

For Every Thing, There is a Reason

43" x 79," 2006, Acrylic on canvas, collage, fluorescent Plexiglas

David Feinberg. Drawing contributions from Dorjay Sakya, Tibetan survivor, Margot De Wilde, Holocaust survivor, and Caroline Kent, graduate student in painting.

To start the cultural interweaving of Dorjay and Margot's stories, Solomon Atta stretched strips of canvas across the piece, crisscrossed in a way to suggest the mixing of Dorjay and Margot's experiences. The first marks on the painting were emotional responses to the stories without being narrative. At the Auschwitz camp, Margot had her ID numbers tattooed on her arm with a triangle underneath them. Margot painted the symbol of the triangle on the canvas. Dorjay then painted a purple triangle on the piece because he was so moved by Margot's decision. Both drawing from Buddhist beliefs, they agreed that even though they had suffered so much, "everything happens for a reason".

At the end of the storytelling, Margot, Dorjay and Caroline were asked to choose from various colored Plexiglas strips which ones they wanted to overlap and weave between the canvas strips. Dorjay chose a piece of green Plexiglas, Caroline chose a red piece of Plexiglas and Margot decidedly chose the strip of mirror. A childhood photograph of Margot with her classmates was collaged onto the artwork. Dorjay suggested we use images from National Geographic as opposed to his personal photographs, to avoid the possible repercussions of his friends, many of who are living in Tibet today. A photograph of the Tibetan cavalry was chosen, which Dorjay explained is now under the jurisdiction of the Chinese army.

The art team needed a visual bridge to connect the photographs of the school children and the Tibetan cavalry. As we went through our files of photographs, we found the pewter plate, made in 1640 of the Swedish King Gustav Adolf riding on a horse. Her uncle bought it because his name was Gustav as well. Her uncle had buried it with other family valuables during the Holocaust. It was retrieved by Margot's father after liberation and is now hanging in her home. A fragment of the horse on the plate was used to bridge Margot's experience with Dorjay's collage imagery of the Tibetan Cavalry. In addition, threads from both sides of the canvas were attached to the horse's harness.