

Yer's First Child Hue, Born in Laos

44" x 52", 2008 Acrylic on canvas, collage, fluorescent Plexiglas.

David Feinberg, with drawing contributions from Hmong survivors of Communist retribution: The Lee family; Nhia, Yer, Pa Houa and Sara Lee with artists: Caroline Kent, Jamie Winter Dawson, Rodney Massey and Adam Streeter

Hue was the firstborn of his family and the last to be born in Laos. But Hue was not Laotian, just as generations before him were not Laotian. His people, the Hmong, have no country that bears their name.

Hue dreamt of one day traveling to America. He also yearned for the Hmong State that the Americans had promised. He served the vitally important role of lingual interpreter.

During a raid against Hmong refugees hiding in the forest, Hue died at the age of 5 from poison gas.

It was Hue's father, Nhia, who had been recruited to serve in the CIA's clandestine Hmong Army during the 1970s. When the American's pulled out of Vietnam the Hmong were abruptly abandoned. Huge segments of their population were targeted for vengeful extermination.

Nhia and Yer survived their young son. They survived years in a dense jungle environment and eventually fled to Thailand, where they would give birth to their oldest daughter Pa Houa.

The painting, "Yer's first child Hue, born in Laos" was composed over several sessions. The family was encouraged to discuss their experiences and turn their thoughts to the story of their survival. They were asked to choose their own colors and apply paint to the canvas at random. As the story was still fresh in their minds, hand drawn collage, created by family members and the artistic team were added to select areas of the piece.

Pa Houa sketched a portrait of herself blindfolded with her "mind" exposed. She said that this represents how she can only hear and think about the events that occurred before her birth. This portrait was divided in two parts that were place on opposite ends of the canvas that are connected by the red lines representing the paths of their difficult journey.

Yer still retains memory of a little girl from another family, crying because she had to be left behind. She was too young to know to be silent and would have put the lives of others hiding in the forest at risk. They never saw the little girl again.