

## **“The Cloakroom: Douglas Elementary School, 1964”**

*2012. Mixed media wall construction, collage, and Plexiglas. 18”w x 20”h x 4.5”d.*

***David Feinberg and Beth Andrews, with contributions from Mike Newman and Claus Newman, and from artists Rowan Pope, Antony Lakey, Michele Coppin, Dylan Hansen, Emily Weber, and writer Carissa Hansen.***

When he was just a young boy, Claus Newman immigrated to Minnesota from Germany with his parents Franz and Hilda Neumann and his younger brother Mike Newman. Claus says that both he and Mike experienced discrimination as a result of being Germans attending school in America. Wherever the boys went, kids would call them Nazis. Claus remembers what it felt like being ridiculed by his peers. He says, “They didn’t understand what they were telling us. They just didn’t understand.” Mike and Claus’s father had spoken out against the Nazi regime while in uniform as a member of the Luftwaffe and was sentenced to death. Mike explains the children’s misunderstanding, saying, “Our feeling was our father was a hero, our father was one of the ones who was against it, our father actually almost died and probably ultimately did die because of it.”

The most haunting memory that Claus has from his schooldays is depicted on the left side of the artwork. When he was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, his teacher pulled him into the cloakroom away from all of the other children and told him, “I’m going to keep my eye on you, you little Nazi. I know what your people did to my people. I’m not going to put up with you in my class.” The incident tormented Claus, and in his piece he says that he’s “trying to get back to that feeling of how it felt being that small and that young and having someone pretty much loathe you for being a kid.” Although the confrontation was painful for Claus, he never told his father what happened at school because he didn’t want to be part of the commotion that his father would create handling the injustice.

Claus wanted his youngest brother, Tom, who was born in the United States and was not part of the project, to be included in the artwork. A photograph reflected in the mirror on the left side of the artwork shows Claus holding both of his brothers on his shoulders in a manner that resembles his mother’s world famous bicycle act.