

Different Times, Different Cultures, Different Borders: A Ritual Crossing

18" x 84", 2008 Acrylic on wood, mirrors, fluorescent Plexiglas

David Feinberg, with drawing contributions from survivors: Dorjay Sakya, Margot De Wilde, and The Lee family; Nhia, Yer and Sara Lee with artists Rodney Massey and Adam Streeter

"Different Times, Different Cultures, Different Borders: A Ritual Crossing" is a collaboration concerning genocide from three different cultures. The Lee family survived a campaign of extermination after the US abandoned its secret Hmong Army with their pullout from the Vietnam War. Margo DeWilde survived medical experiments at the hands of Nazi doctors while interned at the Auschwitz Concentration camp in Poland. Dorjay Sakya survived a violent crack down against Tibetan protesters in Lhasa during 1987. He continues to work for the freedom and dignity of his people.

To begin this collaboration we divided the background into three sections, each representing a culture and its borders. Margo painted a rectangular pattern representing the bunk beds where she, and the other female victims of the Nazi experiments, slept three to a bed. Dorjay painted an ancient symbol of the eternal knot: a symbol of continuity. The Lee family depicted the journey of the Hmong people through time from China to the United States along with the journey of her family from Laos to the United States. From left to right Yer and Sara painted images of traditional Hmong villages in Asia that are interrupted by chaotic splotches of paint symbolizing a difficult chapter of their lives.

Dorjay, Margo and the Lee family were invited to take part in a joint session for this collaborative piece. They were each asked to select one of the three sections created by the wood mounting. Margo took the left section, Dorjay the bottom; Yer and daughter Sara selected the top. After a discussion of the various factors of their survival they were all asked to begin painting within the borders of their area while keeping elements of their story in mind.

Later, David asked the survivors to apply another level paint. This time they were asked to ignore the border mountings and paint over them into the other areas. It was during this phase that the long blue river emerged, stretching across all three sections and linking together their stories of survival.