

2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships

Mohawk Fine Papers Award



JINY UNG

Fine art
Graduate student
Pratt Institute

I am a reflection of my parents' past, a product of transgression, and the daughter of yellow plight, derived from two people. My Cambodian father escaped the Killing Fields, the Kissinger bombing campaigns and the Khmer Rouge after seeking refuge at a Thai refugee camp. My Vietnamese mother fled by boat during the Vietnam War and still continues to struggle in the United States. Unlike my father, she never received any formal education and is completely illiterate. Their experiences and courage have influenced me to express myself and interpret their histories through art, education, and social activism. My own experiences and that of my parents' struggle that has been relegated upon me have influenced the subject of my art, my role as an artist and my responsibility to society.

I have always taken a proactive position in life and feel an obligation to include people and their narratives in both my life and work. Being proactive makes you a member of the community and is my way of giving back to the community. Over the years I have remained active in community projects that further social progress and civic engagement focusing on social responsibility through the proactive role,



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or taking action for social justice and equality. At 16 I interned for Congressman Ken Bentsen and State Rep. Martha Wong. I received a bachelor's in political science and another in studio arts (painting) while interning for the Houston Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender Political Caucus for a year. In addition, I interned for Voices Breaking Boundaries, a literary and visual arts nonprofit, served as board member and also as mentor for the Vietnamese Summer Writing Workshop. I then earned a master's in education while teaching in DC Public Schools to students who were disadvantaged and who were new to the country and language. Through these experiences I came to the realization that social justice and responsibility were important tenets of equality, and I forged work from mixed media and site-specific installations to convey such values.



My work revolves around people and documenting their histories. My work focuses on civic engagement while using art as a platform for dialogue regarding cultural histories and openness to integration—a foundational step towards activism. I am interested in themes of civic duty, whether innate or conditioned by society, that present constructs dealing with “innocent bystanders,” “victims,” and “perpetrators.” I question these roles in a society where definitions differ, and pluralism and cultural entities exist.

Recent projects include “Intertwined” where interviews with the African-American community allowed them to empower themselves in the Project Row House art house. They contributed their stories, relics, or images of the community around them onto transparencies, note cards, the floor and by hanging photos onto clamps interwoven by string. Another site-specific project, “The Daily Staple,” involved interviews of Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans and their obstacles with language and cultural barriers in Washington, D.C. These projects helped to empower the interviewees and allow for exposure to the greater community.



I consider myself an artist, activist and educator and am working on collaborations in mixed media dealing with child soldiers, land mines and social responsibility. Major projects include an animated short about the wars in Cambodia and Vietnam and Agent Orange. The purpose of these projects is to empower the individuals and their narratives and bring to light the unresolved issues that still exist today and how these issues have been passed on to the current generations, allowing us to examine solutions and methods that can inform decisions regarding people, social justice and social responsibility.