

Ivan's palette

One day, two years ago, Ivan was helping his mother organize their old family photos when they found a very small picture, taken in 1953, of his mother (who was about 4-5 years old) with her three-year-old brother and their cousins. Wanting to preserve the photograph and knowing Ivan's background in digital graphics design, Ivan's ma asked Ivan to digitally restore the picture and have it enlarged. Ivan thought he could do better than that. Not only would he restore the picture, he would also transform the sepia photograph into a full-color memento.

The picture was Ivan Bilugan's first ever colorized photograph and his first dip into colorized photo editing. For it, he had to research the techniques involved, the different palettes he could use, some history lessons, and, of course, practitioners of the craft—mostly foreigners, but including one of Filipino descent: Jordan J. Lloyd, a London-based artist whose roots go back to General Trias, Cavite. And then, there are also the country's handful of "colorizers": Manolo Quezon, Derrick Makutay, Edmon Sison, Homer Fernandez, Venjoy Alegre.

"They were very helpful and generous with suggestions on the techniques and principles of colorizing photos. Sir Jordan even told me to strongly observe the lighting and the shadows in the black-and-white photo even before adding the colors. I needed their advice for me to grow and learn more about this craft."

A 2008 AB Communication graduate from DLSU-D's College of Liberal Arts and Communication, Ivan's fascination with graphic design started in his sophomore year, while taking up Computer Journalism. His teacher, Prof. Tina Saulo, praised his early work: basic shapes manipulated to form a logo. "You have artistry in your blood," she told him, and he wondered about it because he couldn't recall anyone in his family who was ever an artist, a designer, or a writer. But he took the comment to heart, delving further into digital design. After



graduating, armed with his knowledge of Pagemaker and Photoshop, he worked as graphics designer and videographer with DLSU-D's MCO (Marketing Communications Office).

"I was taught by Sir Fred (Agustin) and Sir PJohn (Catapang) about techniques and principles of design—I learned so much while I was there. That marked my transition from beginner to intermediate level."

By then, his roster of software knowledge came to include Moviemaker, Adobe Premier and Afterscripts. After three and a half years, he left MCO and formed his own design portfolio: Bilug Bilugan Design. From then on, he did freelance work here and there, even accepting a part-time teaching job (teaching multimedia design) with DLSU-D's College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology, while maintaining a Facebook page devoted to colorized historical photos when he had become very good at it.

"With personal photos, only minor research is involved. But with historical

photos, the research is deeper... background of the photo, identity of the subject, the color of the costumes [and accoutrements], where the photo was taken (interior or exterior) and what time of day, what camera was used, even the story of why the subject(s) was there...."

Skin tone is another thing altogether.

"[Filipinos in northern Philippines] have darker skin tone because they live in the highlands, [while] those in the southern lowlands tend to be lighter. The Chinese before were more yellowish. Manilans also tend to be yellowish due to Chinese influence. Overall, Asians and Africans tend to share the same color palette: brown and red. Caucasians, however, are orange and red with a little brown."

Through Facebook, Ivan met John Tewell, a retired American pilot turned photographer based in the Philippines. Some of Tewell's pictures had been making the rounds of the internet without due acknowledgement. When Ivan colorized one of Tewell's pictures (Manila's Metropolitan Theater), he acknowledged the latter's authorship.

Ivan's palette...from page 1

This was in June 2015. It was at this point that Ivan decided to seriously consider colorizing as a career.

At first, he thought colorizing is still a young and small field in which he could find his niche. "I still think that way," he says, except now, it has become his advocacy to color historical photos. "They say history should be viewed in a new light. For millennials, color is one approach to entice them to be curious and learn more about history."

Just this August, Ivan collaborated with FHL (Filipinas Heritage Library) in marking FHL's 20th anniversary. Of this collaboration, an exhibit of 30 colorized historical pictures, selected from FHL's Retrato collection, was mounted, tied up with an exploration of colors mentioned in Philippine literature and songs, as well as a Felice Prudente Sta. Maria's nomenclature of 40 colors identified and verbalized in various Philippine tribes and cultures. The exhibit was titled "Color in History: FHL Now 20."

This same exhibit was brought to DLSU-D as an inaugural event for the opening of Museo De La Salle's Galeria Oriente on October 28. The exhibit runs until November 28. As of this writing, Ivan is a finalist nominee in Rappler.com's Move Awards, honoring individuals who excel in the Creative field. It was his cousins and siblings who nominated him there, he said. But more than advancing his own popularity, he would like his nomination to popularize his advocacy to promote Philippine history in color.

"To understand society today, we have to understand what happened before. We should not be estranged from our past just because of generation gap or time gap. We have to connect—not just with the present and through social media. We have to connect and be useful to our society as well."



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