

Neil Daza (b. 1961, Paranaque, Metro Manila) grew up visiting his father, a former military colonel who was taken as a political prisoner, in Fort Bonifacio during the Marcos regime.

Daza, who belonged to a family of activists, took to photography and painting to engage with the volatile conditions of the period. Influenced by Jess Abrera and other social realists, he first pursued Fine Arts at the University of Santo Tomas, but quickly traded the brush for the camera when he was given an opportunity to shoot for publications *Malaya*, *Midday* and *WeForum*.

However, his career in photojournalism (1986-1989) was cut short by an accident while covering the New People's Army in the Cordilleras. His injury, which evolved into a slipped disc, prevented his return to the field.

After his recovery, he enrolled in film production workshops at the Mowelfund Film Institute and at PETA from 1991-1995. It was in this period where he would meet fellow filmmakers Avic Ilagan, Ricky Orellana, Robert Quebral, and Ellen Ramos, with whom he formed the collective *Blacksoup Project*. Renting a space for their first office in Marikina Shoe Expo, Cubao, they worked on the second floor and used the first floor as an exhibition space for photography. Daza served as its head curator, staging shows such as "Kambyo", an exhibition of cellphone images, and "Detritus," crime photographs from the archives of the tabloid, *People's Tonight* (1987-2002). The latter was shown under a new title, "Nil" in 2018 at *Artinformal* gallery, due to the insistence of his co-curator Erwin Romulo who believed it a timely response to the extrajudicial killings under the Duterte administration.

Already an accomplished cinematographer, in 2017, Daza held a solo exhibition of photographs at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. "Neil Daza 25 Times, Images from Behind the Camera" covers 25 years of documenting theater, cinema, and television.

"I like doing movies because it requires you to become a pictorialist," he would say in an interview. His images, as he describes them, shuttle between the real and unreal. In the dream sequence of *Bwaya* (2014), a girl in white toga sails across an expanse of gray mist and marshland greens. Solitary figures are captured with quiet intensity: Sharp contrasts of light and shadow emphasize a man's stark features seen from a reflection (Badil, 2013); an elderly actress resting before her take (*Maalaala Mo Kaya*, 2007) is shot in somber tones of gray, seemingly waiting for something that never arrives. Even in these stills, his approach is bound by a faithful pursuit of narrative where even light is treated as character. "It has to be real," he insists. "It has to be motivated." Always carrying a humble point-and-shoot camera, a cellphone, or a portable Instax, Daza would capture both behind-the-scene takes and documentary images of the film location. Geometric patterns in Berlin's holocaust memorial and files of leafless trees in Paris were taken while shooting films abroad.

Daza hopes to one day produce a book that would bring together photographs from his long cinematic career.

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