

Good afternoon and welcome, everyone. My name is Marissa Gonzalez Kuchek, and I'm an educator here at LAMAG. Thank you so much for joining us today for LAMAG Play-- This Is My Story with the 2021 visual art fellow Phung Huynh. If you have not already had a chance to do so, I highly recommend you check out the show. We're going to put a link to it in the chat as well as a direct link to Phung's work. This virtual LAMAG Play program is an extension of what we usually do for drop in family programs held under the terrace of the gallery and we've adjusted that typical format for the virtual space and we hope you all enjoy it.

Before we get started, I'd like to acknowledge some people who this program would not be possible without. Thank you, Phung, for developing this workshop and sharing your practice with us today. I also want to thank our partners at the Los Angeles Public Library and the Department on Disability for supporting this program. I actually think this is the first time that we are livestreaming a program at the library so a special hello to all of you that are tuning in from downtown. Can't see you but wanted to make sure we acknowledge you there. And finally, I want to thank all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules and joining us today.

So before we get started, I just want to go through the plan for today and a few housekeeping notes. So if you plan on following along and haven't already done so, please gather your materials at this time which are listed on the screen. The format for today's workshop is a little bit different than our other virtual programs. For the first five to 10 minutes, we're actually going to do some community introductions, and we will pause the recording at that time. Then Phung will share a brief presentation about her work, and after that she will guide us through making our own self-portrait zines.

We're going to have about 20 minutes to work on our zines, and then we're going to return to share our work and any final thoughts for the last 15 minutes. So the program should finish up around 2:30 today.

And like I said, the presentation component is all that's being recorded, so right now in Phung's presentation and demonstration of the zine, the work time, the community introductions, and the final thoughts will not be recorded. And a final housekeeping note, please keep your microphones muted if you are not intending on speaking so we can avoid any feedback and technical issues. If it's inadvertently unmuted, we will take care of muting it for you. However, during the presentation component and while we're working, if questions arise at any time, you should just feel free to unmute yourself and ask the question, or if you're more comfortable, you can also type it into the chat and one of our staff members will ask it for you.

So without further ado, let's get this started. It is my great pleasure to welcome Phung Huynh. Phung Huynh works in drawing, painting, and public art to explore cultural perception and representation. She has had solo exhibitions at Sam Lee Gallery in Los Angeles, Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills, and the Sweeney Art Gallery at the University of California Riverside. She has also completed public art commissions for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. Huynh is currently professor of art at Los Angeles Valley College. So I'm actually going to pause our recording now.

[INAUDIBLE]

For me to share my story and I can't wait to learn about your stories and for you to make art about your stories, that's what I'm really, really excited about. So I'm going to go ahead and start sharing my screen.

Can y'all see my screen? Yes? OK.

It's just a white background. We don't see the title page yet.

OK, let me try again. Can you see my screen now?

Yes, now I can see it.

OK, great. So today our workshop is about our stories. So I'm going to share you-- with you my story first, and then today, I would love to learn about your stories and see how you're going to produce this zine that is made through your artistic expression. You can draw, you can collage, you can do it any way you want. So I just want to share a little bit about myself.

This is my baby picture. It's a very unusual baby picture. I am a Los Angeles-based artist, educator, mother, and activist with a practice drawing, painting, public art, and community engagement.

I am a Southeast Asian refugee. My father survived the genocide in Cambodia, and my mother and I were born in Vietnam where my father sought asylum. And as a family we were war refugees. So what you're looking at is my refugee photo from a Thai refugee camp.

And these are drawings I did of my parents on pink donut boxes. On the left is my father, and on the right is my mother. My father survived the genocide in Cambodia, and my mom and I were both born in Vietnam.

So we resettled in the United States when I was a toddler, and I learned to speak English while watching Mr. Rogers on television. I speak several languages, and my cultural identity is a slippery combination of Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and American but never in equal parts. My work is informed by this complicated negotiation of cultural, ethnic, and racial identity.

I grew up in immigrant LA neighborhoods where locating identity is in constant cultural flux. While my parents started to work in the garment industry in the 1980s, we met my abuelita, who was second generation Mexican-American, and she grew up in East LA. She was a production manager for a company my parents made clothes for, and she stood up for my parents when they were berated for not speaking English. And she convinced my parents to let me pursue art because they were afraid I wouldn't be able to support myself if I became an artist.

This is my mentor Charles Daly, an African-American artist and a Vietnam War veteran. He grew up in Brooklyn and visited his grandmother as a child during the summers, and he would ride the bus to Virginia, where he experienced that intense crossing of the Mason-Dixon line and saw the crippling effects of Jim Crow. He came into adulthood during the civil rights era and was influential in planting the seeds of racial and social justice for me. He is a Vietnam War vet, I am the War Refugee from Vietnam, and our relationship heal the wounds of assimilating in this country for me.

In my work, I explore experiences of resettlement, cultural displacement, assimilation, and misrepresentation. I have been making artwork that probes the perceptions of Asian female bodies that consider the impact of plastic surgery.

Through a series of paintings, drawings, and collages, I observe how cosmetic products and contemporary plastic surgery on Asian women prioritizes eurocentric standards of beauty, obscures racial identity, and amplifies the orientalist eroticism of Asian women.

My current work unpacks my complicated journey in becoming American as I interview Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in my community. And for those of you who don't know, this is Mr. Rogers, and something that he used to always say was won't you be my neighbor. And as a refugee and immigrant to hear that is very important.

I make drawings on pink donut boxes and cross stitch images of personalized California license plates with un-anglicized names. This work impacts the complexities of immigration, displacement, and assimilation.

So these are some drawings of folks from the Cambodian and Vietnamese community that I wanted to record their stories, and close to 90% of California's donut shops are mom and pop businesses run by Cambodian immigrants. The trend that links pink boxes with donuts can be traced back to the Cambodian-American donut eco-system.

So each drawing or cross stitch piece that I make is meant to be a sensitive portrayal of a unique personal story that is highlighted to post-colonial war trauma. And while we were in quarantine, it's hard to experience art in person, so my works were placed on billboards as an outdoor art exhibition which I felt was very impactful.

I also think my work explores this idea of the refugee experience and distinguishing between immigrants and refugees. We know that refugees come here because they have no choice and their lives are threatened, and we see that now happening at the southern border to our Central American, Asian-- Central American siblings. And so I wanted to imbue that and show that in my work.

And in these series of cross stitch license plates, you'll see that I cross stitch names of folks from my community with un-anglicized names. When we become American, some of us change our names, and some of us don't. And I think it's important to keep our own names, and maybe that's something you want to think about in your zine today.

When the pandemic forced us to quarantine and practice social distancing, I had to reconfigure how and why I was making art. Unable to connect with community was extremely difficult. However, as part of the campaign to support artists, I was commissioned by the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art to sew 200 masks from bed sheets and hair ties that were donated to the Midnight Mission, one of the nation's largest non-profit organizations to serve the un-housed. But what also happened during quarantine was a national reckoning yet again with the pervasive and detrimental effects of systemic racism. Black and brown lives were lost to the brutality of police violence.

From the tragic deaths of so many innocent Black and brown individuals was a social awakening that also dawned during the drastic rise in hate crimes that specifically targeted Asian-American Pacific Islander communities that was stoked by racist remarks by the last president who called the COVID-19 virus a Chinese virus.

Last March-- I'm a community college educator as well-- right before quarantine and as we were beginning to understand the effects of COVID-19, my Asian-American and Pacific Islander students expressed concerns about anti-Asian racism. One of my students was called a gook, and in her confusion, she did not even know what it meant.

As a Vietnamese refugee, this derogatory slur reignited traumatic experiences of resettlement deeply entrenched in racism. After my family survived this intense war trauma as refugees and remade our lives in the United States, I remember playing with green GI Joe figurines. Now as an adult, I realize how painfully ironic that experience is.

I was able to revisit my childhood and to include memories of the American war in Vietnam, and this was very central to the body of work that I created as a COLA Fellow for the city of Los Angeles.

In unpacking the legacy of racist monuments in the United States, I constructed a small mixed media sculpture made of a dollhouse and GI Joe toys. The gestures and poses remind me of many Vietnam War monuments and how these toys eerily mimic the war machine and gesture at how we should remember the war. Since I came to the United States as a toddler, I cannot recall memories of my own and have to rely on the memories of my parents and the distorted representations in Hollywood movies such as *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket* that asymmetrically retold the war in US history textbooks.

I also made a few snow globes that were based on the fall of Saigon in 1975. In preparation for the expected evacuation of the American embassy distribute a 15-page booklet with a map that indicated the assembly areas where helicopters would be able to land to pick up people. An insert page read note evacuation signal. Do not disclose to other personnel. When the evacuation is ordered, the code will be read on Armed Forces Radio. The code is the temperature in Saigon is 105 degrees and rising. This will be followed by the playing of "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas."

Those who were not US citizens but expected to participate in the evacuation contacted Americans they knew and asked them to sing the tune because they fear they might not recognize it. So in the snow globe is a picture of my mother at a refugee camp in Thailand. When we left, a lot of us just left with the clothes on our back, and if we were lucky enough, we might have an extra set or two. And we spent eight months in the Thai refugee camp.

And as I was growing out of my clothes, my mom took hers apart to re sew clothes for myself, and that's what you're looking at in the snow globe.

This is a snow globe from December 1978 when my family first arrived in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and we saw snow for the first time in our lives. Southeast Asia is a very tropical, hot climate, and so we did not even know what this was. And my parents were really scared of it. So in this snow globe, you'll see my godfather who sponsored us to come to the United States teaching our family how to build a snowman.

And this is my older brother's first Christmas, and I'm sure with the language barrier, he's very confused what he was supposed to do to sit on the lap of this red-faced old man with a white beard. And so this photo has a lot of memories for me and for him.

Currently, I am chair of the public art commission for the city of South Pasadena, and I'm on the leadership team of the anti-racism committee of South Pasadena. The role of artists is deeply connected to the role of cultural builder who serves the community. Intentional engagement and making art through a social justice lens have always been central to my practice in addition to my commitment to immigrant communities, women's issues, and BIPOC solidarity.

So that's my story, and I just wanted to share that with you and thank you for that opportunity. But today I want to use the work that I do so that you can tell your story. And the project that we're going to do is a zine project, and at the community college that I teach at, a lot of my students are immigrants. And we talk about their journeys, and we make these zines so at the end of the semester we photocopy them and exchange them so everybody leaves a class knowing the stories of each other.

So these are just examples-- you've seen this already-- of zines from my students, and they're of all ages, all ethnic backgrounds, all different pronouns. And it's really for me. I feel so privileged to learn about their stories.

For example, this zine at the top is of a student who left Armenia at 17 because in Armenia once you reach the age of 18, all men have to join the military. And he didn't, and he escaped through Mexico. He left to Mexico and crossed the border to get to the United States.

Another student came from Laos. I have another student from Mexico. So I have students from all over the place, and they use this workshop-- I mean this assignment in this workshop that we're going to do today to tell their stories.

So I just want to share with you some of these, and, again, all of you have different artistic practices. Some of you like to draw, collage, write. There's no wrong or right way. I want you to just do this the way you want to do it. So when you look at these examples, don't feel like, oh, this is the way to do it. This is just one of the few ways.

So you can see in that example this artist chose to use his body to tell his story, what his eyes, his hands as metaphors, and his name, but also look at the style. He loves to draw in ink, so he appropriates graphic novel and comic book styles. So maybe that's something you want to think about in terms of what style you want to use in your zine, and, again, there's no wrong or right way.

Here's another one. This is by the student who left Armenia and went to Mexico and crossed the border to come to the United States. And this is called *The Creation of Me*, and his name is Ash, which is short for Ashot.

So you can see with Ashot, his words are really powerful and how he merges image and text. So maybe that's something you want to think about. And do you notice how this-- even though this is a cover, when we open up to the back and front cover, it forms one image as well. So maybe that's something you want to think about for your zine.

This one I love. It's by my student who is originally from Mexico and she's always wanted to do art, but, again, a child of immigrants, her parents didn't want her to do art. But I'm very proud of her sticking to what she wants to do, and she actually graduated from [INAUDIBLE] with a major in studio art and she did this beautiful, beautiful color zine of her story.

So with that student, I love how thoughtful she was with using color and black and white. So you'll notice that the cover is-- I mean the cover is in color, but when you open the story, it's in black and white, referencing memory and dreams. How many of you dream in color and black and white, or when you remember something, is it in color or black and white? So she's really thoughtful in her use of color. And then as you notice in this image when you open up the zine on the back, it forms a poster, a large image.

So this-- I want this to be very accessible and not expensive. You don't have to go to art store. So the zine is going to use-- we're just going to use 8 and 1/2 by 11 piece of paper, and it's going to be divided into eight panels. You're going to fold it up and divide it into eight panels, and you're going to cut the center. And I'll show you later in a video how to fold it up into a little booklet or a little zine.

So basically, here's a little graphic of what that looks like. You'll have a little sheet of 8 and 1/2 by 11 paper. You're going to fold it in half and then in half again and press until you get eight sections in the paper. And, again, I'm going to show you a video how to do that. And you're going to prop the middle up and cut the center and collapse it and fold it so it creates a little book.

And, again, the reason why I like the 8 and 1/2 by 11 paper is that it's a standard size. You can photocopy it, you can print it, and you can distribute it. It's so grassroots, and I love that part about it.

So let me show you a video of how to take your paper and fold it, and I can always replay this later if you forget. And if you want to start now with the video, feel free to take your paper and start that. So you're going to take the 8 and 1/2 by 11 piece of paper, and you're going to fold it in half hot dog style or lengthwise.

And make sure the creases are nice and crisp. You're going to open it up, and you're going to fold it in half again hamburger style.

And then you're going to open it up, and you see there's four now. You're going to shake one hand and fold it to the center crease. And you're going to do the same on the other end, fold it to the center crease so that we have eight. And I'm just going to pause here for a second because I know some of you are doing that. Do we have any questions so far? OK, great.

And again if you need me to replay this I can. So basically we want to fold our paper so that there's eight panels, four at the top, four at the bottom. And then you're going to lift the front crease up standing.

Like so. And then you're going to take scissors and just cut right in the middle.

And then you're going to open it up and fold the panel back and collapse it so that the hole is in the center and all the-- you push all the pages in the middle of the hole. The hole's at the top, and it should collapse into a book. So for those of you following along, I hope you got that, and if not, I can always replay the video. Any questions so far?

What a good class!

And, again, if you ever need me to replay it, we can, and as Melissa-- Marissa mentioned, we recorded it so you can always look back at that.

So at this point, why don't we take just a quick five-minute break so you can grab a food item or an ingredient that tells us about who you are. Sounds good. So let's come back in five minutes and go ahead and grab that [INAUDIBLE].

Could you repeat-- could you--

I'm sorry, go ahead. What's the question?

You said something?

I'm sorry. What was the question?

If you could repeat--

You want me to repeat the video?

Your speech [ECHOING]

Oh, the presentation? The presentation was recorded, so Marissa can share that afterwards.

So if it's OK right now, why don't we just go ahead and grab a food item and come back in five minutes.

That was it.

Thank you.

Great. I hope everybody got their food item or ingredient. And before we move forward, does anybody have any questions or comments or feedback or anything they want to share so far?

OK, great. I know you're like why are you asking me to go grab a food item. Because things we love to eat and things we cook with tells us a lot about who we are. So before I ask, any volunteers to share? I will share with you some of the food items that I picked. So I'm going to go ahead and share my screen with you.

Can everybody see my screen?

Yeah, we can see it.

Or ingredient, OK.

Ingredient or food. So let me show you some things that I picked.

So I mentioned that I was born in Vietnam, and for us, fish sauce or nuoc mam is very important. We put in everything, and we love it in everything. And so when I asked you to pick an item, just think about-- think of its flavor, how does it make you feel when you use it or eat it.

But also when you look at the item, look at the colors. Are these some things you may want to incorporate in your zine? So for me, nuoc mam, of course, the language. I love looking at Vietnamese text and the accents, and you'll see here the colors, the orange, the yellow. There's the outline of Vietnam and the fish.

Oh, didn't notice that.

Yeah, so you'll see fish. So that's something to look at in your food item. Are their shapes and colors and textures that you want to borrow for your zine? And what I love about this is how pan-Asian fish sauce is, so not only do you see Vietnamese, you see Chinese, you see Korean, you see Thai, you see Khmer. So I really love how inventive visual language can be with culture.

Yes.

And oyster sauce, who doesn't love oyster sauce, right? So oyster sauce is an ingredient that we use a lot in my household and I love so much and, again, since we're making aren't paying attention to colors and shapes and decals and images. I love-- this is Lee Kum oyster sauce that we use a lot in our house, and I love this little scene of a mother in a cheongsam with giant oysters and her little boy also in the boat. I love these little things.

Or the mom here. How many of us look like this when we're eating dinner? So-- and the flowers surrounding it.

Beautiful.

Yeah. And we live in a very hectic life. We're working, we're doing this, so sometimes instant food is something that you might have in your household because you don't-- just don't have time to make it from scratch. So like ramen or pho, things that used to take two or three days is now commercialized and repackaged. So this is Vietnamese shrimp pho.

And my mom got this for me because she knows I work so much. I'm like mom is that not, but that's fine. This is beef noodle soup, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

And, again, when you're looking at these, just think why do I eat these things and how does it make me feel and how do I identify with it culturally but also like the colors. And look at-- if you look on this red packaging, you'll see carrots, you'll see onions, and you'll see a little cow, a cute little cow. I don't know. You know what I mean? So these are some fun things you might want to use in your zine.

Spam, being an immigrant and assimilating, there's a lot of unique foods in American culture from all these different cultures. Spam is short for spiced ham, and I think it's very cheap meat that was processed during World War II that came out of Britain. And then it was sent to during wartime soldiers. This is their meat.

But then for me being a Vietnamese refugee and those from Korea during the Korean War, Spam came to Asia from these wars being fought, and now you have things like Spam masubi or Spam and eggs and rice. So I love looking at food from that cultural perspective. But also as an artist, that yellow text with the blue background and how these visual languages are used.

So before I move on, does anybody want to share their food item and show us their--

I do.

Yes, Rebecca.

Oh, my gosh I've been-- hopefully, I've been. Can you guys hear me?

Yeah.

I think I've been unmuted the whole time. I'm sorry.

It's OK.

So I thought it was an item not food item, so I brought a book but forget about that.

No, no, share it anyway.

I have jicama here, and I don't think a lot of people know what it is. It's tastes like a potato.