Iris Gil Viacrusis
This year for Filipino American Heritage Month we honor Iris Gil Viacrusis with the Outstanding Filipino Leader Award. Iris has made substantial contributions to the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, and the institution would like to recognize him for sharing his cultural knowledge and expertise with the students, faculty, staff and community. Iris is a historian and expert on the culture and geography of the Philippines. He has been an inspiration and mentor to many of our students and has served as a community member on the planning committee for the Filipino American Heritage Month. He is so giving of his time and talents, featuring his own contemporary designs and traditional costumes from various provinces in the Philippines in a show titled “A Glimpse into Filipino Culture Through Fashion” in 2010, and in 2011 he created a display in the Mookini Library, “Colors of the Rainbow; An Exhibit of Traditional Costumes of the Philippines.”

Iris was born in Olongapo City, Philippines, but traces his Visayan origin to his paternal grandfather, who was born and raised in Palompon, Leyte. He graduated with a bachelor degree in business administration and minor in fine arts at Mission College, California. He also received an associate degree in fashion design at Los Angeles Trade Technical College.

In 2001, he moved to Paris, France, and attended Ecole Chambre Syndical dela Coutre, a premier fashion school in Paris. While in Paris, he worked as a design assistant at Haute Couture House and at Malhia Kent Fabric Design House that designs apparels for Dior, Chanel, and Valentino, among others. He also did theatrical costuming for stage plays.

In 2004, he moved back to the U.S. and worked in interior design in Dallas, Texas, for one year after which he moved to Hawai‘i in 2005 and settled in Hawaiian Paradise Park where he opened his own business, Iris Gil Design, a dress shop specializing in Filipiniana and Hawaiian attire. Iris had been designing dresses for over 15 years and in interior design for over six years using fabrics from India, Japan and Philippines. His love for Filipino fashion and culture led to Habi at Baro exhibit, which he featured at Wailoa Center in Hilo in May 2010. The exhibit created interest and excitement in the community such that he was requested to set up a similar exhibit at the Lyman Museum, Hilo, in 2011, UH Mānoa, Honolulu, in 2012, and at Hale Halawae in Kona during the “Paskong Pinoy” celebration. He also conducted a workshop called “Pinay Dressing — Wearing Culture in Everyday Apparel” for the Filipino Association of University Women at their annual event.

Moreover, Iris has been the costume designer of historical costumes for the Royal Court of the Merrie Monarch festival for the last five years and also shared his talents with the Hilo Orchid Society by designing the floral displays for its annual Orchid Show, which is the oldest and largest orchid show in the state.

With his strong desire to promote Philippine culture and tradition to the Filipinos in Hawai‘i and to the general public, Iris is very busy working in obtaining funds and collaborating with various organizations for future Philippine culture exhibits/presentations at the Filipino Community Center (FilCom Center), Bishop Museum, East West Center at UH Mānoa, and the public schools.

Resource: FilCom Center