



Speaking with Sebastian Cortes

Description

[Sebastian-Cortes_Citadines-Centre-d'Art_Auroville1](#)

Sebastian Cortes with his art at Centre d'Art, Auroville

This Saturday, the PU Inquirer Team had the opportunity to meet Sebastian Cortes an Italian-American photographer based in Pondicherry for the last ten years. He shared his time under the shades of the trees of the Citadines Centre d'Art patio in Auroville. Sebastian Cortes gave us an idea of his way of pursuing photography as an art and a way of life.

He explores the space around him by going into the private. He is not a street photographer. He goes beyond the walls to reach the privacy of the 'Pondicherrian'. India is all about noise and amazingly flashy colours. But by stepping into somebody's house you discover a quieter and softer place. Sebastian Cortes records their lifestyle in a delicate way without disturbing his subjects.

Photography is by fact subjective. The photographer is the one who frames and pulls the trigger. Therefore, the book, 'Pondicherry' is a compilation of his perceptions. Le "flâneur" observes the city. Baudelaire was transforming everything into poetry and he chose to pick up a camera. He looks, takes notes and then comes back. He waits for photographs to happen. He wants to get in, feel uncomfortable and that makes the difference. The process of waiting is a beautiful way to reach a perfect geometry. He just waits for the reality, whatever that is, to become his fiction.

He chooses to combine his images with words. Sebastian Cortes gives more intensity to his images with the words of others. He believes that the communication between different medium is aiming creativeness. He likes to see their reactions and to read what his photography creates in their own imaginary. The texts give another dimension to the photographs.

Why Pondicherry? It has the simplest answer. Pondicherry is a beautiful concentrate of many cultures and generations. 'Pondicherrian' lifestyle is cradled by many influences.

Sebastian Cortes is definitely fascinated by the link between past and present, and what might the future be. Upon publishing his book, Sebastian Cortes had to face the ambiguous understanding of the term “heritage”. What does heritage mean? Is it only a nostalgic retrospect, holding on to the past, or something transformed into something practical and contemporary? Nowadays large Tamil-French houses are no longer practical. But how can we try to maintain this lifestyle when families cannot afford it. The challenge is to find a perfect balance between history and functionality, past and present. Sebastian Cortes affirms “I don’t want to be stupidly nostalgic,” so to find this balance he chooses only to record and get out. This is his way to bring the awareness and pass the ‘baton’ to a politician or other concerned citizen.

Sebastian Cortes draws attention to the almost forgotten past. In few words he expresses his satisfaction to see the Old Distillery being used for artistic purposes. The energy of the past is transformed into a new energy: the present.

Photo: Tintumon M

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Foreign Student

Category

1. On the wings of the muse

Date Created

February 2, 2014

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