

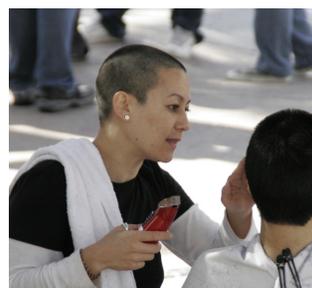
Genevieve Erin O'Brien

artist statement

I use performance, video and installation to explore notions of “home” and “homeland”. As a mixed race child of Vietnamese immigrant mother and an Irish-American father, who was a career diplomat, my sense of home has always been fluid and changing. I was conceived in Vietnam and born in the U.S. In a sense, I was exiled before I was born and lived most of my life as an expatriate. My art practice is about exploring these disjointed identities that co-exist in my body and this ever-present search for home. More than the emotional and physical sense of home, I am interested in the ways that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and spirituality shape this construct. Through my work, I investigate issues such as war and memory, transnational identity and belonging, and multiple identities and its attendant baggage.

Through social practice and relational aesthetics my performances explore notions of home, memory, “synaesthesia”, community, and authenticity. I am grappling with ideas of food justice and labor. Sometimes, it is about food that reminds me of a place I once called home, a memory or feeling of a place. Sometimes, it is just about a moment. Sometimes, it is about a confluence of temporal and spatial realms in a particular space. It is always about food. As a bit of a nomad, food has always been anchor to a place that for me has never really existed – a place called home. My work is an exploration of the performance of, appropriation and misappropriation of identity and culture through food. I am curious how memory, nostalgia and self become mediated and negotiated through a relationship to food and culture. I am playing with alternative forms of narrative storytelling and sculpture, using food as a medium. Using food, humor, narrative and conceptual structures, I develop work that is invested in collective engagement, to further social justice and cultural understanding.

Whether it is a large scale edible Gingerbread nuclear reactor, an intimate themed dinner, hors d'oeuvres and drinks, hotpot or sausage homages my work engages the viewer in multiple senses, taste, sight, smell, as well as through a narrative story and a conversation. I call this a “synaesthetic” experience, a term I designed to embrace all aspects of what I have developed in my approach to my performances. It includes the visual presentation of the food, the stories and narratives that shape the menus, the history and socio-political constructs that are explored in the crafting of the food, and the experience of tasting of the food itself. My installation work utilizes similar gastronomic based visual aesthetic and uses food to telegraph a story about the invisibility of labor in the food industry or the universal search for love.

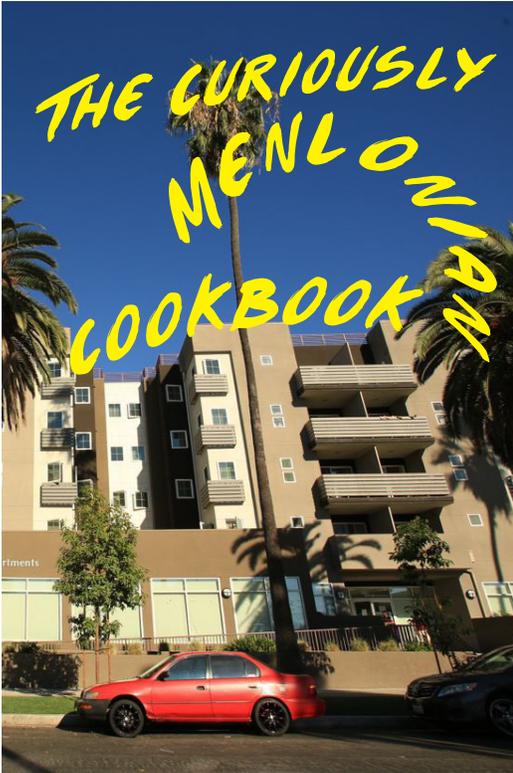


The Snake Will Eat Itself in Saigon

In a global capitalist economy, branding is everything. For luxury brands the scarcity of the product creates the inflated value. Luxury is reserved for those who can afford it. This conceptual performance documents my journey over the course of three days through the 12 districts of Ho Chi Minh City, capturing the manifestation of this collapse of capitalism in communist Vietnam. I chose to travel through the city on the back of a motorbike, which represents modernity and forward movement for Vietnam. In a mixed economy, where sartorial choice is limited, brand names are seen for their value and therefore replicated so as to capitalize on these brand names and luxury ideals. They are ripped off and pasted on every shirt. In turn, this copying, replication, and knock-off industry then dilutes the value of the luxury brands. Seeing these knock-offs, many of which are labeled as the “genuine article” represented in the city landscape illustrates the concept of the capitalism collapsing on itself. I chose to take pictures only from the back to highlight what is “behind” the reality of the global capital luxury fashion industry, many of the goods produced in the global south and Southeast Asia. Many of these people pictured are the workers in the Nike and Gap factories, producing garments for the middle-income consumers, unable to afford the expensive luxury brands themselves. These images of Saigon today illustrate the lowest end of the sartorial stratification through the failed replication of luxury brand names. Other images in this series represent a semiotic language where the humor and irony are only legible to a Western gaze, one replete with the complex context of US and Vietnamese socio-political relationships over time.



The Curiously Menlonian Cookbook



is an artistic collaboration between The Music Center and Koreatown Youth and Community Center's Menlo Family Apartments in September 2014. This book is a collection of recipes provided by workshop participants. Working with artists Erin O' Brien and Los Hopper, participants openly shared these recipes, along with their personal stories and memories of family, traditions and reminders of the places we consider home. We share this book as a representation of our collective artistic exploration of identity, culture, food and stories and what binds and nourishes us as a community. This curious collection of recipes represents an eclectic mix of flavors, a standing tribute to all the culturally diverse homes that came before the Menlo community was brought together and all the people that gave shape to our food histories. This book is the end product of three workshops in which we shared unfamiliar flavors, recipes and even personal stories with friends and former strangers. In the process of learning more about our food histories we were able to learn more about each other.

THE CURIOUSLY MENLONIAN

COOK BOOK



PREPARATION

*One trick when you want to cut your meat very thin is to put it in the freezer for a few hours (not frozen completely) then when you take it out it will be firm and you can slice it super thin with a very sharp knife or on a mandolin.

Mix all of the ingredients (except the chopped green onions and the sesame seeds) together with and the beef and place it in the refrigerator for at least 30 min. to 1 hour. Then cook the meat on a pan or a grill and transfer to a plate (or cast iron plate) to serve. Sprinkle the green onions and toasted sesame seeds at this time.

Cactus (Side Dish)

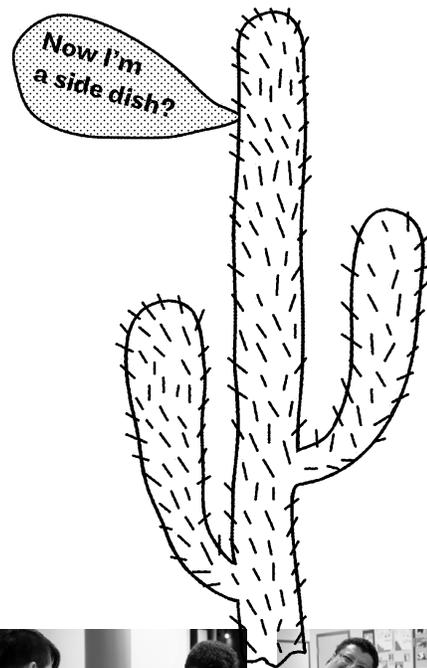
(Courtesy of Jorge Manuel Aragón)

INGREDIENTS

- 1½ lbs. of cactus
- 1 Clove of garlic
- ½ Onion red or white (finely chopped)
- 3 Tsp. of olive oil
- 3-4 Diced Peppers
- 1 Pinch of Salt

PREPARATION

Sauté the olive oil, onion, garlic peppers and salt for 5 minutes then add the Cactus and sauté for 15 to 20 minutes more on medium heat. A great side to accompany your Carne Asada.



Spice Homage



Through the lens of flavors and spices, a multi-sensory installation and interactive workshop facilitated by the artist offers participants a way to craft personal narratives and stories that bring friends and strangers to the table. Participants in this performance installation develop, through a series of exercises, a personalized spice mix to honor, or pay homage to a person or a place of importance in their life.



Meat My Friends



This recent performance series explores alternative forms of narrative storytelling. The first installment of the series of performances is a variety of sausages inspired by the stories of my father and my friends' lives. One sausage "Pyongyang Ain't No Picnic" details my father's journey to oversee the dismantling of North Korea's Nuclear Reactor and his failed attempts to buy a local rotisserie chicken. The sausage is made with ground chicken, garlic, garlic chives, Korean gojujang chilies, soju and oven crisped chicken skin. A second sausage entitled "the 8 1/2 Year Tour" explores his extensive time served in Vietnam as a civilian. The sausage is a country style pork grind with caramlized shallots and lemongrass, nuoc mam (fish sauce) and Guinness beer. Details on how you can "Meat My Friends" at www.eatmeatmyfriends.com



This current project, Mixed Spices, is an attempt to gastronomically represent the culture of mixed race people. The artist endeavors to translate the ethnic and cultural heritages of mixed race people into unique flavor and spice combinations. While some are general mixes - "Mexirean" a combination of Mexican and Korean spices or "Blackinese" - Black and Chinese flavors, one can commission their own personalized mix, for example the Perski - Persian and Polish or "Chimacan" - Chinese and Jamaican.

Mixed Spices



Installed and performed on Loving Day - a holiday to commemorate the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws based on the supreme court case of Loving Vs. Virginia. a dialogue about Hapa, mixed race identity, and how culture, ethnicity, and race engage our sense of self, home, nostalgia, and community through food.

Why hotpot? It's a fun, communal way to share food and stories. You can mix and match the ingredients to make your perfect bowl of soup. Wouldn't it be easier if life was like that? The hotpots have two sides just like Hapas—try Korean spicy kimchi chigae broth on one side with light, chicken kaffir broth on the other side or perhaps you prefer a spicy lemongrass pork broth on one side with a ginger soy broth on the other side.

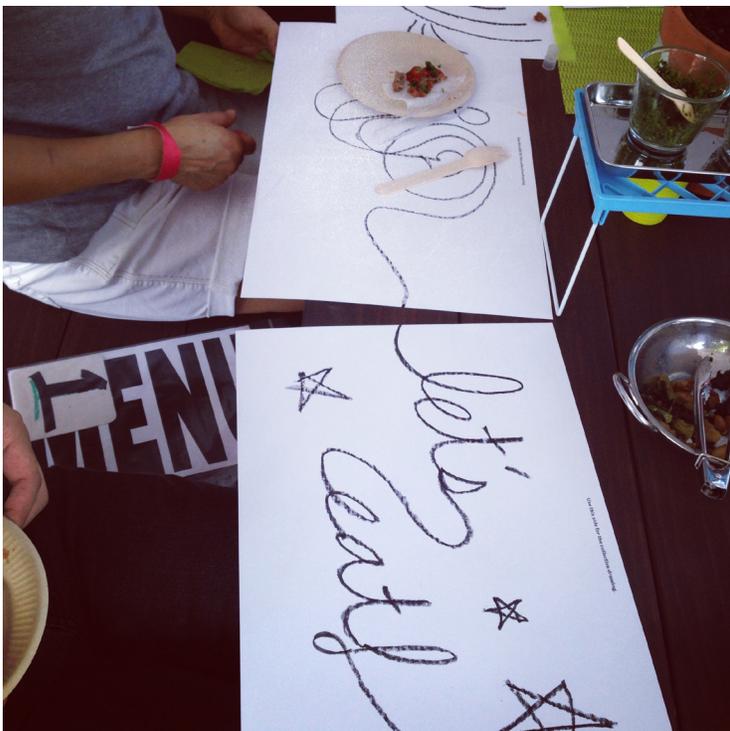
Bring a Hapa recipe to share, with stories of your favorite cultural mash-ups. Do you love peanut butter and pork floss sandwiches on white bread? What about fried chicken banh mi? How do your diverse ethnic cultures meet up and make out in the kitchen? These stories and recipes will be collected to create a Hapa dinner menu

Hapa Hotpot



Let's Talk About Food

As a commissioned artist for the Music Center, Los Angeles, this project was highlighted as part of the Pop-Ups @MusiccenterLA. "Let's Talk About Food" brings together a mix of flavors representative of the LA food ecology. Come share our evocative selection of LA sampler bites with local strangers! Draw onto your placemats and take part in a conversation about the everyday food experiences binding our city together. Participants craft their own amuse bouche that represents what Los Angeles taste like, engage in an exquisite corpse drawing and taste the artist's sample bites.





Genevieve Erin O'Brien & Grace Umali
Family Potluck

2014

Wool Felt, plates, wood.

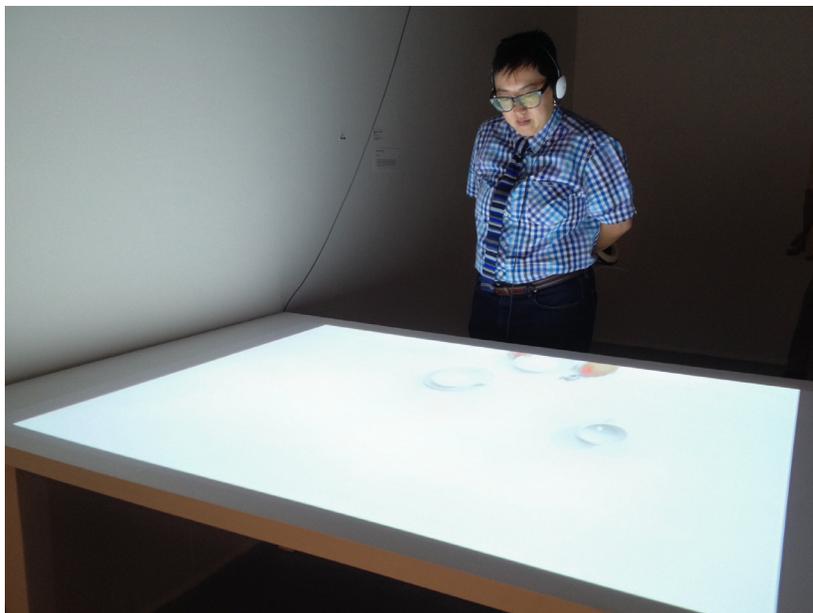
Potlucks are a vital way that family, chosen family, and community come together. We wanted to capture and preserve that moment of arriving at the table to take in the collective feast, surrounded by people, conversation, and connection. The medium of felt illustrates the idea of "food that is felt" - a play on words that brings attention to the material and its tactile quality while alluding to the feelings that a shared meal evokes.





Genevieve Erin O'Brien & Aaron Henderson
Place Setting
2014
Mixed media installation

The visual dance and choreography of plates, silverware and glassware portrays the ebb and flow of romantic relationships and one of the primary languages of communication – food. The ritual of setting the table and clearing the table offers the space for us to contemplate the cycle of love and relationships: seeking, finding and losing love. Reset.





FOR THE LOVE OF UNICORNS

Kylan, a young, mixed-race girl, loves unicorns. Kylan goes to the carnival, which claims to have a real live unicorn. Kylan is enraptured by the spectacle of the carnival, yet, when the Ringmaster fails to produce the the star of the show, a “real live unicorn” through the power of community, Kylan transforms her disappointment into hope and optimism. For The Love of Unicorns foregrounds community and utopia - a utopia for queer, mixed race, Asian American, people of color, workers, and non-gender non-conforming people. Kylan represents the hope that when we speak out and organize, one day we can live in a utopian world where even though everyone’s unicorn may look different, they can all dance together under a glittery rainbow.

geobomb productions & Panda Boy Productions

Dir: Genevieve Erin O’Brien

Producer: Alice Y. Hom

Digital Film 5 Minutes

Narrative/Live Action/Animation/Short

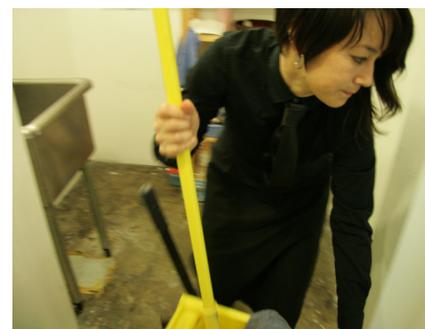
The Armed With a Camera Fellowship for Emerging Media Artists is sponsored by grants from
The James Irvine Foundation

Los Angeles County Arts Commission

A Visual Communications Production © 2014

As a complement to my performance series "GEO Home", I have embarked on a new series entitled "GEO Work". These performances investigate and explore the unseen overlooked labor of the service industry, as well as the viewer's relationship to labor. We live in a time of economic crisis. Minimum wage is the lowest hourly, daily or monthly remuneration that employers may legally pay to workers. 4.4 million people in the US work at or below the federal minimum wage rate of \$7.25/ hour the largest majority of these people work in the service industry. The federal poverty line is \$10, 830 for a single person and \$22,050 for a family of 4. The average person working a minimum wage job, often with no health care, no sick days, and no accrued vacation will earn \$15, 080 before taxes. The tasks associated with service industry are backbreaking, laborious, and repetitive.

This series of performances, presented in 8-10 hour shifts with 15-minute breaks every 4 hours (the legal requirement) engage the audience with the invisibility of labor and the service industry. I leave footprints that trace the steps of my labor through the gallery or performance space. In a separate durational performance, I remove the traces of my footsteps by hand washing the performance space. In each performance I perform tasks that I have done working in the service industry, including, but not limited to, cleaning, polishing silverware, setting tables, cooking, serving, bartending, bussing, dishwashing, emptying trash, lifting heavy equipment, setting up and breaking down formal and informal events. Where possible, documentation of this performance is done with closed circuit security cameras.



GEO Work

GEO Home

a synaesthetic performance series



In this synaesthetic performance series, I cook a meal that reminds me of “home,” which is prepared at the host’s house. Through this performance series, I explore notions of home, memory, synaesthesia, community, and authenticity. Having lived in more than 10 countries, home can be fleeting. Sometimes, it is about food that reminds me of a place I called home, or even a memory or feeling of a place. Sometimes, it is just about a moment. Sometimes, it is about a confluence of temporal and spatial realms in a particular space. It is always about food. As a bit of a nomad, food has always been anchor to a place that for me has never really existed – a place called home.

I create a performance of home by preparing and sharing a meal with you. Much in the way that home has never existed in one space, place and time for me, I Skype a guest into each performance to share the experience from afar. Skype guests from Hanoi to Kabul have shared the experience however disjointed and patchy over the internet in hopes of creating new community and breaking bread together in a cyber format. You never know what will be on the menu. Together, we will enjoy a meal, just like family – just like “home.”

For me, part of the performance is the inevitable failure as I seek to replicate or create dishes with authenticity. For example, I spent days going from market to market in Ho Chi Minh city in search of a turnip to make Syrian Meklah pickles. At each stall, as I displayed a picture of a turnip to the vendor, the response was the same, “it looks like a daikon. I don’t have that (pointing to picture) but i do have daikon.” In the end, I had to resort to daikon, as my turnip quest was unsuccessful.

GEO Home Dinners have been hosted in homes in Vietnam and Cambodia. Currently the GEO Home dinners are being presented as pop-up restaurants in Los Angeles. Each performance is documented with digital stills and video and where possible the dinners are broadcast live on the internet using UStream.



GEO home sample menus



3rd and Kenmore Menu

Cucumber Salad
Mizuna Bacon Salad
with crispy black rice noodles and lime dressing
Japchae Noodle Salad

Kimchi Tacos
with garlic chive soffrito and gochujang sauce

Kochu Mushroom
Chipotle Crispy Fish
Orange and Ginger Carnitas

Pico de Gallo
Guacamole
Mango Guacamole

homemade corn tortillas

flan

home

a synaesthetic performance series by
Genevieve Erin O'Brien

www.erin-obrien.com



Cao Thắng and Broadway Menu

Jicama and Mint Salad
Pomelo, Prawn, Bacon Mizuna Salad
with crispy rice and nước mắm and lime dressing

Pozole Huế ~
spicy chili lemongrass broth, tender slow-cooked pork
shoulder and hominy topped with banana flower and rau

Thit Kho - caramelized pork belly
Nam Kho - caramelized king mushrooms

served on handmade corn huaraches
topped with cumin black beans, napa cabbage,
queso fresco, cotija cheese and crispy shallots

Fresh Salsas -
Pico de Gallo
Mango Guacamole
Garlic Chive Sofrito
Tương ớt Atípico (roasted garlic chili sauce)

Do Chua Chicana -
pickled Jalapeños, carrots, radish, daikon
Dua Gia - pickled bean sprouts, chives and carrots

chuối chiên cali
fried plantains with sticky rice crisps

served with housemade ice cream
Shimmy Shimmy Coco Snap (vegan)
Coconut and Mung Bean (vegan)
Cà Phê Sữa Mèxicali

entire menu is gluten free

home

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Al Mahdi Bin Baraka Street Menu

Syrian Salad

Coleslaw
with Sesame Ginger Dressing

Corn on the Cob
with lime butter

Spicy Saigon Sloppy Joe's
made with Tuong Ot & Aleppo Spice

served with Pickled Daikon and Carrots
Homemade Mekhela Pickles
Homemade Sweet Dill Pickles

Choice of Bun, Banh Mi or Pita

Pineapple Upside-down Cake

home

a synaesthetic performance series by
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Mam Tom Kiss



In the gallery, I eat a Vietnamese meal prepared with *mắm tôm*, a fermented shrimp paste. I then offer a “gift from the artist” to the audience. Each of the willing audience members receives a kiss from me. Having just eaten the *mắm tôm*, this intimate interaction is accompanied by a pungent odor. Responses vary however, for most westerners, the smell is repulsive and repugnant whereas for most Vietnamese the smell is familiar and nostalgic. This work was created specifically for the IN:ACT International Performance Symposium in Hanoi, Vietnam.





The work is based on my research during my Fulbright Fellowship. I am investigating the nuances of the word “nước.” In Vietnamese, the word “nước” means, water, country, nation, and homeland. To ask “nước nào?” is to ask, “Where is your country?” Where is your home? This on-going project investigates the relationship between Vietnamese communities and water. By exploring the subtleties of the word “nước” in traditional arts, myths and legends, I am creating a series of videos, installations and performances that explore notions of water and home in the Vietnamese Diaspora. Specifically, I have been working with nước mắm (fish sauce) creating a mixed media installation. The work involves drying nước mắm to make salt. The idea is that when nước mắm is explained to westerners it is compared to salt “it is in every dish and on every table.” This led me to think about the Vietnamese Diaspora, you can take the Vietnamese out of Vietnam but you can never really take the nước mắm out of the Vietnamese. Much in the same way you can make salt from nước mắm but you can never really make the white western salt we are familiar with. The salt will always retain the flavor and essence of nước mắm. The nước mắm will be evaporated in the gallery space and accompanied by text written with nước mắm on rice paper, which is rendered visible only by the slow application of heat. The installation also contains several video projections. The first video projection is a 20-minute loop of workers building a boat and the second video is 20-minute of loop an empty guard tower.



nước

Nuclear Family

I want to offer a way for people engage in the nuclear peace movement that is tangible, edible and fun. The installation, titled 'Nuclear Family,' is a natural blend of my mother's occupation as a pastry chef and my father's work overseeing the dismantling of Democratic Republic of North Korea's nuclear reactor and my own performance and installation art.



Digital stills Nuclear Family two-channel video

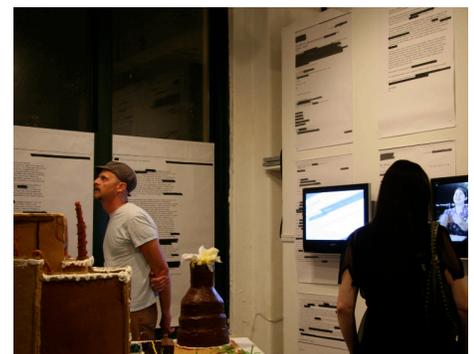


Images of Nuclear Reactor at Yongbyong, North Korea

I built a scale replica of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear reactor site at Yongbyon entirely out of gingerbread, using my mother's gingerbread recipe.

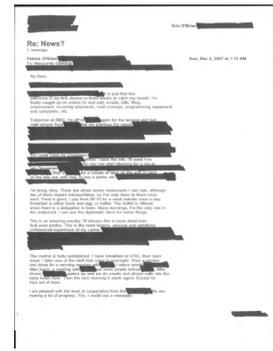


Nuclear Family
2008
Installation
2-channel video
Dimensions vary





The gingerbread reactor is surrounded by large scale redacted texts of emails and instant message communication between my father in Pyongyang, North Korea, my mother in Ho Chi Minh City, my sister in Seattle and myself in Chicago.



There is a two-channel video that accompanies the work. In order to obtain the footage for the video, I had to send a video camera to my sister, who hand carried the camera to Vietnam and then my mother snuck the camera into North Korea. The video centers on my family in their respective "homes" and everyday lives. The video work explores the idea of family legacies and the parallel family legacies of the Bushes in the US and the Kim's in North Korea in the current escalation towards nuclear entrenchment.



I hosted a press conference/performance where the public was invited to come dismantle the gingerbread nuclear reactor for peace.



Nuclear Family



Việt Nam, Ngủ Trưa Nhé.

30 Tháng 4 detail

Việt Nam, Ngủ Trưa Nhé.
2009

Dimensions:
2.5 m x 10 cm
Each set (street) con-
tains 30 images



Điện Biên Phủ detail



Hai Bà Trưng detail

In this conceptual photographic performance series, I am attempting to capture the stillness of sleep amidst the hustle and bustle of life in Vietnam. I am interested in the collapse between the private and public space through my documentation of people sleeping in public places in Vietnam. By capturing the performance of the everyday, I am forced to contend with my own positionality as an American, a Westerner, a foreigner, even though I am part Vietnamese, as I engage with the social landscape of Vietnam. Susan Sontag contends that, "photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed." In this performance series, I must repeatedly negotiate my own power and position the enables me to "take" these pictures, the subjects unaware and "powerless." In turn, I have to navigate my own relationship to Vietnam as an outsider.

I am reminded that Vietnam, in the imagination of the American public and other westerners, exists merely as a war. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag explores the role of memory in reading an image. She states, "ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feeling." With respect to collective memory, the foreign gaze must reconcile the memory of war invoked through repeated images of still, lifeless Vietnamese people – resembling the dead, in the landscape of everyday contemporary Vietnam.

Each set of prints in the series is named after a street found in every city of Vietnam but also invokes the historical relationship to colonization and struggle for Vietnamese independence.

Vietnamese Suitcase

A Vietnamese suitcase is a generally speaking a cardboard box. The "suitcase" serves a particularly temporary purpose, unlike the somewhat indestructible western version of the suitcase, made for on-going travel. I position myself at locations around various cities; the sites in each city include the federal building, the Vietnamese neighborhood and a Vietnam Memorial. I travel between these sites by public transit over the course of one day.



Vietnamese Suitcase
2007-2010
Multi-city Durational Performance
Duration: varies



People are asked to share their thoughts, feelings, and memories of Vietnam. I chose not to talk, instead using a flyer and gestures to communicate. I ask people to share these thoughts, feelings and memories by writing them on Joss paper and placing the Joss paper in the "suitcase". I carry these sentiments with me throughout the city.

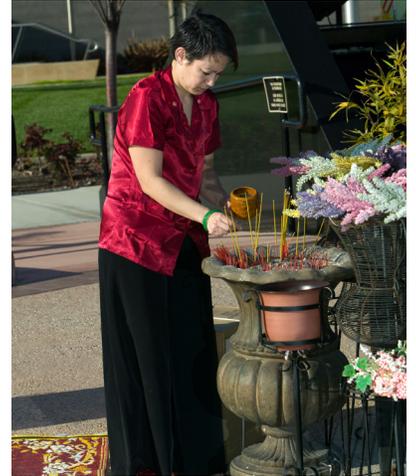
The Vietnam People
did nothing to me
They didnt call mi ni gi
They didnt hang my
People But The U.S.
did.

Home
family

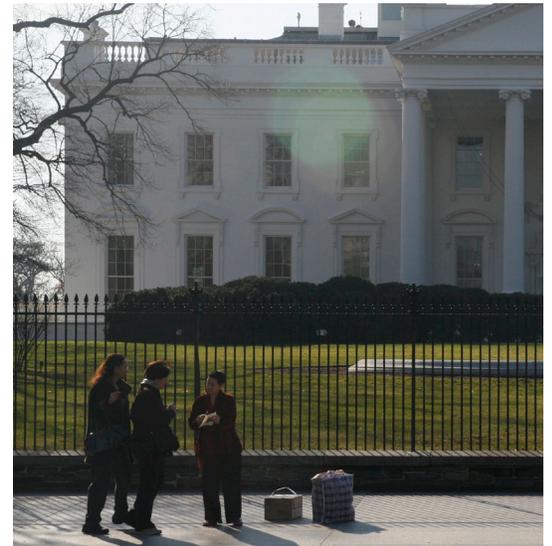
I think it was
wrong of America
to Kill the Vietnam
People.
Ronald Johnson



At each Vietnam Memorial, I perform a mourning ritual where I burn incense to honor the Vietnamese who were killed in the war.



The durational performance was performed in three cities - Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington DC.



Vietnamese Suitcase





An installation was created with the Joss paper and the documentation of the durational performance.



After visiting all three cities, I returned the Joss Paper and suitcases to Vietnam. In Hanoi, Vietnam, I created a final ritual performance. Using the text from the Joss Paper and a translator I read the sentiments in English and Vietnamese then I burned the Joss papers.



In addition to burning the joss papers, I burned 3 million US dollars in Joss paper, at least \$100 for every person killed in the war, US or Vietnamese, military or civilian. I then repatriated the ashes of the joss papers and scattered them during the festival of Vu Lan, the Day of Wandering Souls, a lunar holiday. The performance series follows the migrations and forced immigration of Vietnamese Diaspora in the reverse.

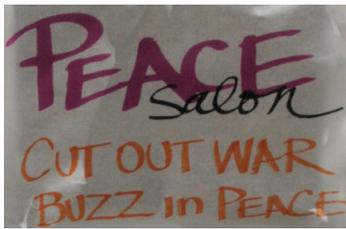
Vietnamese Suitcase

Peace Salon

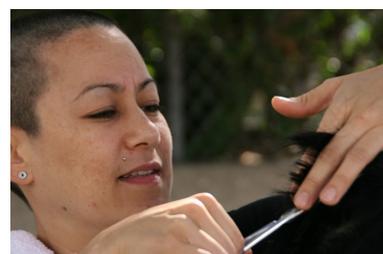


The Peace Salon also serves as a space for critical analysis, thought and dialogue. This space is telegraphed beyond the moment of having one's head shaved and into the everyday interaction with the public.

This bold statement is a reminder that everyday when we look in the mirror that we cannot afford to be complacent, that we are part of a larger system. Inspired by the buddhist monks who shave their heads to emulate birth, the personal transformation that participants will experience is a testament to our pledge for peace that we embrace in all aspects of our life - to release ourselves from attachment. It is this very attachment that drives this war, attachment to convenience, to our oil-dependent cars, to our lattes, and to our daily life.



The visual signifier is also meant to be a reminder to the American public that we are a country engaged in war, as well as a physical marker to extend our solidarity with the soldiers serving in Iraq and our determination to bring them home.



Materials from the performance were used to create an installation in Chicago's G2 Gallery



At the Free Speech Corner, adjacent to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, on Veteran's Day 2007, I publically shaved my head as a response to the war in Iraq and other forms of oppression. In order to extend this gesture to the public, I offer to shave off the hair of those willing to make a commitment to peace.



The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago curated the Peace Salon as part of the 12x12 emerging artist series 2008.



Over 80 heads were shaved, young and old, male, female and transgender, black, white, asian, latino, indigenous, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Christian. There was a space to talk about Peace and our relationship to war over lemongrass popcorn and iced tea.

Peace Salon