

“Cambodia: The Story of the Broken Wagon”

2009. Bronze Relief Sculpture. 12”w x 15”h.

David Feinberg. Drawing contributions of genocide survivor Bunkhean Chhun and artists Jason Krumrai, Evelyn Lennon, Rodney Massey and Nicole Rodriguez.

Bunkean Chhun lived through what Americans know as the Vietnam War. His story is that of the Cambodian people caught between the Vietcong, the American soldiers, and the Khmer Rouge. In his words, he was caught between an alligator and a tiger. Forced out of the city by the Communists and into the fields, he labored for long hours beside other Cambodians.

“Life is a circle” is the main theme of the piece. The symbol of a circle is very important to Bunkean as he describes that we all are born, get old, and then die. In the middle circle we see a sort of checkered board. This represents the rice fields in which they labored. The rows of rice had to be perfectly square or a right triangle. Along with this are the figures of fish, abundant in the Cambodian rivers and lakes, and a dead body. This gives us a glimpse into what Bunkean would see on the riverbanks and floating down the rivers. Everything is united by water, a river flowing out of the piece and drops adorning every circle.

On the left smaller circle there is an ox cart full of rice. This is the cart that Bunkean drove to get water, and also the many carts he rode to escape. The wheel is broken like the bodies of each worker, so tired that they could hardly stand, and also their broken country. In one of his many stories he tells of a chance he had to stop working in the fields, and instead travel from a lake to the workers, using an ox cart, providing them with water. Though he was not from that area of the country, in a later time, the people he helped saved his life. On the top right circle there is a boat. Again boats were a mode of transportation and used by many of the escapees to travel through and out of the country. This boat in particular Bunkean honors the memory of a woman who saved his life. Though she was on the other side of the river and without a paddle, she used her hands and was able to get to Bunkean just before he drowned. Bunkean to this date is still mystified by how she was able to get to him. As his body struggled to survive he thought she would never get there and that he was going to die. Now Bunkean enjoys a life in the United States with his wife and children, teaching math.