

**Cesar Hernando** (1946-2019; Manila) —screenwriter, art teacher, graphic designer, production designer, director, overall creative collaborator and yes, photographer, too—has inhabited the movie set for close to five decades now. With his multifarious involvements in Philippine cinema, no one has captured the milieu quite like his photographs.

For years, Hernando has been clicking from the sidelines to catch moments behind the scenes that tell their own stories. There is the one with Vilma Santos, before she goes into character as *Sister Stella L.*, casually holding a cigarette in front of Tony Santos Jr. lying in a coffin—while the director Mike de Leon, actress Anita Linda and DOP Rody Lacap look on. There is the one with Hilda Koronel on the set of *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising*, where the actress seems to be internalizing her character's fate— the submissive married woman who meets a young bachelor at the wrong time. She is sitting on the edge of a bed, her head down, in a bright room that might as well be her cage. There is that photograph of Rita Gomez looking terribly incensed on the set of *Pagdating Sa Dulo*, the heads of camera people recording her expression—a picture that brings reel and real together, on the set of a movie about making a movie. Whether stills or behind-the-scenes pictures, his images possess a cinematic composition, and a deep reverence for the movies and the people who make them. For he is not a mere stillsman whose photographs serve only as continuity guide—he is both filmmaker and fan of the medium.

Hernando's fascinations for the illusory world of telling stories began as a child. His father, a lover of detective narratives, was a policeman who worked in the homicide division. He would tell his children stories before they go to sleep. His mother, on the other hand, was a housewife who loved the radio soap opera. Hernando would grow up amidst comic books and the sound of radio drama, and on Sundays movie dates with the family in downtown Manila.

He loved movies even as a young man. Back in Hernando's younger days, there were hardly any options for an enthusiast like him to learn film's disciplines. "I've loved movies since I was a kid when my family and I would watch films on weekends," he recalled. "My parents were addicted to movies. When I reached college, no courses on film were being offered then so I took up Fine Arts which I thought was closer to film."

While working as an artist at McCann Erickson, Hernando enrolled at an evening film course offered by the Film Institute of the Philippines (FIP); the classes of which were held at the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila. There, Hernando became classmates with the screenwriter Clodualdo "Doy" del Mundo, who would introduce him to Mike de Leon, scion of the family behind LVN Pictures, himself a filmmaker.

In 1970, FIP head Ben Pinga would recommend Hernando as assistant director (AD) to Ishmael Bernal who was then making his full-length debut feature entitled *Pagdating sa Dulo*.

Unlike recent practice wherein a photographer takes both stills and behind-the-scenes photos, Hernando's work as AD also included photographing movie scenes. Because the newbie did not own a camera back then, he borrowed one from an uncle.

Hernando would get to work with De Leon on his next assignment: he was asked to take some photos of *Itim*, one of the director's first full-length features. It would be the beginning of a longtime friendship and collaboration. Hernando would take photos of almost all of De Leon's movies, apart from taking on production design work for two of the director's best works: *Kisapmata* and *Batch '81*.

For Hernando, movie still photography is more than just taking photos for documentation, continuity and promotional purposes. "The still photographer should know how the film camera is blocked or placed so that he can see it from a vantage point related to the storytelling of the film being shot—without being a nuisance during the take."

Since the 1970s, Hernando had photographed many of the productions he was involved in, the last one being De Leon's 2017 political drama *Citizen Jake*. Even when Hernando transitioned to digital photography, he still preferred the analog format. "In analog," he mused, "I was more careful in shooting. You see, the film spool has only 36 shots. So I was always alert about film running out of my camera... In digital, it is 'point-and-shoot' and one can have the tendency to overshoot." Along with the rise of the digital camera, however, contemporary filmmaking in the Philippines has done away with the stillman because of budget constraints. Most producers would just rely on screengrabs from the 2K camera shoot.

Over the years, Hernando had amassed a treasure trove of images, that, when pieced together, offer rarely seen perspectives of Filipino moviemaking, as well as a history of Filipino cinema. He worked exclusively with the greats, which added even more importance to the pictures he took. While his aesthetics were no doubt influenced by the European New Wave filmmakers, his exposure to some of the most sophisticated minds in local film only served to hone his craft. Just as his short films were recently screened in small retrospectives, his body of work in photography was exhibited twice: once at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and the more recent one at Archivo 1984. He directed his first full-length feature film in 2015 called *Gayuma*.

As a film production designer, Cesar Hernando is known for his collaborations with directors de Leon, Lav Diaz and Raymond Red. In a career that spans almost four decades, Hernando received four Best Production Designer awards: three from the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (for *Kisapmata*, *Bayani* and *Batang West Side*) and one from the Young Critics Circle (for *Himpapawid*). As a Fine Arts professor, the low-key Hernando, was responsible for educating and inspiring a whole generation of film artists.

Hernando was also an ardent supporter of the Society of Film Archivists (SOFIA) and audiovisual archiving in the Philippines. He dedicated himself to promoting and preserving film history and culture through his significant collection of movie memorabilia (stills, publicity photos, posters, props, etc.), both local and foreign.

His other artistic pursuits included book design and film poster design. Hernando was indeed a man of many pursuits and disciplines, and it just so happened that these all benefited the world he loved so profoundly: the world of moviemaking.

Cesar Hernando, advocate of cinema, passed away on May 8, 2019.