

“Journey To Nowhere”

2016. Mixed media on canvas. 27” w x 39” h.

David Feinberg and Beth Andrews, with contributions from storyteller and artist Kimchi Hoang, artist Michelle Englund, and students Kristin Anton and Jane Bollweg.

Kimchi Hoang was born in Hoi An, a small village in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Kimchi remembers marveling at the rocket displays in the night sky as a child, thinking they were fireworks instead of exploding bombs. Kimchi’s father was a Captain in the South Vietnamese army. Curiously, he was against killing people, and instead found ways to help citizens of both the North and the South. These actions saved him from a firing squad once the war ended, as the North Vietnamese shot many of the officers who had colluded with United States forces.

After the war, the North Vietnamese took over the country, leaving citizens of the South in mortal danger. Kimchi’s family fled their village on foot to Da Nang. People took all of their belongings with them.

Years later, Kimchi and her brother tried to escape the war-ravaged country by boat. Kimchi’s boyfriend had already successfully escaped, and eventually landed in the United States. Kimchi was not so fortunate. The police captured the boat, and people jumped out, scattering in the tall grasses. Both Kimchi and her brother ran, with police dogs giving chase. Knowing that prison guards were harder on men than women, Kimchi stopped, allowing the dogs to surround her, while her brother ran on to safety. Kimchi was indeed thrown into prison where she shared an overcrowded concrete room with many other women. They were given a mere ½ cup of rice a day as food, and one bucket for them to use as a communal commode. During the day, they worked under the hot sun in the fields. 17 years later, Kimchi’s boyfriend returned to Vietnam to marry Kimchi. They now both live and work in Minnesota.

An image of the prison wall and tower appear on the right side of the painting. A yellow escape boat and a green landing dock appear in the middle of the painting, and seem to be falling into the prison grounds. The original boat had eyes painting on each side of the bow. Here, an elongated pair of eyes, one black, and one blue adds to the composition. Ocean waves swell under the dock, evoking the danger of the voyage. Pictures of a Vietnamese prison appear in the upper right. In the upper left, we collaged a picture of workers in a rice field.

Soldiers fought in the streets in front of her family home; no one could tell whether the uniformed men were “good guys” from the South or “bad guys” fighting in the Viet Cong army.