Work Wear Diaries: Nikki Luna

The social advocate and artist makes a whole lot of difference in society and rocks her jeans at the same time.

I wouldn’t dare say we live in a nation where the youth are deemed apathetic. It’s heartening to know that many have been actively participating in advocacy campaigns but there are those rare individuals who are leading the pack. One of them is social activist and artist, Nikki Luna.

Nikki is the brains behind startART project—a non-government organization focused on Youth victims of Human Rights violations, abused and victims in war zones, using art as a means to help them cope up and deal with adversity.

As an artist, things took a turn early last year, after her work was sold at the Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings Spring Sale at Sotheby’s Hong Kong. She’s also done commissioned art work and portraits for celebrities including Liz Uy.

Nikki has always seen herself becoming an artist but most remarkable is how she put to good use—with a lot of heart—what she's always been good at. She is no signboard-carrying radical, but has canvases, buckets of paint, brushes and jeans that she rocks all the time.
What exactly do you do?

I'm a full time artist. I like to do installation and conceptual art. I paint, too. I'm also the founder of startART Project, an NGO focused on art and therapy.

How did you get into this career path? Is this something you've always wanted?

I've always been creative. I knew I wanted to be an artist. While studying in UP Manila and Diliman—Political Science for about two years then shifting back to my first choice, which is Dine Arts major in Painting—I developed a strong social concern and eventually, my works revolved around this.

Being an artist, I've always thought of ways to increase awareness, sensitivity and concerns about relationships, female issues and society through my art. Being able to confront this "in the round" where an audience could actually experience it is something I've always wanted. Hence, the exhibits that attempt to call for interaction and reflection from the viewer.

The NGO came in the picture since I was committed to a lot of causes/issues—political and social commentaries that were expressed in my works. I felt I wanted to contribute further by having my own NGO on Art+Therapy which focuses on Youth victims of Human Rights violations, victims in war zones (Political and Military conflict in urban and rural areas).

I'd like to help the children who witnessed or experienced these brutalities and lost loved ones to wars and injustice to use art as a tool—Art as a means to learn and heal. Maybe it'll help them have the ability to hope and dream again despite facing adversity.

What's your daily routine/schedule like?

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I wake up at [around] 8:00am. I eat breakfast and definitely have my coffee. Right after breakfast, it’s spent on checking my e-mails, check my NGO's website, make calls to the other NGOs, LGUs, and I start painting or continue conceptualizing some projects. I eat lunch when I can or I skip it since I forget anyway.

Right after lunch it's just all creative work—painting and planning on more projects/exhibits. This involves logistics, drawing, planning and talking to suppliers.

In between, I would also do research on history, concepts and all the information I can gather about a project I'm planning to do. I always want to make sure I have everything covered. My exhibits are based on social concerns and emotionally charged issues. I make it a point to read up a lot. I get data from other NGOs, communities and studies both local and international.

Most of the time between 6:00pm to 9:30 pm, I spend with family, dinner at home and quality time.
After dinner, I continue working till 11:30pm to 12:00 midnight. Sometimes I stay up till 2:00 or 3:00 am painting or writing my concepts. Writing concepts for an exhibit/project is like writing a thesis for me. There can't be any holes. It has to be complete. I also spend this time collaborating with other artists/professors sharing ideas over the phone or via e-mail/chat here and abroad. Late nights work well for most of us.

Tuesday and Thursday are a different schedule since everything is done outside the house or studio. I wake up around the same time as my M-W-F schedule. Sometimes I still touch up on some paintings since they are hard to ignore and I always feel the need to retouch the paint again or I head out really early and visit some groups and organizations, mostly women groups and some communities where I plan to have a project. You can call it field work.

I also set most of my meetings, appointments [on these two days] from about 11:00am to 5:00pm, usually in Makati or you will find me in my NGO's new home in New Manila. Then at 5:30 to 8:30 pm I'm off to school. I'm taking up Masters in Women and Development in UP Diliman.

After class I follow to some exhibit openings if there are any. I head home either after class or I have another meeting from 9pm to 11pm since this is the only time I dedicate to going out. I still paint if I can when I get home and I read a book, study then sleep.

What do you do on your spare time?

I read a lot. When I have books, I just can't stop reading. I also like watching films—old and new—mostly documentaries, art films and other disturbing movies. The odd ones really appeal to me. I like being outdoors too, going to the beach or just laying out by the pool getting some sun.

What do you do after work?

A good dinner out with friends, have a few laughs and just catch up.

What do you do on weekends?

Saturdays and Sundays I juggle my NGO, friends and home. If I'm lucky I'm out of town in some beach with my girlfriends.

What are your other interests? Hobbies?

I can't last without listening to music. I love Pink Floyd, Beatles, Metallica, Black Sabbath, White Zombie, Eminem, Janes Addiction, Outkast, Razorback, a lot of classic rock, alternative and a bit of hip hop. When I have the time I go surfing.
What's your personal style?

I like quality. I like having a few exceptional pieces. I don't like fakes. My taste still leans on the safe side with an edgy approach. I like sexy and subtle. I like the sophisticated '70s look. My palette can be described as something like a dead garden or a stormy sky.

Is there any fashion item you collect?

I love Jeans. I have a lot of jeans and bikinis. My favorite jeans right now are J Brand Lovestory, AG and Hudson. For bikinis, Salinas is the best for me—the bottoms are perfectly small. I like Vix, Le Tarte, Zimmerman and Tigerlily, too.

What's your favorite item in your closet?

All time favorite would have to be my Dita shades and my current favorite are my Vita bracelets.

Where do you shop for office/work wear?

I love Rustans and on line stores such as Revolve, Shopbop and Singer22

Ref.: http://www.stylebible.ph/fashion/work-wear-diaries-nikki-luna/

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