
Asian American Art Oral History Project


Asian American Art Oral History Project

2-20-2010

Tina Ramirez Interview

Karina Lopez
DePaul University

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/oral_his_series

 Part of the [American Art and Architecture Commons](#), [American Material Culture Commons](#), [American Popular Culture Commons](#), [Art and Design Commons](#), [Art Practice Commons](#), [Asian American Studies Commons](#), [Asian Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Asian History Commons](#), [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Contemporary Art Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), [Modern Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Other American Studies Commons](#), [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lopez, Karina. (2010) Tina Ramirez Interview.
https://via.library.depaul.edu/oral_his_series/20

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Asian American Art Oral History Project at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Asian American Art Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

Interviewer: Karina Lopez

Interviewee: Tina Ramirez

In-Person: DePaul University Student Center in Lincoln Park Campus

Date: 02/20/10 1:00pm

Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 201: Asian American Arts & Culture during Winter quarter 2010 as part of the Asian American Art Oral History research project conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor Art, Media, & Design/Director Asian American Studies.



Tina Ramirez



BIO: Tina Ramirez was one of the organizers that helped run the program of YAWP! (yôp) n. Young Asians with Power. “YAWP! formed in the summer of 2002 to address the need for a conscious, multi-disciplinary, for-youth-by-youth arts program for Asian/Pacific Islander American (APIA) teens in the Chicagoland area. Although we self-identify as APIA (Asian Pacific Islander American) we simultaneously redefine the term to be inclusive of West Asian (Middle Eastern), South Asian, and Multi-Racial peoples.

YAWP! exists as a hate-free, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, safe space for young Asians to create, grow, change, cultivate, reflect, and transform through art as critical and conscious expression. In a city historically unaware, unresponsive, and all too often patronizing of the history, culture and issues of the Asian diaspora, YAWP! exists at the intersection of art and activism, individual growth and community empowerment.

YAWP!'s inaugural program entitled, *Blurring Boundaries, Claiming Voice*, involved an 8-week writing workshop which focused on topics of Identity, Stereotypes/Racism, Rituals, Neighborhood, Childhood, Immigration, APIA History, and Gender Roles.” Referenced from the official YAWP! Website, <<http://www.thecollectivechicago.org/yawp/about.html>>

¹. Being half Asian and half White.

². APA is Asian Pacific American.

Q 1 Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, such as your background with birth date and birthplace.

Okay. My name is Tina Ramirez. I was born in Wichita, Kansas, in 1981. I grew up mostly in Kansas but I have been in Chicago for 15 years.

Q 2 Have you traveled or just been in Kansas and here?

I've actually been fortunate to travel a lot. Both of my parents allowed it because it was something that they really valued. I lived in Venezuela with an uncle when I was eight years old. I've been both to... my mom's from the Philippines and my dad's from Colombia, so we go there very frequently. Also have traveled to a few other places too.

Q 3 Being that you have two different cultures, one being your dad from the Philippines and your mom from Venezuela, how do you identify yourself?

That is something that is actually an ongoing sort of definition of myself and has changed as I grew up. And especially since I grew up in Kansas on a farm and ethnic identity wasn't something on my radar until I left and came to Chicago. I came for high school and that was sort of the first time that I met people that shared the same cultural traditions, had the same values and that definitely brought some provide and identity that I had not experienced before. And I think that's a time in adolescence that people start to seek out. Especially if you are a person of color you start to seek out those similarities, those differences and typical teenage rebellion type of things. I would say now my identity influences me now is that it's present in everything that I do and that I value, but I know to that there is not many people with my background, with my experiences. You know there is sort of the hapa¹, identity is...is...I don't want to say popular now but people are aware of it. Having that experience of having to grow up in the rural environment too, is definitely another layer that I value too and infuses to myself too.

Q 4 Certain people sometimes struggle to find their identity; did you find yourself in those shoes and struggle?

Yea I would say that in terms of like identity covering so many different things, your ethnic identity, the sub cultures, communities that you seek whether that's music related. I went through a lot of phases: gothic phase, hippie stage and that was part of me trying to find myself and whether or not I can actually easily define that in an elevator speech or whatever. I would say that we sort of struggled it's a celebration of figuring out okay this is me and I'm cool with that. You know even if I can't define it on a day-to-day basis, even if that changes. And that being powerful source that your identity can change and sort of impacts you.

Q 5 Can you provide with more information on the organization that you take part in?

Young Asians With Power is something that has actually gone to bed. We closed the chapter and kind of started to open up a new. What we did was work with Asian American youth in a creative setting. So YAWP started in 2002 as a writing workshop for Asian American youth in the city of Chicago. Started as an oral history project and sort of

¹. Being half Asian and half White.

². APA is Asian Pacific American.

as a safe space for young people to come together and to talk about issues of identity and to focus on writing craft. Sort of how these two things intersect. One was very focused on poetry and different styles and forms poetry but two it also was a space to explore cultural traditions, issues in the community that aren't talked about often. You know especially surrounding hate crimes, violence, prejudice, and stereotypes. And it started an impact because there were two spoken word artists that came out of a group called, *I Was Born With Two Tongues*, which like in the late 90s was like the group that everybody all over the state knew *Two Tongues* that would go to college campuses. And I first saw them when I was 18 and I was like I have to be a writer. I need this. I need to be part of this community and even if I didn't know if I would ever encounter them again. I was just blessed in mid 2000s to run into them and found out that they were doing this incredible writing workshop for young people and I just started organizing with them. The two organizers were Marlon Esguerra and Anida Esguerra, who now goes by Anida Ali. In YAWP we would do one or two writing workshops throughout the year, mostly in the summer. And it was a six to eight week curriculum, was structured as a workshop to explore writing but also to explore a space to dialect and process different community issues. We also did a lot of leadership retreats that for some young people it was the first time that they ever left the city, went camping, went fishing, we kind of just hung out and removed ourselves from the city environment. We also traveled to a couple national conferences, there's APA² and National Spoken Word and Poetry Contest, which YAWP would actually facilitate most of the youth workshops for which was kind of cool because it was spreading almost what *Two Tongues* did back in the 90s. People all across the states were like YAWP is the premier APA youth poetry workshop/performance workshop and so we were kind of trying to built on that momentum and build on that energy and network with other youth organizations. Like in Detroit there is something called Detroit Asian Youth Project and we were trying to connect with them. We were all trying to create like this online community of like sharing curriculum, sharing stories, and to be quite honest it was sort of in the middle of that momentum that our leadership changed here with YAWP and with that sort of shift the core organizers kind of stepped back to their own creative things and we couldn't maintain that momentum. And I would say that in 2007 might have been the last YAWP year and we kind of tried to refocus our energy tried to see where we could continue having the youth space and we ended up having to reorganize again and it just didn't happen. In part there were three of us who were involved with another organization called the Multi-Cultural Youth Project. And one of our really strong facilitators at the time was primarily working there and it's similar working with primarily Asian American youth doing different kinds of workshops. I was working there in the summers while I was finishing up grad school and so it was one of those things for putting all of our energy, all of our creative energy, all of our community energy into this space why reinvent the wheel when the organizers were exhausted either way doing that work all the time. That's why all the energy started being focused on MCYP and that sort of became the core group of youth that were doing creative projects, writing their histories, writing poetry, and kind of building up that youth space.

Q 6 Do you feel that it was important for the organization to connect with the younger generation in order for them to be able to find their identity, to be able to see the history in where they have come from?

¹. Being half Asian and half White.

². APA is Asian Pacific American.

Yea, I think there is definitely something about that idea of passing down, or pass it around and so the idea of sharing your story and recognizing to that with especially with the history of Asian Americans in this country that is traditionally left out in the history books, you know people don't realize how long Asian Americans have been in the U.S. or how much of a foundation they laid literally with the railroad tracks across the country and still marginalized and not left in the main culture. So part of that is sharing these stories and remaining people especially younger generations to continue that because otherwise we are going to let that be swept aside. So that idea of that this is our legacy and what is your personal legacy doesn't have to be this hyped up thing you know but it is important to remember your family stories and particularly too for the Diaspora a lot of immigrant families that come memories of war and memories of hardships and if we forget that I feel we forget part of our humanity.

Q 7 What role did you play in the YAWP organization?

I was one of the core organizers from 2004 to sort of until its end. I would help create curriculum, would help organize events and did some out reach programs and that sort of things.

Q 8 Where there any specific projects that the organization did that impacted you greatly and in a way served for you motivation to keep going forward?

Well we would always create each workshop with its own chapbook, we would always culminate in a big event where we would sort of pull in big weights like having the Pacifics come and perform at the end of an event. And at the end of year event we threw a YAWP Prom which was the most hilarious and fun time ever, everyone dressed up did their performances and we just had a big party at the end. But I would say that the biggest impact was having those personal connections and it actually convinced me to shift careers and peruse youth development and education to pursue that. I was working in publishing before and wasn't fulfilled at all working in my cubical and checking commas. It was the personal connections that actually made me to go back to school for social work and to sort of see how I could push to create that idea of self-expression and story telling and that is therapeutic and the connections it has to make that much more meaningful. So that is why I personally shifted to and there is actually three of us that have pursued social work in that way, not just for the clinical side but sort of that idea to transform communities.

Q 9 How did you first become involved in YAWP?

I became involved...actually put it this way I had a friend who was organizing with it and I was like that is the coolest thing ever, I want to be part of that too. And then sort of really particularly Marlon Esguerra, one of the founders and who was part of *I Was Born with Two Tongues* who I saw at a reading for Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, which is like a premier hip-hop history, it's a really incredible book. So I'm here at the reading and I notice the person next to me is reading the same poetry book I always carried around and so we talked and that was when my friend who already worked in YAWP told me that they were looking for new organizers and if I wanted to go to the meeting. And

¹. Being half Asian and half White.

². APA is Asian Pacific American.

here I am being able to work sort of with what I considered my writing hero. It was then that I started to get involved with YAWP.

END

¹ Being half Asian and half White.

² APA is Asian Pacific American.