DMZXING

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Text written by the artist and etched on the 16 glass panels of the installation is reproduced on pages 3–6 and pages 11–14.

"Home and Home Again" essay by Calvin Reid on pages 8–10.

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BODY COUNT

what lies between and across

The Vietnam War was never officially declared.

a mark on a page torn out of time of space

Officially, what is called the Vietnam War should properly be considered the Second Indochina War. The first Indochina War in 1945-54 was a conflict in which communists fought against the French colonial rulers.

words in a line not linear

Indochinese, in particular the Vietnamese, experienced generations of conflict and warfare on their land - against the Chinese, the French, the Japanese and the U.S.

a marker of difference

Between 1965 and 1973 approximately one out of thirty Indochinese was killed; one in twelve wounded; and one in five made a refugee.

of division of separation of conflict

For every Viet Cong killed by U.S. Search & Destroy missions, six civilians died.

a boundary that designates that separates
that keeps apart

Senator Strom Thurmond called for the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam if there was no other way of bringing about a victory.

a country a territory a place a community
a people

Almost 3 million Vietnamese dead
200,000 Cambodians dead
100,000 Laotians dead
3,200,000 wounded (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia)
14,305,000 refugees (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) by the end of the war

crossing

Almost two decades after the war, 1.5 million Vietnamese have left the country

here and there
noWHERE NOWhere

Nearly one fourth of the Vietnam countryside has been laid to waste.

NOW

February 3, 1994 - President Clinton lifts the embargo on Vietnam

HERE

MEMORIES FADE
ONLY OFFICIAL HISTORY
REMAINS

Mr. and Mrs. Srun live with two of their five children and an orphaned son of a relative named Vuth.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge attacked Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge killed those who seemed to be intellectuals or wore glasses. Mr. Srun pretended to be a taxi driver. The Sruns were particularly vulnerable to Khmer Rouge persecution because they were middle class and of part Chinese descent. The Khmer Rouge targeted those they suspected of being Chinese or Vietnamese. The family lost their home and possessions when the communists took over the country and they were sent to the countryside near the Thai border to work as farmers. They were there from April 13, 1975. Three years, eight months and 20 days. A college age daughter wrote that when she was seven, she was forced to go to school where all she learned was how to farm. Students were taught that "there is nothing to life except for work" and that their own parents are their enemies.

In 1979, when the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia, the Sruns decided to escape to Thailand. They took their wedding pictures with them during their escape along with clothing and food. The escape took two days and a night walking barefoot, mostly through forest. Along the way they saw and smelled many dead bodies. They were fearful of the many land mines planted in the area. One of the children was six months old and had to be carried. Another was three years old. They were in constant fear of being caught.

They were in a Thai camp from 1979 to 1982. There they met up with Vuth. The Khmer Rouge had killed his father in 1973. His mother had remarried but in 1975 his stepfather was also killed. Vuth's mother died in a refugee camp hospital from malnourishment suffered before she got there.

An estimated three million perished under the Communist Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. The Srun family lost many relatives and friends through starvation and killings. The Sruns agreed with Vuth that "it was a lot worse than the movie, 'The Killing Fields.'"

Mr. Srun applied to France, Canada, Australia and the U.S. In 1982, they were sponsored by a Lutheran agency in Utica, NY, where they initially settled for two years. Mr. Srun worked in a bakery for $3.30/hour and received refugee assistance funds. They rented an apartment with 14 people living together. Upon invitation from a Cambodian friend, they then moved to Hartford where he studied machine shop, a program organized through the Refugee Assistance Program. The program helped to find him a job. He changed jobs and currently works making airplane parts. They stopped receiving government funding assistance in 1983. He's been working eleven hours/day since his wife was recently laid off her job of five years at a factory assembly line. She feels that her Caucasian supervisor treated her unfairly and resented her success as a foreigner with children in college, a house and a car.

Most people here think they are Chinese because of ignorance about Cambodians. "People would shout ching-chang-chong sort of stuff, but now it's better." In New York, their son Soden had a fight with a kid who broke his hand. They feel that so many young people are ignorant about other people and don't seem to want to learn.

Everyone agrees that there is good communication within the family. The parents rely on the children for their English fluency for instance in buying the house or when Mrs. Srun had problems at work. The parents want the kids to carry on the culture and religion which the Khmer Rouge wanted to destroy. The Cambodian community in Connecticut has no cultural center but still gets together for special events like weddings. At home they speak Cambodian with parents. They are learning to read and write Cambodian at a weekly school. It's been easy for them to adjust to the U.S. and they think that the schools are good here. They'd like to thank the American people for giving them freedom.

BELT TIGHT
BEAU CHARGER/BUFFALO
LAM SON '54/HICKORY

Under the 1954 Geneva agreements there was to be an inviolable five mile wide buffer-zone straddling the 17th parallel. During 1967, defense analysts, pro-war politicians and bar-room hawks suggested that the United States should have occupied this DMZ to frustrate North Vietnamese infiltration and, later, large scale incursions. In fact, in 1965 and 1966 serious consideration was given to occupying the DMZ.

There were serious concerns about the political consequences of occupying the DMZ, that of provoking a Chinese military intervention as during the Korean War. Nevertheless, in July 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the bombardment of the DMZ and limited incursions up to the 17th parallel provided that no public disclosure was made. Return fire across the DMZ was authorized in December 1966 and pre-emptive fire, including air-strikes, from February 1967 in operations such as "Belt Tight" and "Buffalo."

MAPPING THE COLD WAR

At the 1954 Geneva Conference, the first major conference of the five leading world states since 1945, the Korea conference ran from April 26 - June 15. From May 8 - July 21, the focus shifted to Indochina.

At the Korea conference, the main issues were elections and the withdrawal of foreign troops. The North proposed nationwide elections and the simultaneous and proportionate pull-out of all foreign forces before the elections. The U.S. and South Korea proposed that elections be held only in North Korea, under Southern law and under U.N. auspices. The North came to negotiate but this conference ended in deadlock with no movement toward reunification of Korea.

Although the Vietminh forces under Ho Chi Minh won a decisive victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, the world leaders at this Geneva conference persuaded Ho Chi Minh to accept a temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel with elections to reunify the country in two years. The South, under Ngo Dinh Diem with U.S. backing and enormous financial aid, denounced the Geneva accords and refused to participate in the reunification elections. The division of Vietnam hardened, leading up to the war.

During the 1950s, in the case of both South Korea and South Vietnam, the U.S. supported corrupt and autocratic rulers as part of a foreign policy informed by the Cold War notion of a domino theory in which the spread of Communism had to be held in check at any cost. One country's fall to Communism would lead to another. With this ideological smoke screen, the U.S. refused to accept indigenous developments of national liberation movements. Communism and nationalism were neither synonymous nor monolithic.

Mr. Saengaly was drafted into the Royal Lao Army and achieved high rank. He fought against the Pathet Lao forces and against the Viet Cong. He was captured and sent to a large re-education camp near the Vietnamese border. The camp is believed to still exist. Saengaly escaped by lying to the camp commander that his mother was ill and so was allowed leave. The rest of the family remained in the camp. The camp consisted of a school surrounded by three huge buildings. Every morning everyone had to learn about the system of the new government. They also had to farm and grow rice. There was never much to eat.

Before he joined the military Saengaly was a farmer growing rice, sugar cane and corn. He married in 1962 but has no marriage pictures because they did not have a camera then. Their marriage was not arranged.

The Saengalys recalled that it wasn't very difficult to escape from Laos. They walked to the Mekong River and got a boat across. From Thailand, they were relocated to a Philippine refugee camp for seven months. Then they went to Colorado where they had cousins. They stayed there a year but the jobs were very low paying, so they moved to Connecticut. Saengaly now works in a furniture factory with about 30 workers. He knew one person there who helped him get a job. Since he did some woodworking in Laos, he had some experience to bring to this job. Mrs. Saengaly works full time at a pasta factory. She gets home before him and cooks the dinner.

His son and daughter are still in Laos, as well as his sister-in-law. By the end of 1980 however, 300,000 people, about 10% of the population left Laos.

On weekends they socialize with other Laotians and go to a Christian church. Most were Buddhists in Laos but became Christians here. Many continue to attend both a Buddhist temple and a Christian church. The Episcopal church helped the Saengalys when they first arrived in the States so they maintain their Christian connection. The daughter translates the services for them.

They pay about $580 rent on each side of a duplex house. The households consist of Mr. and Mrs. Saengaly, their daughter, the daughter's ten year-old son, the widowed sister of Mrs. Saengaly and the two nieces.

When asked about his impressions of this country, Mr. Saengaly responded that it's more bearable here. Everything seems more professional to him. However, in Laos, he was his own boss. If the government were no longer communist, Saengaly would go back to join the rest of his family.

DOUBLEVISION

Nightly. News. In living color.
And that's the way it is.

The first TV War. In 1965, 93% of U.S. homes had TV. Color sets had started making an impact on the mass market a year before. "Soon everyone in the country would be all too familiar with the flaming orange of napalm, the vivid greens of Asian jungle, the dull yellow of monsoon mud and the deathly black of burnt skin."

Vivid. Radiant. All too real. Still. Hitting home, radiating living rooms, seeping into every membrane before I knew what hit me.

The images of the Korean War are black. Black and white. Flicker and fade. To black.

During the interviews with Southeast Asian refugees, I asked to see photos of their families and perhaps even of their life before their exile. This usually proved to be the high point of these sessions. I seemed to share with them a precious regard for the small glimpses offered by these images of another experience, another place. I was pleasantly surprised that all of the families had such a substantial snapshot record of their relatives and lives back home. I had expected that some of their ties to their families would be severed or tenuous based on my own mother's experience as a refugee during the Korean War.

With my father away with the American forces for most of the war, my mother had to manage the several evacuations during the war by herself. During the three-year war, as the frontlines moved dramatically up and down the Korean peninsula, my mother, like many other Korean civilians, had to pack up and evacuate on very short notice. When she initially fled with her two small children, my older brother and sister, from her Seoul home, she had no room for photos in the few bundles that she managed to take with her. I first became aware of this when I saw my parents' wedding picture for the very first time in a photo album belonging to my aunt and uncle who had just emigrated from Korea in the late sixties. It dawned on me then that my parents have no visual record of their life before the war. There is no photograph to compare the veracity of the mental image I've conjured of the sister who died during that war before I was born.

By 1952 due to the unbelievable intensity of U.S. bombing as part of a "scorched-earth" policy of military operations such as "Strangle," to cut communication routes and supply lines, and "Insomnia," to exhaust the population by relentless bombing, just about everything in North and central Korea was completely levelled. Napalm was, in Churchill's phrase, "splashed" over the Korean people and landscape.

The U.S. maintains its most stringent embargo against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Nowhere is the distance between preparation for war and actual war closer than in Korea.

REAL eSTATE

In 1989, I visited the DMZ. A few months earlier that summer, another Korean woman, Im Su Kyung, crossed the border in an historic act.

As a naturalized citizen of the U.S., I could enter the Joint Security Area of Panmunjom on an organized tour. Any DMZ tour is strictly off-limits to citizens of the Republic of Korea (ROK) or South Korea. Furthermore, while I can technically travel to North Korea or the DPRK, South Korean nationals cannot.

Im Su Kyung defied ROK National Security Law which prohibits any contact with North Korea or its people and became the first South Korean student since the end of the Korean War to openly travel to the North. She went as an official delegate to the World Youth Festival held in Pyongyang. She was representing the aspirations and the political agenda of those in South Korea's student movement working for reunification. As a political gesture, she also returned to South Korea by crossing the DMZ in full knowledge that she would be held in contempt of law. As soon as she crossed the DMZ to the ROK side, she was promptly arrested and subsequently imprisoned for four years.

SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES

My trip to the DMZ was a routine tour, albeit quite surreal at times. I boarded a bus in Seoul full of Japanese and Western tourists. I may have been the only one of Korean descent. After a few diversions, we arrived at the checkpoint of the Joint Security Area. According to schedule, we ate lunch at the military messhall. Afterwards we were led into a modest gift shop strategically located next door where I bought a souvenir DMZ cap and a packet of postcards.

At some point, an American United Nations military personnel took over the tour and we had to relinquish our passports. Next stop was a building where meetings between officials of the North and South Korean governments and the U.S. take place. This barracks-like wooden structure straddles the 38th parallel. We were allowed to browse inside what was a stark, empty room except for a centrally located table. A bold line ran along the floor dividing the room and the table lengthwise. On the tabletop were the North and South Korean flags, each on its respective side of this line. Looking out of a window, I saw a few North Korean soldiers peering inside the room through their cameras. I was told that it's like a staring game - each side is constantly pretending to record every movement of the other.

Our next stop outside was a pagoda-like structure trimmed in bright colors which seemed comically garish in this military setting. From the top level overlook, I looked directly across the border to the North Korean Administrative Headquarters buildings and a few figures gathered in front of this large building staring back at us.

Ironically, because the 38th parallel is a "no man's land," it has inadvertently become a wildlife sanctuary, while at the same time a trigger zone of deadlocked hostility targeted by U.S. nuclear warheads. At one point I asked the Yankee U.N. officer leading the tour if he saw Im Su Kyung during her crossing. He seemed annoyed by the question and simply replied that she was a fool.

A family of Hmong farmers from a highland village of Laos, the Yangs arrived in the U.S. in September of 1992. The family is composed of a husband, Blia Kao Yang, wife, Phuua Xiong, two sons, daughter, granddaughter and Yang's brother and his family. They all live together in a five bedroom house owned by the brother.

The Hmongs played a unique role in the Vietnam War. They were recruited by the CIA to fight both the Vietminh and the Laotian communist forces of the Pather Lao in a "Secret War." Officially, the independence and neutrality of Laos is internationally established. However, since 1961, the CIA covertly built up General Vang Pao's Hmong guerrilla forces. With too few men left for farming, these Hmong villages relied on rice drops, money, schools, medicine and military protection provided by the U.S. Hmong mountain strongholds became radar relay centers in support of the American air operation over Vietnam. Hmong guerrillas were regularly sent to rescue American pilots downed in Vietnam.

In 1964, Operation Barrel Roll, the secret American bombing of Laos began, with the number of tons of bombs dropped on the Plain of Jars alone between 1968 and 1975 exceeding the tonnage dropped anywhere by the U.S. in all of WW II. In 1969, the U.S. Senate banned U.S. armed intervention in Laos but the Secret War continued.

Almost every male between early teenage years and fifty was in Vang Pao's army. They were paid directly by the CIA with a second lieutenant or a captain getting around $30-50/month. They were trained by the CIA on the M16 and M14 rifles and 105mm and 155mm guns. Mr. Yang's battalion were all Hmongs. He was about 13 years old when he first joined.

After the fall of Cambodia and South Vietnam in 1975, abandoned by the Americans and the Royal Lao forces, the Hmong became targets of genocide by the Pathet Lao. Over half the Hmong population died during the Vietnam War and the subsequent flight to Thailand.

Mr. Yang hid from 1976-7, then surrendered to the communists. He decided to escape to Thailand with almost the entire family in 1989. They left behind one sister and mother-in-law in Laos with whom they stay in touch by mail.

It took them six days to escape, through mountains and different zones. When they reached the Thai border, the Thais reported them to the UN and took them to the camps. At the camps Mr. Yang learned that his brother was already settled in the States. They stayed in the crowded camps for a little over two years until his brother and the Lutheran church arranged sponsorship. Hmong, Laotian and Vietnamese were each in separate camps. There were only three camps in Thailand for the Hmong.

Mr. Yang can read and write in Hmong and Lao. Although the Chinese tried to eradicate the Hmong language by exterminating Hmong scholars and leaders, when the Hmong people migrated and resettled in Laos in the early 19th century, they retained the oral tradition as well as produced a new written form. Hmong and Lao languages and customs are very different.

Elaborate stitching and embroidery has been an important part of the cultural tradition of the Hmong women. Most have not been able to maintain this tradition due to their radically different lifestyles here.

What they miss most now is their own home and land.


DMZ
XING

Yong Soon Min's work surveys the realm of geopolitical conflict, cultural encounter, localized desperation, war, forced immigration, assimilation and most importantly, the lyric excavation of the memories and social reflections that surround and animate these scenarios. Within these broad thematic concerns, the specific issues of gender, race and cultural difference are explored. And while the works often address the violent encounters at the root of the refugee's flight, Min also manages to provide an essential and often touching recognition of human resilience, interdependence and interaction. She attempts to make sense of the often bitter exchanges between differing groups of people while presenting a record of forced movement and desperate flight as a prelude to an often uncertain and miraculous process of cultural mutation and hybridization. The resulting series of thematically linked art manages to encompass the most intimate personal realities while symbolically addressing political interests, economic forces, technology, popular culture and nonwestern traditions, all the while producing a physical and limpidly visual manifestation of the effects of cultural encounter and personal metamorphosis.

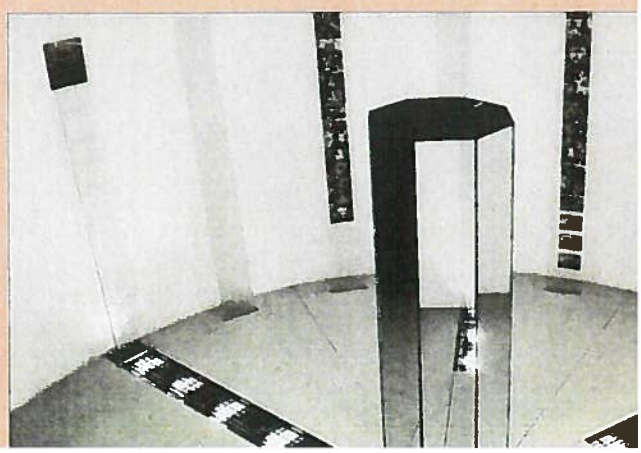
Min's prints, drawings and multimedia installations embody a critical post-colonial sensibility that takes the measure of nonwestern societies and the imperial powers that threaten their political and cultural sovereignty, putting these historic relationships in a new context—the art gallery space, a self-conscious arena of comparison, analysis and contemplation—all the while examining the impact of these conflicts on the individual life. She asks basic questions about the nature of the post-immigrant national identity: who am I and what traditions do I belong to?; where did I come from and what were the forces that led to my displacement?; what traditions animate my past and how do I use them to face the future?; and ultimately what is an American and how do we make sure the definition is as broad and embracing as the people that make up its population? Ever mindful of the forced and ongoing international transit of people, her work indirectly points to the full spectrum of American ethnic complexity, bringing to mind the full range of intricate and ongoing cultural transformations of Asians, Haitians, Russians, Mexicans, exiles from Central America and Africa—all forced to adapt to their new circumstances even as their presence transforms the bewildering and often dismissive society that they must now live in.

Min has provided us with a symbolic representation of the physical experience and inner life of the displaced individual, while suggesting a vision of what a future of genuinely compassionate, tolerant multicultural interdependence might look like. She has symbolically mapped the process of her life as a post-immigrant Americanized Korean woman to recreate her own search for home, to satisfy her longing for "a place of belonging, wholeness, and rootedness"—a longing and sense of absence festering at the heart of the refugee community that she attempts to address. All this in America, a country whose historical relationship to Asians and women is rooted in racist reaction, cultural marginalization and stereotype. International conflict, historical oppression, displacement and assimilation are the conceptual substance, the materials she works with, evoked through the elegant use of transparency, layering, language and the use and placement of the emotionally charged, memory-laden object.

In *DMZ XING* Min has produced a small monument to memory and communication, familial devotion and social rebirth. Hartford, Connecticut, a critical East Coast Asian refugee intake center, is also home to a significant Asian American community both in the city and surrounding suburbs. Indeed, as she indicates, the U.S. has settled the largest number of Southeast Asian refugees with more than one million counted in the 1990 census. Interviewing and photographing a number of refugee families in the area, Min has taken their stories of persecution, dislocation, international dispersal and inspirational perseverance and intertwined them with her own tale of forced transplantation to produce another chapter in the book of American national identity and an homage to their ordeals, their determination and their circular path from desperation and disjunction to security and existential rebirth.

These new citizens are the latest contributors to the hybrid state we call America; their stories, like that of Yong Soon Min and like the African, Caribbean and Native American cultural threads that make up my own family background, begin to assert their presence as part of the common and contentious American national mythology just as these families slowly but surely stake their claims to the abstract ideals granted by the U.S. Constitution.

Bringing together the characteristic aspects of much of her work, Min's large circular installation consists of 16 glass panels about a foot wide and about six feet tall, arranged around the circular interior. Text and narrative, photography, personal narration and sense of existential investigation have marked her work in the past, but the text and the research that goes into it are not meant to serve strictly as journalism, but as a lyric pastiche of symbolic detail and psychically charged anecdote. Min's work often presents a translucent reality, a veiled and partially revealing record of past experience that hints at a parallel buildup of obscuring and victimizing social experience. Some glass panels are inscribed (in Min's characteristically spare and elegantly direct prose) with the story of the Asian refugee families; these alternate around the



and home again

interior walls of the installation with other panels etched with her own life's record of dispersal, reunion and remembrance.

As one moves clockwise through the circular installation of *DMZ XING* the first panel to the left partially covers a combat photograph of the Vietnam War. The text inscribed on the panel begins with the words BODY COUNT. In a brisk listing of the Vietnamese wars of national liberation she catalogs the suffering of a land at war for so many years. The Vietnam War is the signature disruption for the families she interviewed for this piece, in the same way that the Korean War marks the beginning of her own forced wandering across the world's stage. "For every Viet Cong killed by U.S. Search & Destroy missions, six civilians died," says the text, noting that more than 14 million Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodian refugees were produced by the conflict and marking the moral and intellectual beginning of Min's investigation into the outer circumstances and inner lives of her fellow refugees.

But *DMZ XING* is also Min's story. She was born in a small village in South Korea in 1953 into a society devastated by war. Her father was a civilian translator in the South Korean armed forces and after the war her mother and grandmother worked at an American military base in Seoul. Her father immigrated to the U.S. after the war and Min and her mother joined him in 1960 and began the halting process of acculturation: born Korean and on the way to becoming an American. Growing up in what she has called the "dream world" of a Korean-less American suburb, she developed into an apparent American, but an American who would come to recognize a growing, indeterminate longing for her Korean beginnings.

As we follow the glass narrative panels around the room, each is marked by a channel set in the floor holding bright red heat lamps. These floor channels, about the same width as the glass panels, extend inward toward the mirrored polygon in the center of the installation. They blink on and off in measured intervals, radiating an oppressive heat and signifying warning and emergency—a sense of trauma, discomfort and existential crisis. Initially, the floor channels travel clockwise around the room, touching and corresponding with the first glass panels that present the story of Min's life, beginning with the longest floor lamp marking the initial BODY COUNT panel. As the piece continues around the room each floor section of lamp becomes a bit shorter, serving as an indicator of the fiercely chaotic events in her own life and measuring the initial intensity and the slow diminishing of internal crisis as her own sense of place, social connection and cultural repose increases.

The work attempts to capture a sense of the refugee experience, the essence of what Min calls the DMZ: that strip of misnamed no-man's land; an imposed boundary that serves as a symbolic measurement of the social and cultural trauma of the lands of Vietnam and Korea specifically, and of the arbitrary and intensely divisive sensibilities immigrants must face in their new circumstances. As the panels continue around the installation each segment details Min's story—her visit to Korea and the actual DMZ, her relationship with her father and his views of the past, her growing political consciousness and sense of Korean ancestry and her poignantly stated reflections on the geopolitical conflict that transported her, much like her fellow refugees, to the present moment. And as we follow the stories in this room, we also begin to see an evolving personality grow into that of an engaged artist, complete with all the loose ends, obstacles and delusions that provide human personality with its variegated, mutative substance.

The metaphorical DMZ Min speaks of here is her own demilitarized zone, a scarred and contentious interior psychic landscape that is as indicative of existential trauma and restricted desire as its real world corollary is of geopolitical strife and a frustrating national standoff. Even the name of the piece, *DMZ XING*, or demilitarized zone crossing, indicates, once again, her sense of movement toward an ambiguous location and subsequent groping for a place of physical, cultural and psychic repose. But "Xing" also indicates a negation or oppositional stance, a crossing out as well as a crossing over, and the realization that the social forces exploiting both inner and outer divisions can be challenged and reconfigured.

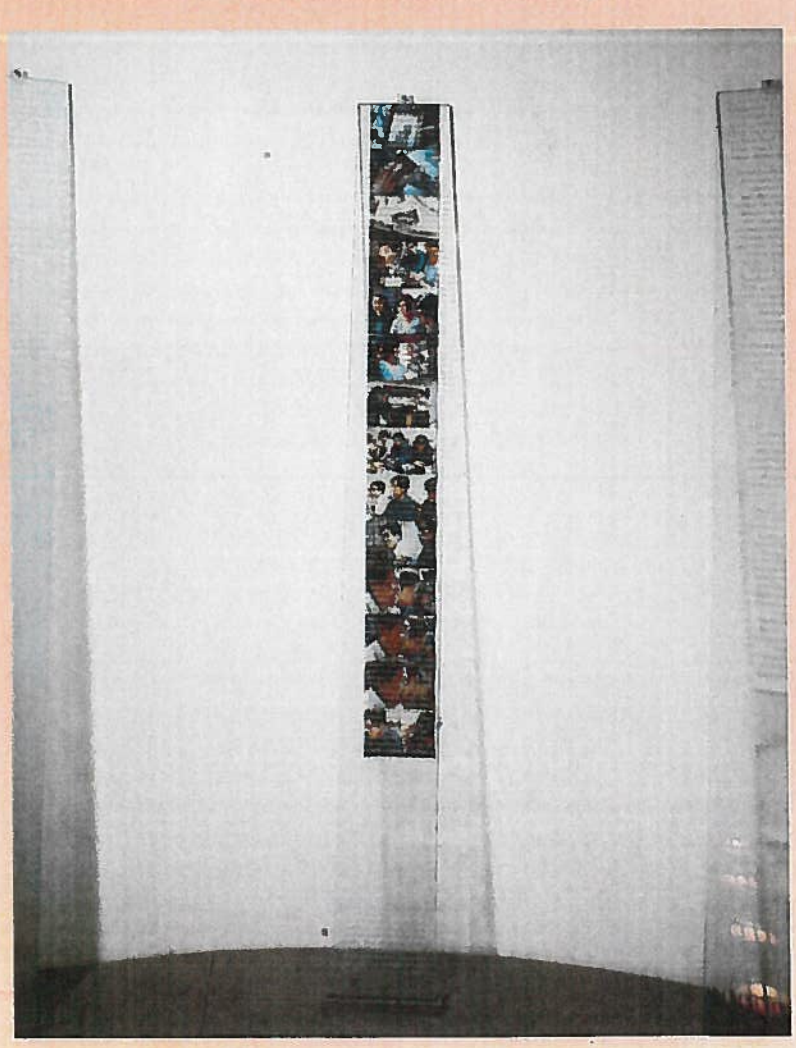
This hall of memory also serves to mark the transformation of these families as well as a lyric documentation of their breathtaking stories of suffering and escape and their continuing story of adaptation and sense of connection to their former lives. It is centered, it could be said, by the mirrored center post, kaleidoscopically refracting and reflecting this welter of individual experiences, each pointedly individual and each with some scrap of experience and insight that the others can likely embrace as mutual. The many photographs—some etched into the glass panels, others tacked to the wall like snapshots—are coupled or layered over or under by text-inscribed glass. These images capture the refugee families at earlier times in their homelands and in more recent images recorded in their new homes and apartments and at a Connecticut Buddhist temple.

These life stories document the journeys of Vietnamese Buddhists like Vu Xuan Hoai, Nguyen Thanh Binh, Le Vac Trang and the Reverend Thich Chi Nang, members of the Buddhist Association of Connecticut. The new careers, new neighborhoods and the continuing connection to family members still in Vietnam are captured, even as the association maintains their traditional beliefs in a startlingly different locale. Min retells the story of the Sruns' escape from the Khmer Rouge to a Thai refugee camp and their arrival in Utica, New York. She relates their struggle to teach their children to be Cambodian as the children learn for themselves how to be Americans, and the family's gratitude, despite the racist ignorance they've encountered, to the American people for their ability to remain a family. Another panel documents the Saengaly family's escape from a Pathet Lao reeducation camp and how they travelled to refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines, arriving in Colorado (and leaving Mr. Saengaly's son, daughter and sister-in-law behind in Laos) before making their way to Connecticut.

Min chronicles the dramatic escape from Pathet Lao forces by a family of Hmong farmers, recruited like so many Hmongs by the CIA to fight the communist Pathet Lao and Viet Cong. Abandoned after the fall of Vietnam, the entire Yang family (also forced to leave behind some family members) escaped to a Thai refugee camp ultimately to be reunited with a brother already settled in the states. But Min also records the sense of loss and remembrance, noting how much the Yangs (as do the Saengalys) long for their home and their land as their own Laotian traditions erode in a very different and often difficult land. She interviews the Hung family, who entered the U.S. as part of a resettlement program for Amerasian kids. The son of an American serviceman, 18 year-old Hung has long since lost the only picture of his father. Hung lives in Hartford with his brother and mother and prepares to enter college, a Vietnamese kid who knows Connecticut history and who says he wants Americans to know something of Vietnam.

Despite her documentarian knack for reclaiming the narratives of these New World refugees, *DMZ XING* goes straight to the heart of Min's own life, a transformed individual among a community of transformed people. She explains how her political growth and activism reflects not so much a generational conflict with her father's anti-communism but more specifically reveals an internal alienation from her own cultural difference, her own past and an unqualified, assimilationist acceptance of popular American historical and cultural mythology. Her sense of being Asian American has taken on a new, deeper and more hybrid meaning, one that she can connect with her father's former life and her own current life as an Asian American/transnational/anti-imperialist/activist/teacher/artist/woman. Neither a seamless connection nor a disjunctive break, this newly evolved state of self-conscious psychic amalgamation is an embrace of the shadowy but vivid past-world lodged in her memory (and within the memory of her parents), as she and the other refugees face a new and often hostile daily reality just outside the door.

Calvin Reid



Calvin Reid is an artist who writes about art.
He lives in New York City.

RE-EDUCATION

My father was not a military man. In a curious way, it was his study of linguistics that forged his military connection. Teaching English in Korea led to a job in the Korean War as a translator for a high-ranking officer of the U.S. Army. During the war, he was part of the U.S. frontline which at one time advanced as far north as the Yalu River near the border with China, and another time retreated all the way down to the southern tip of the peninsula. After the war, he was sponsored by the officer to attain another college degree in the States. Upon graduation, he found employment again with the U.S. military by utilizing his language skills, this time by teaching Korean at an army language school. At one time he was on a task force to crack North Korean military codes.

During the worst of our periodic fights in my late teen years, I condemned my father for what I considered to be his militarism. I rebelled against his strict authoritarian ways which ran counter to the more liberal influences of my public schooling. He believed in a "strong arm" rule for Korea because Koreans, in his view, lacked experience in participatory democracy. This is the same premise behind Franklin Roosevelt's proposal in 1945 of a multilateral trusteeship for Korea (and for Indochina), arguing that Koreans were not ready for self-government and would have to be tutored towards an independence that would come only "in due course." In my father's wholehearted support for the nearly three decades of thinly veiled military dictatorships after the war in South Korea, he adamantly opposed the Communist regime of the North.

During the late Sixties, as I came out more assertively against the war, we reached a painful impasse in our political arguments in which he was the resolute hawk to my unwavering stance as a dove. I derided him for being a knee-jerk anti-Communist as he similarly dismissed me as a bleeding-heart liberal, too young and immature to know any better.

I took comfort in thinking that my conflicts with my father were part of a larger social phenomenon, of a generation which questioned authority and rebelled against norms. Most of my peers in college were opposed to the war. I was swept up in the chants, the passion, the rhetoric. Down with the military industrial complex! Bring our boys back home! Give peace a chance! It seems ironic that I felt more American than ever during this period of fervent dissent, as if my ability to criticize this government meant that for the first time I had a stake in its affairs.

With hindsight I've come to realize that my conflict with my father was less about the war or generational conflict and more about my denial of our difference. In my adopted Eurocentric view of the world, my father's history was inconsequential and even pathetic. Nothing around me validated my father's experience and identity or our experience as immigrants. In my quest to assimilate, I felt alienated from my native country, its history, its traditions. Not only was I ignorant about the Vietnamese and their history or that of other Asians, I hardly cared. They were just distant victims of U.S. imperialism, as abstract to me as to other Americans. The four Kent State students who were killed protesting against the invasion of Cambodia were more real to me than the countless Vietnamese casualties.

Learning more about Southeast Asian refugees and their history has made me question and re-evaluate our political differences and our relationship. I became more appreciative of the critical role the family has in providing a support base for immigrants to negotiate the present and the past in the new surroundings. The many horrific stories from Southeast Asian refugees about their experiences with certain forms of communism has made me question my simplistic and untested intellectualized understanding of this ideology and political system and given me insight into my father's anti-communism.

I still don't see eye to eye with my father politically but I do see our differences with greater complexity and I hope with greater compassion.

Hung is an 18 year-old senior living with his Vietnamese mother and a 14 year-old half-brother, Tua, in a small one bedroom apartment in a poor neighborhood of Hartford. The two sons sleep in the living room.

In Vietnam, his mother worked in the U.S. military base. Hung's father was an American soldier named John who Hung guesses must be about 36 years old. His father left Vietnam in 1972 and Hung was born the following year. Hung had a picture of his father and a letter from him but lost it in the Philippines. Hung says that he looks like his father.

Hung and his family are from a small town near Danang. They left Vietnam in June 1989 when they were granted leave as part of the U.S. government's Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987, a program to resettle families with Amerasian kids in the States. They were flown to a large refugee camp in the Philippines where they stayed for six months. During that time, Hung attended school and learned English. Catholic charities sponsored their transfer to Hartford, Connecticut. For the first 2-3 weeks they stayed in a hotel then moved to an apartment. They were given two months' financial aid until his mother found work at a local retirement nursing home operated by nuns. Hung also works as a housekeeper for nuns on weekends.

He still writes to his many relatives in Vietnam including his grandfather who is 76 years old. He hopes that the U.S. and Vietnamese governments will cooperate so that he can go back and visit. He does not think that he'd want to live there.

When asked about the Vietnam War, Hung responded: "It seems like a civil war, [it] was terrible. I don't want to talk about it....Vietnamese ask, why did the Americans lose?"

Tua knows Connecticut history but not U.S. or Vietnamese history.
Hung wants Americans to know about his country and its history.
"When I first came to Hartford High, they spoke Spanish with me. I mean kids came and ask 'are you white?' I tell them I'm Vietnamese."

Hung has been accepted to the University of Connecticut and plans to major in engineering although he may consider business because physics is very difficult.

DREAM STATE

For the Vietnam generation, there's a popular saying: if you can remember the Sixties, you weren't there. I can't remember the Sixties very well. But not entirely because of the lingering haze or residue of some mind-altering substance abuse. For most of the Sixties, I was in a fog, under the influence of something as equally mind and vision altering. I was in a dream state then. Immersed in the American Dream.

It's been a long process to shake free of this dream. Part of the awakening process has been to revisit this period, this war and to try to see it with a different lens, in better focus. Meeting Southeast Asian refugees and hearing their stories has given me invaluable insight into the multidimensional complexities of this war and its broad impact on the ordinary lives of people as well as to my own process of becoming an Asian American.

It was nearly Christmas when we landed in Monterey, California. Holiday decorations were up everywhere. To my seven year-old mind, I had been magically transported to an extravagant wonderland beyond my wildest imagination. I had left behind an old and weary capital still recovering from a devastating war as well as a massive civil uprising in April of 1960. From the chilly Korean winter it was an overwhelming contrast to land in the cozy, warm and carefree ambience of a small coastal resort town. Nothing in the pre-modernization life in South Korea could have prepared me for the luxury of conspicuous consumption in my new life, even in our first home, a dilapidated one bedroom apartment. Everything, small and large, seemed magical - from indoor plumbing to Barbie dolls and TV. I was a scrappy Third World kid set loose in a dazzling First World playground. Like a supermarket, aisle after aisle, or a Spiegel catalogue, page upon page, my American Dream world was bountiful and picture perfect.

HITTING HOME

The War landed on our doorstep during Nixon's draft lottery days when my brother's number came up 57. He was inducted but managed to hold up the process legally due to technical irregularities until the war ended.

Around this time, I had begun to read my brother's copy of the Autobiography of Malcolm X. But it was a decade or so later when I became an Asian American, that his words as well as the legacy of the Civil Rights movement really hit home. I had to realize that claiming my place in this culture is a political act. I had to search for and reclaim the marginalized history of Korea and the Third World before I could make meaningful connections. The war at home for civil rights and economic justice is related to the war in Vietnam as Martin Luther King declared. Colonialism and imperialism "over there" has its roots here at home . Malcolm X's assertion for Blacks, that the American Dream is a nightmare, became my wake-up call.

WHAM
(WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS)

Disruption. Displacement. Dislocation. Uprooted. Torn apart. Between two worlds. Two vastly different cultures. Starting from scratch. Learning everything all over again. A new language. An epic upon epic. Journey upon journey.

"When you sail away, you see only the sky, no trees. You think, maybe 99 percent die, one percent live. Maybe you be lucky." —Tram Thuy Ngoc Tran, who escaped from Vietnam alone at the age of eleven on a boat, spent three years in a refugee camp in Thailand before finding an American sponsor.

Among all the nations, the U.S. has settled the largest number of Southeast Asian refugees. With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the U.S. enacted the Refugee Resettlement Act of 1975, which permitted the migration of 500,000 people from Vietnam, and which was amended in 1979 to include Laotian, Cambodian, and other ethnic groups from Southeast Asia. The Refugee Act of 1980 for the first time defined who can be admitted to this country as a refugee and established a framework under which the federal refugee assistance program operates.

According to the 1990 Census, the total number of people in the U.S. from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam topped one million.

Southeast Asian refugees comprise the majority of Asian Americans living below the poverty level in the U.S.

Southeast Asians suffer a disproportionately high number of hate-crimes in the U.S. due to resentment and the racism of segments of society that refuse to let the Vietnam War die.

"If you're few in number, you're almost exotic. If you increase in number, you're perceived as a threat."

My interview with Mr. Vu Xuan Hoai, President, Nguyen Thanh Binh, Vice President, Mr. Le Vac Trang, member and Reverend Thich Chi Nang, a guest monk, took place during a Sunday service of the Buddhist Association of Connecticut in Bloomfield, Connecticut.

In Vietnam the ratio is roughly 70% Buddhist to 30% Catholic. During the French colonial rule, the Catholic church was dominant. Then the Americans brought Protestantism to Saigon. Before the arrival of the French, there were three main religions - Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism influenced people's daily code of conduct; Buddhism their spiritual life; and Taoist influence was most evident in literature. Every village has a Buddhist temple.

The Buddhist Association in Connecticut has been operating for 10-12 years, initially in the living room of their former president until their current building was donated to them by a developer in the area. They fixed the old house to use on weekends for service and Thursday nights for a meditation class. There's usually 20-30 people in attendance on weekends. A bedroom has been converted into a library.

According to official communist doctrines, there is freedom to practice any religion but in reality that's not the case. The communist government tries to suppress any religion not under its control. It established a State Buddhist church in Vietnam and tried to force other Buddhist churches to join with them but most have refused and conflicts continue.

Mr. Binh, now an engineer, teaches at the University at Storrs and in Manchester. Before the Vietnam War, he was in Saigon studying science and math. When, like most Vietnamese men, he was drafted into the army, he volunteered for the air force in 1971 and was trained by both Vietnamese and Americans as a helicopter pilot. He had to learn English because all the equipment instructions were in English.

His division suffered little casualty because it was not Vietcong controlled. When Saigon fell on April 30th, he was still on duty in the Mekong Delta, west of Saigon. He was the officer in charge of his unit. Although the commander of that division ordered that no one leave, when Binh heard on the radio about the surrender, he decided to act. He bypassed the orders and arranged with a friend who didn't have a license but knew how to fly, to bring a helicopter to where Binh was stationed, from which point he took over. He escaped with about a dozen other air force personnel by flying to a U.S. ship. Because he wasn't a high ranking officer, the possibility that he might have been spared persecution made his decision to escape very difficult. But in hindsight he is sure that he made the right decision considering the thousands of South Vietnamese who were sent to re-education camps.

En route to the ship they first landed on an island to refuel and contacted the ship for permission to land. Once on board, they had to dump the helicopter overboard to make room for the Vietnamese evacuees. They were taken to the Philippines, then flown to Guam where Binh stayed in a "tent city" for a few weeks while his sponsorship by a church in Rhode Island was processed. There he attended college and graduated as an engineer. He then moved to Connecticut to work for an aerospace company as a civil servant.

Here, Binh married a Vietnamese who is also a 1975 refugee. They have three children. He keeps in touch with his parents and siblings who live in central Vietnam and sends them money through friends in order to avoid government interference. His family was spared official recriminations because he took care to ensure that the government would have no knowledge of his whereabouts. Now the government has relaxed these kinds of concerns.

His family in Vietnam doesn't want to come here. They want to live in their own homeland. Mr. Binh feels that there are too many conflicts here, perhaps as a result of too much individualism. However, he finds his life here rewarding. He would like to visit Vietnam when he's near retirement.

HEARTLAND

I'm a child of the Cold War, born in 1953, the year the Korean War ended, neither in peace nor truce but an armistice, a temporary suspension of hostilities by agreement of the DPRK and the USA. The Korean War was the first war fought between the U.S. under a U.N. flag and communism. The U.S. claims to have won the Korean War in containing communism. So does the DPRK, in containing U.S. imperialism. Nations may "win" wars but the people always lose.

Korea remains a Cold War residue, a remnant, an unresolved zone of contention. One people, even families, torn apart into two nations. A festering wound yearning to be healed before it destroys the entire national body.

Wars end. Hostilities go on forever...

For the exile or refugee, April 30, 1975 was the National Defeat Day. For the Vietnamese in Vietnam, it is the National Liberation Day.

"To grow up Vietnamese in America is to grow up with the legacy of belonging to the loser's side. The young men and I, through our fathers, are veterans of a civil war we never actually fought."

"Inside those of us who have had personal experience with the communists, there will always be a want for revenge. But we cannot pass on our bitterness and hatred to the younger and the new generation. It is too heavy a burden for them."

For those of us whose histories have been marginalized, or who have been colonized or displaced, or have lost a "heartland," memories are all we have. Especially those that are painful. They must be preserved and activated to renew their meaning and relevance. We must re-member and re-invent, and create new contexts for understanding our histories and ourselves. We must struggle to search and find, in the margins and the interstices, truth and possibilities. We who have been forced outside of territorial boundaries by history must carry into a new world, a world within, creating a vital relationship between the past and the present. This is the healing process that we, certainly not the victor nor the victimizer, initiate out of necessity.

A line runs through my memories, intersecting histories.

Crossing, relocating, locating, connecting, the past imperfect, present conditional.

Korea and Vietnam intersect and parallel at the DMZ.

GROUND ZERO

At the DMZ,
I saw an old bridge,
The Bridge of No Return.
This is the only bridge connecting the two sides that was not destroyed during the Korean War. On the South Korean side, two soldiers, one South Korean and one U.S., guard its entrance.
A bridge exists.
Yet no one may pass.

Where is my demilitarized desire ?

Where is my decolonized body politic ?

"A boundary
is not that at which something stops
but...the boundary is that from which
something begins its presencing."

DMZ XING is based on interviews with the following Southeast Asian refugee families conducted by the artist from February–June 1993. The artist is indebted to them and the translators for their participation and contribution:

Hung Phan and family
Saengali Khamnouan and family
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