

# Filipino glass artist explores culture and perception in new exhibit

By Pamela Ellgen  
The Asian Reporter

Highly acclaimed glass artist Jeffrey Sarmiento will be in Portland March 18 at the Bullseye Gallery to celebrate his new exhibit, “Constructions,” a dynamic and diverse installation exploring the nature of culture and perception.

Sarmiento was born in the United States to Filipino immigrants, received his M.F.A. in glass at the Rhode Island School of Design, and went on to earn a Ph.D. at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom, where he presently resides. Given his multicultural upbringing and borderless residence as an adult, he says he doesn’t feel native to any particular place.

“I sometimes think that growing up Asian American brings with it a sense of rootlessness or feeling unable to truly fit into any culture,” Sarmiento said. “I have found the experience of being elsewhere a way of defining myself, or in some cases, redefining. I found out more about myself, my American-ness, and indeed some of my Asian-ness, when I moved to Europe.”

## Overarching themes

Much of Sarmiento’s current exhibit explores these themes, both the layering of realities and the way in which perception imbues new meaning to an object or experience. He masterfully utilizes the characteristics of glass to simultaneously obscure and illuminate these realities.

In a piece called “Encyclopaedia,” he uses printed and kiln-formed glass to illustrate the endlessness of information. The work is a long rectangular piece, similar to a full-volume set of encyclopedias. Instead of paper and ink, Sarmiento uses glass and brilliant colors, printing numerous “pages” and sandwiching them together.

When viewed from one end, only one or two pages of “Encyclopaedia” are visible, but from the side, it’s clear the encyclopedia is brimming with illustrations and text. Some are legible; others are hidden. His ambition for the piece was to condense an epic amount of information into one heavy block, whereas other pieces in the show, such as “Beautiful Flaws,” are meant to extend visual information to fill a space.

Two companion pieces — “Muse” and “Muscles” — present an idealized, even exotic, image of a Filipino woman in traditional dress and a muscular man. Both prints are displayed with hundreds of small lenses that distort the image when viewed from close up and expose it



from a distance.

## Social constructions of morality

Sarmiento has found that wherever he lives, there are different social rules that govern how people behave. He explores the concept of cultural constructions of morality in his piece “Race/March.” On cast glass, he has printed two contrasting and mirrored images. One is a vintage photograph of men from a running club in Jarrow, United Kingdom, near where he lives; the other is Filipino natives walking. Sarmiento says the images are meant to parallel each other visually.

“I’m not entirely sure if the meanings are explicit in the visual content,” Sarmiento admitted. “In the ‘race’ component, I think the mirroring of the images gives an impression of two armies going to war with each other, when in fact the rather calm walking pace of the Filipino natives is actually for a boar hunt, so they are off to kill



**CONSTRUCTIONS.** “Constructions,” an exhibit by Filipino glass artist Jeffrey Sarmiento (left photo, standing amid his “Beautiful Flaws” piece), is on view through May 3 at Bullseye Gallery, located at 300 N.W. 13th Avenue in Portland. Pictured above is “Encyclopaedia,” printed and kiln-formed glass that illustrates the endlessness of information.

something.”

## Beauty in imperfection

Another theme resonating throughout the exhibit is the inherent beauty in imperfection. While considering a pile of discarded greenhouse glass, Sarmiento observed the way the flaws in the glass transformed the nature of what was viewed through it. The most prominent piece in the exhibit, “Beautiful Flaws,” highlights these imperfections in a circular wave of glass pieces perched atop a steel-and-aluminum structure. Radiating from each flaw like ripples in water are printed rings, designed to underline each imperfection. “One of the challenges was to make the worthless glass beautiful,” he said, “which I hope I’ve done.”

“Constructions” is on view through May 3 at Bullseye Gallery, located at 300 N.W. 13th Avenue in Portland. The March 18 reception takes place from 5:30 to 7:30pm. To learn more, call (503) 227-0222 or visit <www.bullseyegallery.com>.

## Japan marks third anniversary of tsunami disaster

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Higashi-Matsushima has seen some rebuilding of public housing, schools, and other facilities. Altogether, the city lost 1,000 residents.

“We survivors have a responsibility to live a full life on behalf of those who perished in the tsunami,” he said at a Tokyo ceremony, representing the survivors from Iwate prefecture. “I hope to see the reconstruction achieved as soon as possible.”



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## 2013 Most Honored Elder Award Recipient

Narendra Sinh Rathod

Indian American Narendra Sinh Rathod was born July 14, 1935 in Zanzibar, Africa, where he grew up. He attended school at Cambridge and also in India, where he studied to become a mechanical engineer. He worked as a textile engineer



AR Photo/Eugene Wong

for a few years in Africa, where he married his wife, Kundan Ba, in 1960. He moved to the U.S. in 1971 and worked as an engineer in the construction field. His projects include the Georgia-Pacific Building and several other high-rise buildings in Portland, as well as the Libby Dam in Montana and The Dalles Dam in Oregon. After moving to Portland, Narendra and his wife had three children: son Asit and daughters Bindu and Amisha. Narendra is active in the Indian community as a member of Asia PDX, Gujarati Samaj, and the BAPS Temple. His diverse activities range from rally driving to skiing and playing soccer. He was

a nationally certified soccer coach and referee. He also volunteered with the Portland Timbers as a technical advisor to players in the mid-1970s and early ’80s, and has been involved with the Oregon Youth Soccer Association as a staff member, referee, and state-select coach for youth teams. After retiring from engineering in 1983, Narendra drew upon his experience as a rally driver and opened his own business, the H & H Auto & Transmission Center in Tigard, Oregon, which he is still running after more than 30 years. He spends his free time cross-country skiing and teaching young adults how to ski. In addition, he is a private pilot and owns more than 12 RC model airplanes.

**The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2014 “Most Honored Elder” awards.**

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 17, 2014 at northeast Portland’s TAO Event Center. Nomination forms and guidelines for eligibility are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is Wednesday, March 26, 2014 at 5:00pm.

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