

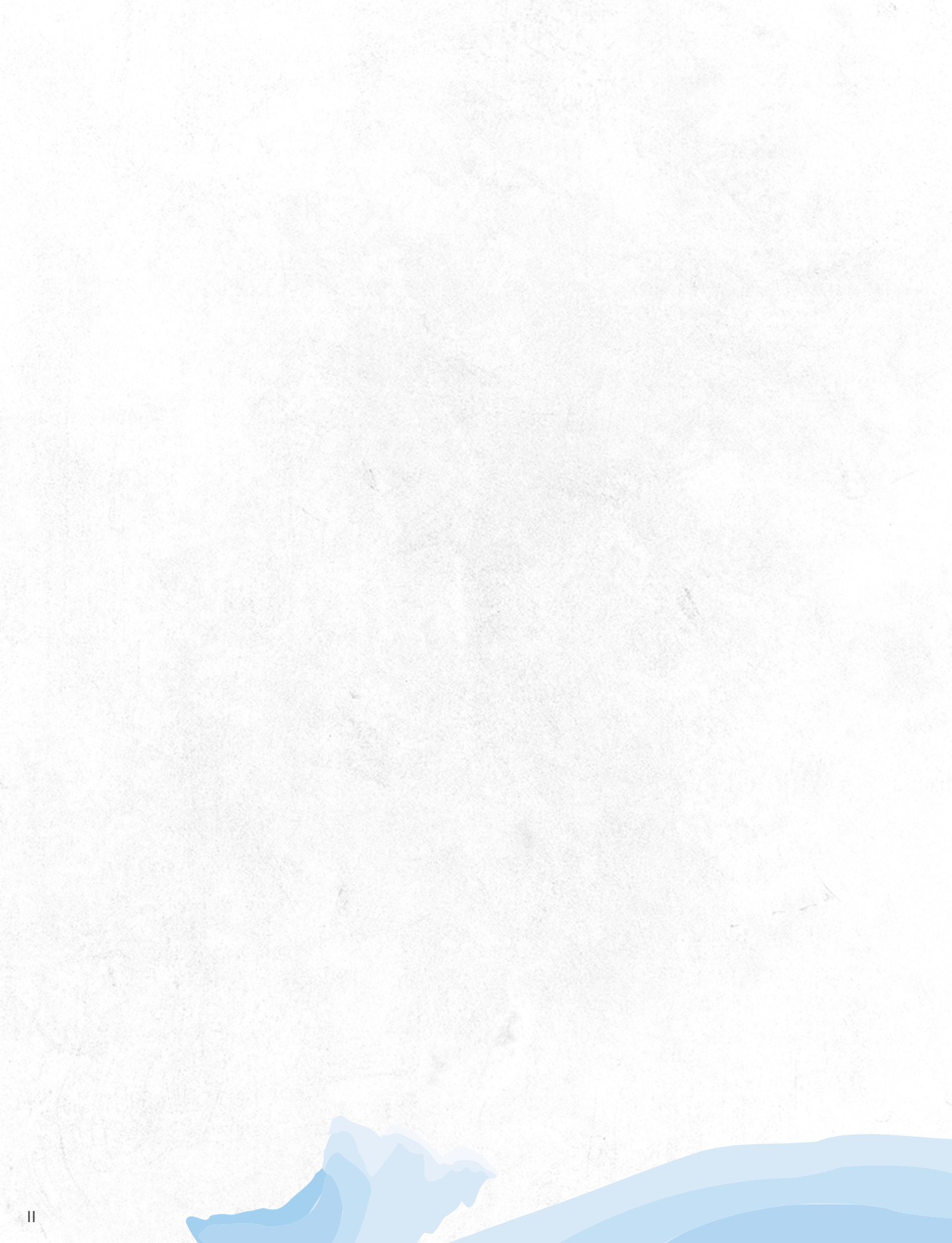
HMONG
MUSEUM

Hmong Museum Presents

Hmong American Experiences during the Pandemic

A collaboration with Hmong Artists, Writers, and Filmmakers

*Designed by Bob Xiong
Edited by Npaus Baim Her*



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Hmong American Experiences during the Pandemic©

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Editor's Note

By Npaus Baim

"The digital zine marks a moment in Hmong American experiences in history—the pandemic. Through the voices and drawings of these 26 artists, future generations will be able to better glean what we went through."

– Mai Nhia Vang, Executive Director of Hmong Museum

My Tais told me when she was a little girl in Laos, she lost her younger sister to an illness. My Tais told me that in Laos, sometimes they had to wash the dishes without soap.

During the first wave of the pandemic, I watched Tais bring groceries home from the store. She'll throw everything in the sink: the Clorox wipes container, shampoo bottle, oranges, broccoli, and so much more. After washing her hands, she'll drizzle her clean hands with dish soap and wash everything to sanitize it from COVID-19 germs.

I can tell. I can tell when Tais uses a generous amount of soap, it's a survival mechanism. Or when she anxiously scrubs off the germs, it reveals that she doesn't want to relive her painful past.

The pandemic has brought up internalized trauma the Hmong community has experienced during the Secret War in Laos. Our elders and parents ran through the jungles in fear, not knowing if tomorrow would come. They were surviving. During the first wave of the pandemic, our elders and parents lived in fear again—not knowing if they contracted COVID-19 or not knowing if the supply shortage was long term. They once again had to think about surviving.

I feel like Tais's way of healing from internalized trauma is being with her family and knowing that we are healthy and happy. I remember before the vaccinations were developed, Tais had my whole family drink some herbal tea which was supposed to boost our immune system and prevent us from catching COVID-19. It made her feel at ease when we drank it because she knew then that we would be safe. It was also her way of showing her love for us. We showed love back by drinking every last drop.

* * *

Tais tells me all the time how "lucky" I am to be in the United States. I definitely acknowledge this privilege, that I have access to opportunities and an unlimited amount of basic necessities that my grandparents did not. However, that doesn't completely mean I am "lucky."

I am a Hmong American woman who does not fully know her own language, history, or culture. I grew up being called white wash and was talked down upon for not knowing these things. I was adamant to learn, but everytime I learned something new, I was told that I didn't know enough. It was never enough. I was told that if I wanted to continue investing in my own community, I needed to know these things.

And for the longest time, I was disappointed in myself.

However, my mentor, Tou Saiko Lee, told me that the younger generation has learned how to connect with their Hmong American identity in their own unique way. I was reminded that I have my own unique way of learning about my own language, history, or culture. As I read through these collections here, I also learned that I am not alone. We all continue to learn more about the Hmong language, history, and culture in our own ways. We can never learn too much.

This collection of creative pieces are so important because it shows how we live in the present and continue to heal everyday from intergenerational trauma. As a community, we continue to cultivate and flourish.

In this digital zine, the artists, writers, and filmmakers poured themselves into these creative pieces. They reveal their journeys of understanding their Hmong American experience and navigating the pandemic. Feel proud of their journey and feel empowered to share more narratives and yours.



Hmask Up

By Savanna Thao

2022

5" x 5"

Markers, Gel pen, & Digital

This piece is called, "Hmask Up" and consists of both traditional and digital art. I first created a colorful, Hmong-patterned background with markers, then I digitally drew a black-and-white overlay of a Hmong woman wearing a Hmong hat and a mask. With this piece, I wanted it to be about how many Hmong New Year events were canceled (or made virtual) as a safety precaution to protect our communities and prevent the spread of Covid-19. Hmong New Year is an annual event that many people often look forward to because it's a time when families and friends can dress up, take photos, eat food, watch entertainment and sports, and more. As this pandemic goes on, I hope we all continue to [H]mask up and take care of ourselves and our communities so that we can once again celebrate and attend Hmong New Year in person.







Tally Marks

By Krystal Kazi

It's always been an issue. It's always made you less than all the other Hmong kids. "I forgot how your generation is," one mother said to you. "You kids just don't want to learn," cried another. You thought to yourself, *Why would we choose this? Why wouldn't we want to speak our own language? Why wouldn't we want our culture to live on?*

You remember trying to fit in with all the Hmong kids at the tiny charter school you attended from second to fifth grade. You remember wanting to curl into a ball and slowly, but surely wither away when they were having a conversation in a language that is your own but hasn't laid its claim on

you. That was the first time you ever marked a tally in the back of your mind, collecting the moments you wished you weren't you. You remember giving up in third grade. You remember being tired of feeling out of place. You made friends with the kids who weren't Hmong because it was easier. Easier to talk to. Easier to laugh with. Easier to fit in.

You remember when the Hmong dance team you were with for five years had finally disbanded. You tried out for another dance school, a bigger one. You remember sitting on the bumpy and rough black mats staring at yourself in the mirror that stretched across the wall thinking, *just go*

talk to them. You can do it. You looked at your big sister who was already becoming a fan favorite and asked yourself, *how does she make everything look so easy?* You remember when she left a year later, and you didn't. You remember that year being the only time dance wasn't a chore but a hobby. Not because she wasn't dancing, that was just a happy coincidence. It was something to look forward to. Something that brought an excitement you hadn't felt in so long. You remember everyone being close and telling each other everything. You remember never feeling out of place. You remember it all now wishing you had soaked up every last bit of it. You know now that you loved them because they loved you. After all, the word "Whitewashed" rarely came out of their mouths and when it did, it was never directed towards you. You remember when it ended, that feeling of fitting in. You were at a competition having the time of your life until you decided to start singing the lyrics to the Hmong song your team was dancing to and having your teammates laugh. All in a lighthearted manner, so you laughed too. You laughed and mocked yourself but when they turned away, you marked an invisible tally in your head where all the times you wished you could disappear were on repeat. You also made a mental note to NEVER sing another Hmong song out loud and definitely not with an audience. You remember taking a year off but at the time, it was "quitting

for good". Then, you came back. You went back unprepared for the fact that it was a completely different team. Same name, same coach, same you, different team. You remember it being quiet. *It was always quiet...* until it wasn't. Oh, how fun it was when it wasn't quiet. You never felt like you fit in but you certainly didn't feel out of place. It was good but you didn't love it as much as you did two years ago. You remember when the final competition was coming up and you thought you couldn't make it because you were going on vacation. You remember how you caused the team so much stress as they tried to adjust the dance to your absence. You also remember that terrible feeling that hit the bottom of your stomach when your mom told you the trip was canceled. You still think about it now. You think about how so many people probably assumed it was all a lie from the start. How they thought you were just lazy, unmotivated, not committed. You remember when one of the dance moms spoke to you in Hmong, even though she knew you wouldn't understand. She asked you if you were going to the competition, even though she knew the answer to that too. You stared at her awkwardly, "I don't understand Hmong," you said, followed by an awkward laugh. She continued to speak Hmong to you. Just for fun, you assumed. You usually wouldn't let this anger you so much but you knew she could speak English and she knew

you couldn't speak Hmong so what was her intent anyway? "You know what she's saying," another parent added. Even now, you still aren't quite sure if he was being genuine or trying to belittle you too. You aren't even sure if *she* was trying to belittle you. He repeated, "You know what she's saying." You stopped forcing laughter out of your mouth and shook your head no. You remember walking away, knowing they thought you were rude but you didn't care. You added another tally to the small closet of memories in your head of all the times you wished you could've found your voice and defended yourself, but you were only sixteen and these were adults. You knew how you acted would've been a reflection of your mother in their minds. You have never wanted to tarnish anyone's good opinion of her.

Your mother. You love her. Of course, you do. Just like you love your father. They have always tried their hardest and have never made you do anything you didn't want to do. They are like other stereotypical Hmong parents but they are also different. You know they support your dream to be an author. You know they'd be okay with you marrying a person who isn't Hmong. You feel bad, so very bad for being angry with them for never teaching you Hmong. For putting Barney and Mickey Mouse on as a kid instead of Hmong movies. For only speaking English growing up and

never Hmong unless it was to each other. You remember your mother once told you about how hard it was for her to catch up when she moved here from Laos. How hard it was to learn English and learn as fast as the other students in her class. She told you that she didn't speak Hmong to you when you were a kid because she didn't want that to be your first language. She didn't want you to have the same struggles. You admire your mom for that, even though you wish she had spoken Hmong to you, you understand. You admire your mom because you can see how hard she's worked. You admire her because she's one of the smartest people you know, despite how little she was given. You admire your dad too. You know that even though he doesn't talk very much, he's just as smart and works just as hard. You never stop wishing people would finally realize that just because someone isn't smart in English, doesn't mean they aren't smart at all. You are fully aware of the fact that you'll never stop wishing your parents spoke Hmong to you while you were growing up and there will be times when you will still be angry but you can empathize with them. They are hard workers and great parents who've always wanted you to have your best chance. You do *everything* and would do *anything* to make them proud.

You think about the Hmong teacher you had when you were a freshman, how she once

said, "The Hmong language is dying." You always knew that to be true but it didn't click until then. You also always think about finding love. Finding your person. You think about how scary it is for your language to die. You want to marry a Hmong person so that they can teach your kids your language because you don't have that ability. But then it dawned on you that you could never be enough for their parents. You aren't what any Hmong person wants in a daughter-in-law. You don't have the best grades, you have no interest in being a doctor or lawyer, you don't know how to cook, you have no knowledge about shamanism or any religion for that matter, *you can't speak Hmong or even understand it.* The fear of your language dying is constantly at war with the fear of being a disappointment for the rest of your life and the latter is winning.

You lay in bed daydreaming about what your perfect life might look like. You think about the future, say mid-thirties. You're married with kids. You married for love and not for convenience. You love your kids and have lots of family dinners where you talk about your day. You are a published author, some have even been best-sellers. People love your work because you have a certain quality, one they can't quite pinpoint, but they know they love it. You think about the days you were unhappy with yourself as a teenager and how different it all feels now. You remember feeling like a burden

to your family because your brain doesn't work the way everyone else's does. You remember feeling so small when an older Hmong man or woman talks to you and you have to repeat the same five embarrassing, belittling words, "Sorry, I don't understand Hmong." You remember never feeling like you fit in. Like you are constantly floating above the world watching everyone else live their lives, like an outsider. You smile softly to yourself knowing all of that is gone. You're happy, you're content, and for the first time ever... you are in love with life. For the first time ever, you finally feel like you're living it.

You snap out of your daydream when you feel the wetness of your faint tear fall out the corner of your eye and slowly run a stream to the behind of your ear. You close your eyes shut wishing for the day you stop dreaming and start living. You wonder how you'll ever be able to accept the fact that not knowing Hmong is not your fault and it's not your parents' fault either. You wonder when you'll stop feeling alone. You wonder when the day will come when you finally find your voice. You wonder when all those tallies you made in your mind that bring back horrible memories will turn into tallies of all the best moments of your life that you only tuck away until you have someone to share them with. You remember. You wish. You wonder. And you survive. One day, you hope you'll live too.



To Be All Before I am Mine

*a brief discussion on intergenerational trauma
(and the words of a Hmong daughter)*

By Kassi Moua

There is a hardship that spilt over us all, a loudness only heard when the world seemed bare, dark and broken. In March 2020, when the world felt like it was ending I had nowhere else to go but inward. This piece represents the very beginning of my journey back to myself. Healing is ongoing and ever changing, I hope we all have the courage to let go of the narrative we were told to play; the unbecoming of the roles put onto us as children and return to who we have always been: our center, ourselves, our home.



Grief, like all things
begin from the womb of everything.

When I was birthed from my mother
pain left her heart and
I've been holding it ever since.

My eyes are not my eyes
they are portals to a dirt path
and napalm sky still wet with death.

My hands are not my hands
they are the cloth that carries
the breath of my people.

My legs are not my legs
they are children to the wind
and go where comfort calls.

My voice is not my voice
it is the indefinite shriek,
the shrill wailing

strung inside my throat
an octave too high
forcing the quiet to live inside.

I unravel the sound of my heart
and it is unheard, still, barely there
like a forest right after a labored storm.

My body only knows
how to serve,
run,
or die.

I ask to live and it says to me
*"your body is not your own,
it is the womb of everything."*

Pain is still the name
Given
to me at birth.
Grief still lives in place of me

holding,
and holding —

like the Earth in her roundness
I take everything given to me,
I am not mine.

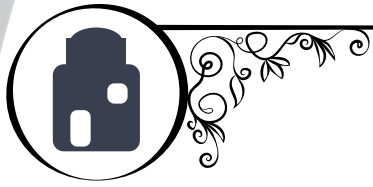
I am
my father's daughter
the fallen fruit of a rotten tree,
the bud of a lotus flower bathed in ash.

I am
where the earth and sky bleed cherry red,
the blood of the mountainside,
the quiet rise of smoke.

I am
my mother's daughter
the place my ancestors take shelter in,
the deep well we all cry into.

I am
keeper of all the hurt,
a body of bones used to light the fire
that leads everyone else home.

I am not mine.
I am the womb of everything.



A Story from a Stay at Home Mom

Anonymous

I'm in my mid 20's and a stay at home mom (SAHM). I have chosen to be a SAHM due to having no sitter and to my first-born being sick on and off during the first year of her life. It was a new and unexpected experience for me but it has been such a blessing.

I would also like to mention that I am not speaking for everyone but to those who may have felt the same way as me, as a SAHM. Before I was a SAHM, I was a colleague, a friend, a sister, and an ambitious Hmong womxn. Being a SAHM during quarantine vs being a SAHM before the pandemic happened— I'd say, there wasn't much of a difference for me.

People often mistake our duties as a SAHM. It looks like we have the "luxury" to stay home with our kids. You don't understand until you become one yourself. I know being a SAHM is hard. I can write a book about being a SAHM, yet never really cover what we feel and endure completely during those times alone.

Being SAHM is all about isolation and depression too. Not everyone talks about it though. You don't see posts or open discussions, especially in the Hmong community. We only see that SAHMs take care of their kids with joy, take good care of house duties, and how they can still manage to put food on the table after a long day. No one talks about the ugly, the exhaustion and frustration, and the motions we go through. Some days are better than others. Most days, all we need is a hot running shower to check in with ourselves. Yet, that doesn't mean we don't enjoy being with our kids. As any human being, we too, need breaks for ourselves.

In my experience, the strange part about being a SAHM is when I do get to go out, I'll think about my child's well-being and miss her. I suffered greatly with separation anxiety the first year. For me, being a SAHM is also about losing one's self identity. You eventually lose a sense of who you were before, who you are, and who you will become. Being isolated and judged upon, we are again often mistaken to be not as hardworking as those who do work actual jobs. We are expected to play our A game when at home since we are the ones that do not bring income in. I always thought it was more of a significant other type of issue, but later on in the year, it started to be an issue with some friends as well. Being a young mother and having friends that did not understand made me push myself away. I felt they no longer understood me. I wanted alone time with my child and family. I wanted to sleep in early in order to

be able to take care of night feedings and my child throughout the day. I didn't want to bother anyone to care for my child. As a mother, she was now my priority and I wanted to be the one to handle her with care and cherish those moments with her; even if that meant that I no longer had a social life.

I thank all the mommy groups on social media now. It wasn't until then that I felt understood and empowered to be a mother with all the scars no one had mentioned about. I finally felt heard. Those who used to know me, will call me the life of the party, not because I partied a lot, I was just one of those people who knew how to socialize and have a good time. I used to love late hangouts and enjoy a good time, but now, I am often too tired and do not have as much energy as I used to before pregnancy. Again, I'm not speaking for all moms. I still see those who are able to manage with what they used to do and I give them props for that; they mostly have the support I wish I had at times.

Most importantly though, everyone lives their lives differently and I just had a different mindset of what I wanted to do with my life after having my child. I told myself it was time to lay low in order to reach certain goals that I wanted in life with my little family.

I'd say the only difference about being a stay at home mom (SAHM) before the pandemic vs being in the pandemic would be a sense of freedom.

Before the pandemic, my family and I could go out freely without worrying as much as we do now. We could have people over and do a girls' spa day, cook day, or night in. But now, as COVID-19 has hit, I feel like there's been a decrease in a sense of freewill to do anything due to being cautious for my little ones.

I have a daughter that just turned two-years-old. She was born during the start of the pandemic in January 2020. On top of that, I am now currently expecting a baby boy in two months; during the most viral times of the pandemic.

When I had my daughter, news just recently broke out about COVID-19 and it wasn't that viral in the US. We continued our usual routines until a year later or two. Luckily, after the pregnancy, there isn't too much to worry about because I've always been OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) and a bit of a homebody.

When my daughter and I do go out, I'll always make sure to wash her hands. My daughter has very sensitive skin due to her eczema and gets sick often so I was more protective towards what I thought was right for my child. She was different from others. We mostly went to small family gatherings and some friendly hangouts. I'll always ask if anyone was exposed and so forth. I figured that those who understood wouldn't take it offensive and those who did, didn't matter that they were offended. Those who didn't take me seriously, they never saw us for a while and that was okay with me. If they

didn't care about anyone's well-being, they didn't need to see me or my family.

Though COVID-19 had come crashing by, my husband and I still took the time to take my daughter on walks at the park and explore the outside world. As a mother, it broke my heart to have my little one quarantined, but as a mother, I also wanted to protect her from things that I could at the time.

A year after, the vaccine was finally FDA approved. I am not anti-vax but I did not get vaccinated either due to my own personal reasons. I did my own research and thought to myself that I know my body best. I can talk more about why I did not choose to get vaccinated but that's probably better for another day.

Till then, my little family and I just practiced good hygiene, often washed our hands, and just remained cautious when we were out. Two years came by and I found out I was pregnant with my second child. I was more cautious and stressed about COVID-19. I remember telling my husband that if we do decide to go forth with this pregnancy, I wanted him to know that it meant saying goodbye to hanging out with friends and traveling for vacation due to the high rise in COVID-19 cases.

My husband understood the importance of exposure as much as I did. For that, I was thankful to have such a loving and supporting husband by my side during these hard times.

As I am now considered high risk myself, we still did what we had been doing since the start of COVID-19. I only attend my parental appointments and my husband, he goes to work. I wasn't just looking after myself now, but also my baby that was growing inside of me. My responsibility isn't just with myself as a whole, but also reflected heavily on my baby; I was now living and pumping for two people in one living body.

As the pregnancy came by, we only joined small family gatherings for the holidays. When I got further along, my husband and I did end up catching COVID-19. He had caught one strain and I had caught not one, but two strains of COVID-19. I was worried when I found out because I thought it was the flu due to it being flu season. My daughter also caught it with me, but thankfully it was not as harsh as those I've seen. My baby boy was active as ever and we all came back stronger than ever. This still doesn't change the fact about me wanting to get vaccinated though. I hope to in the future when I feel that it's more reliable. Though it did open my eyes more, to be okay to live a little. I still limit myself because in life you have to set your own boundaries, yet practice self care and good hygiene because before me, comes my little ones first and for them, I would do anything in the world for.





Survive

By Bekki Lee

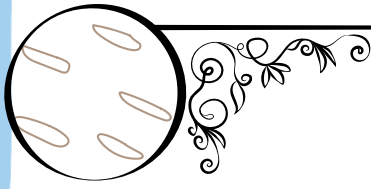
2020

11" by 14"

Acrylic & thread on canvas

We were all bound at home, I was stuck in my own pressure, under depth of fear for time and failure. Fear of another year wasted. Failure in success then to hear "You're just playing, do something more important." Painting and sewing became time consuming and calming. I realized I was using the same art my ancestors used, stitching. A canvas in modern minimalist line art stitch and acrylic. There's water dripping because I believe Hmong people flow like water, we have always been flexible in mind and body, I believe it is a skill we developed to survive.





The Invisible Rice Bag

By Boonmee Yang



Have you had to carry a 50-pound bag of rice from the car to your kitchen? My mom used to make me and my brothers do it when we were younger. I'd maneuver the polypropylene sack onto my back, go up the four stairs, then heave it onto the laminated kitchen floor for a quick break (only to empty the rice into our 30-gallon "rice" container).

Now, imagine doing that on repeat.

That's what it felt like teaching through the first wave of COVID-19. (During a non-pandemic year, the workload is already usually demanding.) With the added burden of switching teaching styles to adapt to a virtual platform, worrying about resource shortages, lesson planning, and needing to provide support over the phone to my non-English speaking families as they navigated technology, most of my work days didn't end until 10 pm. Then I'd wake up at 8 am to do it all again.

Some teachers might take pride in working extended hours; I do not think it's healthy for me.

Doing so put me on constant edge, even on days where I was supposed to be relaxing. I just couldn't seem to shrug off this 50-pound bag of rice, especially since my home was now both my work space and my personal space.

Eventually the strain took its toll on my mental, physical and emotional health to the point where I began taking it out on my relationship with my then-fiance. I sank into depressive modes often and withdrew from him into myself, drank a lot, and created an environment where he felt he had to walk on eggshells around me to avoid triggering another unwarranted argument.

It was also the first time that I then sought professional therapy to cope with things I couldn't control, so that I could begin to control my response to these things.

What's improved since seeking therapy has been my attitude towards this invisible 50-pound bag of rice. Instead of trying to carry it all at once, I've gotten better at halving it, taking more breaks, and learning to leave it a little longer on the floor before I need to pick it back up. (And most definitely feeling less guilty about it all.) My home no longer feels like a cage, and I've gained better clarity at what is worth my emotional response and energy.

However, my story is not singular and neither were my struggles. If anyone out there is still struggling with pandemic-related stress and depression, please take care of yourself by seeking professional therapy. It is not an immediate solution, but going from little to no coping methods to a handful of strategies can drastically improve one's choices in response.



Untitled

By Xai Lor

2022

11" x 14"

Acrylic on wood panel

My passion to draw and paint started when I was young. As a child, I watched my mother create flower cloth. I would copy the designs, and patterns onto paper with crayons and colored pencils. The use of bright colors and bold designs have inspired how I approach my own art-making practice. I gravitate toward vivid colors, shapes, and modern imagery. This is the type of imagery I create. My painting focuses on perceptual and referential; it shifts from viewer to viewer allowing personal interpretation. I like the idea of painting that could create a dialogue that can be shared from one to the next.



CoronaVirus 2020

By Zena Vue

The deal with this virus is
atomic. The war
in the heart finally
reaches land.

The bombs raining hard
and dust flying in shards.

Reminiscing to a time when there are only 3 grains of
rice left.

Not even enough to feed the chickens.

But you don't know this, so you prey on trauma and
memories of starvation.

Making fun of this virus is all you can do.

You want to be famous. So bad that you don't care to
remember the sacrifices made to be here,
in this country of
abundance. The war
here is different.

It is not mixing the rice with corn to fill your stomach, never mind that the old and young cannot
bite into the tough kernels.

It is not digging up dirt from the feeding ground of cows and sheep to boil for salt just so you
can taste something more.

Here it is different.

It is grasping at the memories of beaten fields and
then being beaten after having survived



That war.

It is being Asian in every sense and proud
then scared of what it means when


The war here is coming to a head.

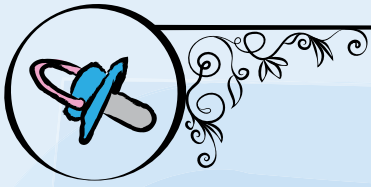
As eyes scroll for news of the next attack and desecration of what is
left of us.

You are ignorant to this as you try to go
viral.



Many of the younger generations did not understand why our parents and elders were buying out the rice in stores. After talking to my mom, she told me a few things she did to keep starvation at bay. This made me realize that her actions came from a much deeper place than I imagined. Seeing memes and photos floating the web dismissing, and essentially, ridiculing the actions of our elders, I felt the need to write. I believe humor can be used as a means to cope during tough times, but I wondered why it had to come at the expense of putting down your/other families' behaviors. To me, the pandemic changed a lot of things, but most of all, it brought forth the traumas of our elders and showed us that war isn't such a far off memory as we may think.





First Time Mom Teaching During The Pandemic

By Diane Xiong Yang

March 2020

When schools first shut down, I was actually on maternity leave and my son was just about 3 weeks old. I was a first time mom so I wasn't really sure what that meant for maternity leave or if it would affect my leave at all. When it was finally announced that we would return virtually at the end of April, I decided to cancel my baby bonding time so I could teach from home. Initially, I thought it was a great opportunity to be able to be home with my baby as well as teach my students (rookie mistake). It all sounded like a great idea, but little did I know, it was going to be the most challenging and mentally draining time I've ever experienced in my teaching career.

Teaching from home was something teachers had never done before. We had to figure out exactly what that looked like and my district decided to just assign work on Google classroom and do virtual check-ins. This meant that students logged onto zoom at 9 a.m. for thirty minutes or at 2 p.m. for thirty minutes or attended both. It wasn't required for students to check in but if they needed any help or just wanted to talk for emotional support, then there was a way for them to get into contact with me.

From the outside looking in, it seems like an easy day right? But not only did we have to meet with students for these check-ins but now we had to learn how to create digital resources and assignments to support students' learning. My third grade students have never had to do any virtual assignments before so navigating Google classroom was new. Teaching how to use the technology was a huge hurdle that we had to overcome in order for virtual learning to be even remotely successful. Like how do you teach elementary students to use zoom over zoom? My days were quickly filled with creating video tutorials of how to use Google slides, Google classroom, and zoom as well as recording each lesson of different concepts we focused on each day. Very quickly I saw the achievement gap widening before my eyes. Some of my highest performing students were struggling and even began

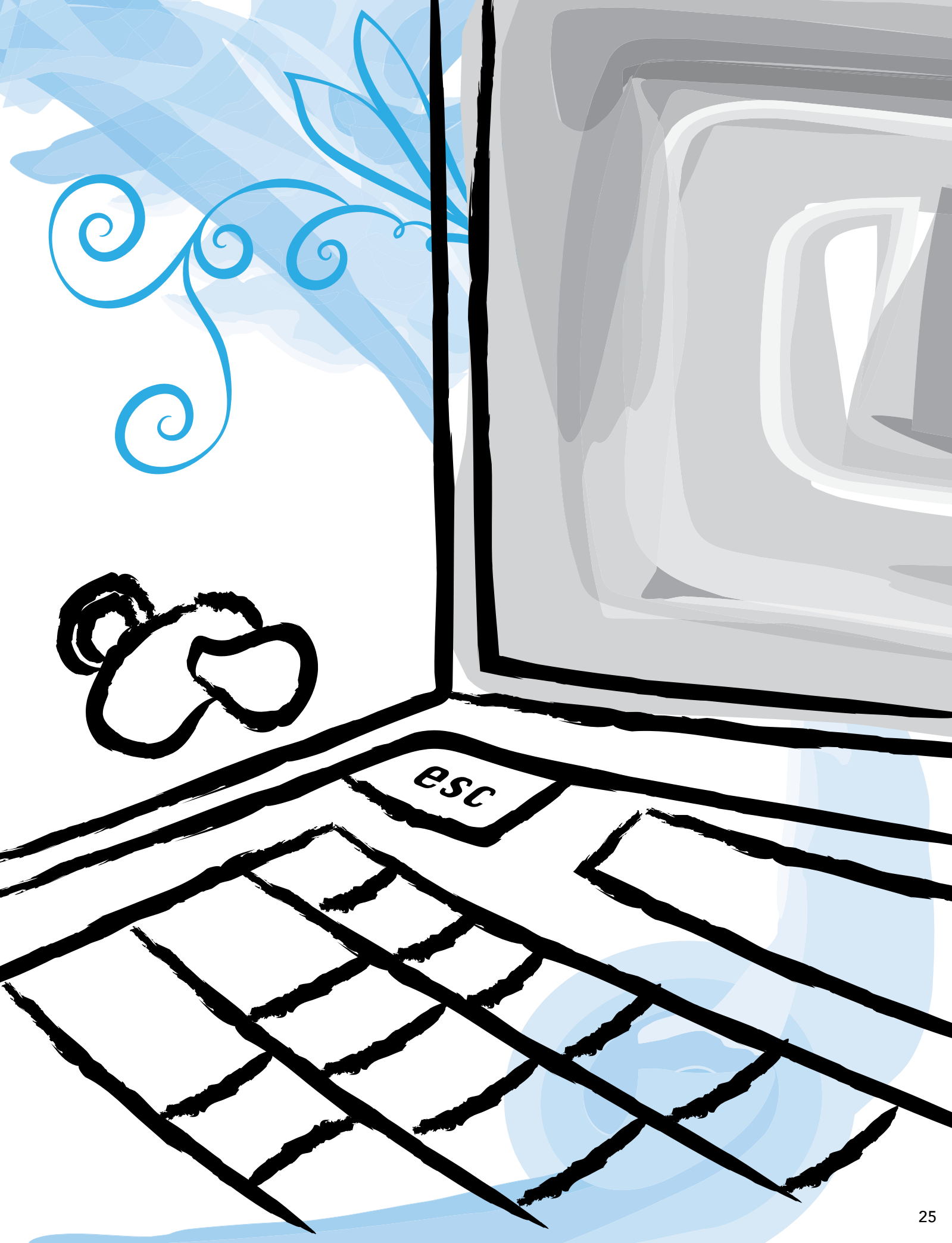
to fail. Every student comes from various cultural backgrounds, economic status, language, and family circumstances, but in the classroom, I can at least try to make it a level playing field. I am there to monitor throughout the lesson, adapt my lessons minute by minute depending on student responses or misconceptions. I can pull students who need a little one on one time or extra practice to go over the concepts one more time. I can grab my math manipulatives or draw a quick sketch on the spot to try to explain something in a different way. With virtual learning, I'm not able to do any of that. So if students didn't have parents or caregivers who were literate or didn't have anyone who could help them with the technology, or their parents were working, then those students quickly fell behind academically. That quickly became a concern for many educators, myself included, and lots of discussions began on how to help ALL students.

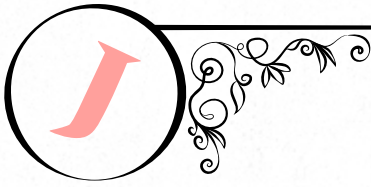
While learning how to teach virtually, I had to juggle being a working first time mom. I had to strategically time my baby's feedings and pump schedule around my student check-ins, meetings, and squeezing in bathroom breaks, diaper changes, and lunch time whenever possible. I had to make sure my son was napping before I started a check-in or pump after a meeting. And of course, there were multiple days where none of that went according to plan.

On those days, I held my baby making sure he wasn't in camera view or grimaced in pain as I missed a pumping session and started leaking. It was hard. Very quickly I found myself consumed with work trying to figure out how I can reach ALL my students and trying to create video lessons for every standard being taught. One of the hardest parts about working from home is knowing when to stop working. Even if I told myself to stop working at 3 p.m., work always went past that and oftentimes would continue working even after putting my son to bed at night. There wasn't a car ride to help me mentally transition from work life to home life and separate work from home. Instead I was trying to do both at the same time all the time.

August 2020

That fall, the district decided we would go full distance learning with live teaching on zoom. Trying to juggle being a mom and teaching was way too difficult so I knew I would need a babysitter this time around. Thankfully my brother was able to come over everyday to help watch my baby while I was teaching. This time, I thought that maybe since students had to be on zoom for the entire duration of the learning time, then maybe they would perform better. However, the same challenges from the spring continued and new ones emerged. I still wasn't able to see student work and give immediate feedback. A challenge I didn't expect was seeing my third graders tending to younger siblings instead of staying focused on the lesson being taught. Many of their parents were in the room next door working. Just as I was a mom tending to my son's needs, many of my students had to tend to their siblings in order to help their parents as they worked from home. I could clearly see in those zoom meetings that every single family was trying to get through this pandemic the best way they possibly could. One thing I learned from seeing all my students on zoom is that it was a hard time for everyone and giving each other grace was necessary in order to get through it together.





Jump

By Yuepheng Xiong

Digital art

During the pandemic I spent a lot of time drawing.



Depression in the Hmong Community

By Jay Vang

Content Note: Trigger Warning

As for many Hmong men, they are told not to show any sentimental emotions. Because men are taught that being emotional is a weakness and that it brings shame upon them.

I'm here to let you know it's okay to cry or get angry what's so ever.

You should never feel ashamed for your emotions because you are only human.

As for many Hmong women, they are told to not to be lazy and be a great daughter for the family.

Because no one would want you, they say.

I'm here to let you know you are enough and that you are trying your best to be a better person overall.

You should never let anyone destroy what your best is trying to be.

Just remember whoever you are and no matter what your religion, sexuality, gender, and identity is, You are you.

There are so many people out there either you know or not, loves you for who you are.

Across the world and universe, your existence matter.

Depression is a silent killer,

But there are many things in life that can heal,

May not fully and completely,

But time is also there to try to help ease the pain.

So please hold on to me and others that really cares even if it's hopeless,

Because I can empathize that explicit feeling of nothing is ever going to work out.

I can't promise you that everything will go your way and work out,

But if you just put down the pills, the knife, the gun, the rope, or whatever it is that can kill,

And just talk it all out about your struggles,

let me and your loved ones listen and try to help.

It is what we need to keep fighting and pushing forward through the dark tunnels and battles.

Just know whatever is trying to stop you and bringing you down,

I am here and here to let you know that you are cared, loved, and more than enough my beautiful friend.

You matter.



In this short writing, I like to talk about mental health in the Hmong community. In a sense of caring about the mental health in the Hmong community, I hope it will ease towards the Hmong people experiencing tough situations with depression.





Penultimate Moments

By Txhee Belinda Xiong

Has your mind ever made your body feel like the walls of nothingness are closing in? Maybe you're expecting an impact of some sort but really, there's nothing in front of you or beside you. It's all in your mind. It was in the middle of January 2022 when I was vacationing in San Diego when my housemate texted me. "You left just in time, we all have COVID." Worried that I might have been in contact with the virus before I left my house, I immediately took an at-home COVID test that one of my friends brought on the trip. Fifteen minutes later, a negative at-home test verified that I was in the clear. What a start to my vacation! Days later, we were out at sea, whale watching. I was in waters that merged with the Pacific Ocean, an endless vast body of water. I had never experienced anything like this before. The only time I ever felt alienated as a human being was riding my friends' horses and seeing how majestic and large these creatures were compared to 4'11" me. As I watched the blue whale and its calf swim among

their dolphin friends, I couldn't fathom that this huge sea creature could simply destroy this entire boat. But in reality, there was no sense of danger at all... just giggling, peace, and moments of silence as we watched on.

I came home to Minnesota and found myself anxious as I prepared to protect myself against this invisible virus making its presence known to the many lives around me. It was sometime after midnight that I had been dropped off at home. Clorox wipes in one hand, adjacent to my naked hand as I turn the door knob handle to enter my house. Has living as a germaphobe my whole life made me more scared or more prepared for this moment? I think both. As I entered the silent dark house, I made my way up the stairs to my room. My beautiful, precious, room. And there, my bed with the foam top mattress pad that I bought off Amazon for my Benjamin Button back. Oh how I've longed for you. But oh, how this will be the only night I spend with you. Because, at this point,

my housemates were still infected by the COVID-19 virus and more specifically, Omicron, the new variant. The new badboy in town. Let me tell you just how bad this bad boy got.

For the next week I found myself lingering in existential thoughts on the air mattress in my brother's condo where we spent time watching a new horror TV show on Netflix. This amped up my brain on existential-ness. And if that wasn't enough, I had a hacking cough I developed from my trip. I didn't think too much of it until... you guessed it. It made me look like I was symptomatic of COVID-19. Living in times where there is a pandemic, it was tough for people outside your circle to differentiate if you were sick with COVID-19 or just plainly sick.

When I went to work the following Monday, I was greeted through text by my co-worker that mentioned she had covered for me while I was vacationing. She then mentioned that she had felt sick and had been coughing later the week before. Then, she reassured me she was scheduled to get tested for COVID-19 that day. In summing it up, my desk was filled with the possibilities of having been in contact with someone who may or may not have had symptoms of COVID-19. Later that day when my co-worker got her results back, she confirmed that she was in fact positive for the virus. Remember when I talked about the invisible walls closing in on me? Those invisible walls are a depiction of all of the chaos that life was throwing at me. With so many questions going through my mind, I needed a breather. I immediately messaged my brother about how I may have been in contact with COVID-19... or not (depending on the ever

changing guidelines about COVID-19). I'm lucky to say that my brother was fearless, reiterating that I was still welcomed to stay with him.

As the days went by, I became more ill from the cough. I remember so vividly taking an at-home COVID-19 test in my room after getting home from the airport. I tested negative. And I took one again while staying with my brother. And once again, negative. You know what feels worse than going to work and not having COVID-19? Is that everyone else in the office thinks you have it. And so, for one day out of that week I stayed home to recover from whatever form of cough or bronchitis this was. I was tired. Tired of fighting the sickness in me and around me. It was mentally straining. As my brother and I continued to watch this horror TV show with themes of existentialism, I found myself dreaming of colors while sleeping. I saw things where I could only describe the visuals as 'high on acid'. I have never been high on acid before but maybe this was in some way my body experiencing living and dying all at once. I was surprised I even woke up the next day. I could say, I felt a little better and had a feeling of hope. Here I was, fighting this sickness among the greater sickness that has caused everyone around me and of all things, I felt hope.

Hope was making it safely back to the marina after whale watching. Hope was there when I did not contract the virus so that I could quarantine in my brother's home while others were sick. I was once again feeling hopeful that someday in the future, we could stop being fearful of COVID-19. Hope, for me, was that feeling of peace among the things that could kill you, but they don't.



Deadline Nightmare

By Alina Yang

2022

4000 x 5000 px

Digital Drawing (Procreate)

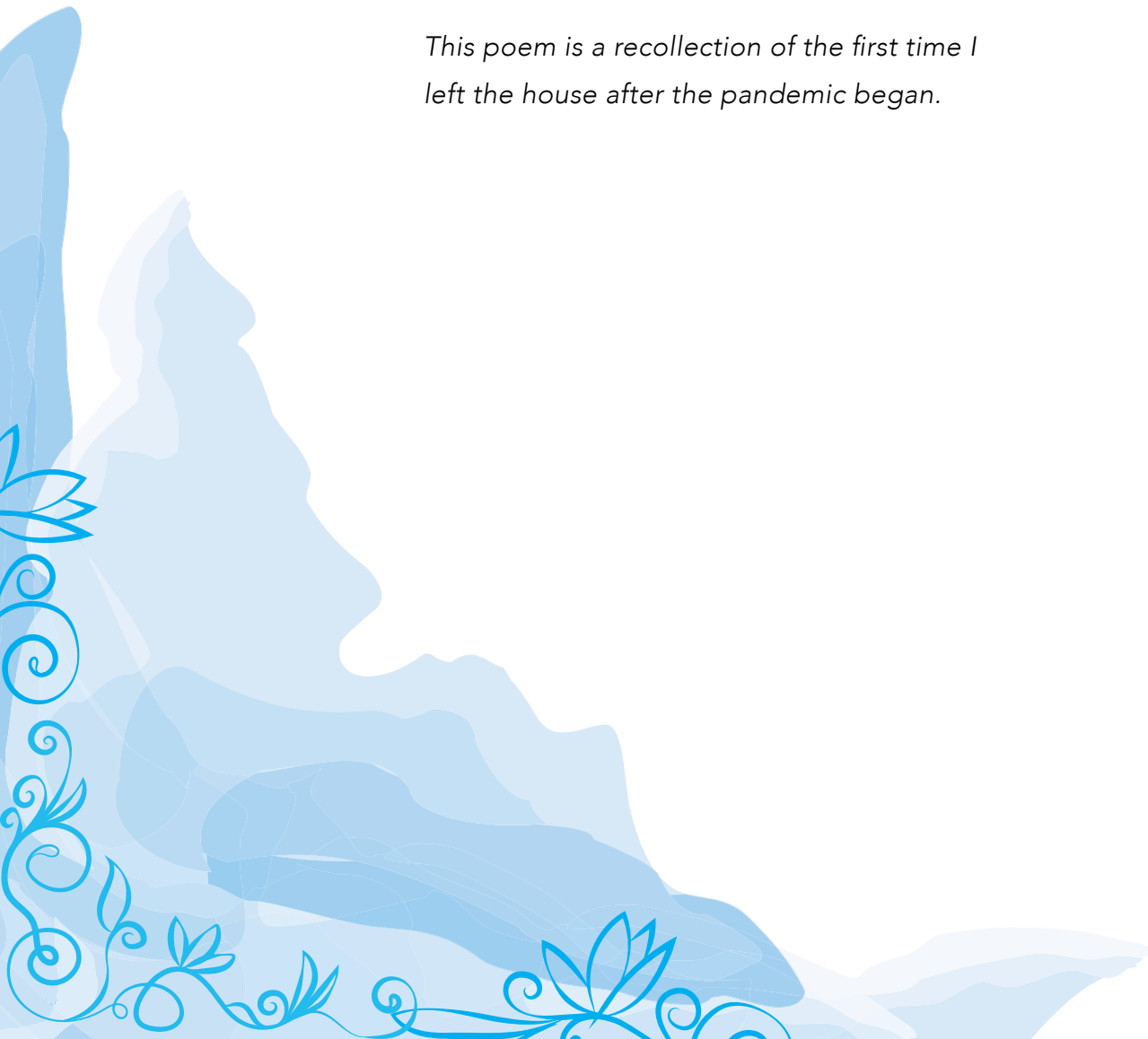
During the pandemic as a college student, I struggled to meet deadlines, overloaded homework, and my job. When I finished all my projects and submitted things on time, I would just relax my mind from all the work and projects. I want to show my struggles and turn it into an art form, where I show a girl who is taking a nap is having a deadline nightmare of the upcoming works after the submission.



Handwritten signature



*This poem is a recollection of the first time I
left the house after the pandemic began.*





The Distance Between Death and Me

By Choua Yang

I am afraid of death because I have seen cities die.

In the blossoming of spring when buds bloom on bare bone branches, and rain remedies release from Earth a world renewed, the city dies with a curtain call for lockdown. The streets are dried of drivers as the roads are slicked wet with rain, and the structures of the city stand like ghosts with hollow windows and doors like eyes and mouths twisted wide [and if you listen closely, whistling chimes of echoed cries carried by the wind can be heard].

In one day, the city has turned into a haunted house with cobwebs strewn beneath lampposts and across bridges, hiding in the corners of the world waiting to be dusted. They stretch from my home to yours, and yet, though we are connected by silk threads stronger than steel, we are more distanced from one another than ever before.

So I am afraid of death because I realize now that dying is no longer limited to you
and me.



Covid Cocoon

By Asia Moua



What is independence without love?
What is freedom without safety?
Wear a mask, wear some gloves
Food is better when it's tasty

Family is not always warm
But sometimes it's all you've got
Stagnant as I transform
Messily untangling knots

What is love without presence
What is presence without love?
Had to learn a confusing lesson
Gave me a push and then a shove

They came to me in a dream
Preparing to go far away
So many years of being unseen
Drowned and had the final say

Choose your friend or choose us
Even though it's the pandemic
Marry him now or give it up
Patriarchy is endemic

Decisions are not easily made
Protecting someone can seem cold
Between love or being safe
Are you a villain or a hero?

As they disappeared forever
The world became smaller
Even new friends and joy can never
Give back the rainbow, the colors

Choosing life is very lonely
Choosing fun is terrifying
Sometimes all I want is only
For so many people to stop dying

I've been working on myself
To remind me of my worth
Others may not treat me well
But that's not what I deserve

Others' opinions do not matter
It's my life. It's not theirs.
As I silence all the chatter
I get them all out of my hair

Can I live with my decisions?
That's what I really need to know
Does it fit into my vision?
Does it help me learn and grow?

Being forced to choose me
Was life testing my resolve?
Maybe lessons can't be easy
As with each one we evolve

I was pounded into mush
It happened all too soon
Waiting without a rush
To break from this covid cocoon





Unfinished Sample

By Maitzeng Chang

One too many thoughts, too many to keep up with
Everything unfinished but still tainted,
Some start in the beginning, in the middle,
While other thoughts have an ending with no beginning at all,

Clouded thoughts with clouded realities,
Forming from unfinished words roaming in my mind,
Unable to articulate a finished reality,

But just enough words to convey unfinished samples
Just like this poem,
Unfinished.



Ib Nhab Xwb

By Shoua Yang

2022

8" x 10"

Relief print

This piece is a relief print produced from a linoleum cut. The narrative speaks about my experiences from the early months of the pandemic when the public was panic buying and emptying out store shelves. Certain supplies were more important for different communities. For the Hmong community, it was 50lbs bags of rice. I remember families running to purchase as much as they could, even with the courtesy sign "one per customer." As Hmong parents were children of war, it brought back distress to provide for one's family at the expense of others.



ONE PER CUSTOMER PLEASE

HONEY

SOCIAL DISTANCE
← 6' →

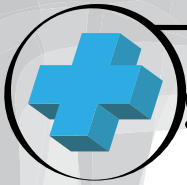
MASK - REQUIRED

JASMIN RICE

ONE PER CUSTOMER PLEASE

STAY 6' APART

CAUTION



The Experience of Nurse Pa

By Pa Doua Chee Moua

I worked as a bedside Registered Nurse in a Cardiac Unit Stepdown Unit which is also one of the designated COVID-19 Units in the hospital. This unit is a Progressive Unit, meaning that patients were too sick for a standard Medical Unit, but stable enough to stay out of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Majority of patients did improve and discharge, while others were hospitalized for weeks and needed additional treatment. When the Covid patients didn't progress on our unit, we would have to transfer them to the ICU, usually meaning that they required more support, such as receiving respiratory support from a ventilator. As a nurse, our mission is to help patients feel better and discharge from the hospital, so it was very disheartening transferring them to the ICU and witnessing a patient deteriorate over time.

Some of the common treatment plans for covid patients included anti-virals, anti-inflammatory medications, breathing treatments, supplemental oxygen, steroids, and proning in bed. Majority of the covid patients were unvaccinated. Many of the patients with COVID-19 had breathing problems and these problems would affect other organs including the lungs, heart, liver, and kidneys. It's stressful to see how one problem resolved, but other problems became relevant. One common treatment was utilizing Heated High Flow Oxygen therapy, which is supplemental oxygen that can be delivered up to 60 liters per minute with

100% oxygen. Sometimes we would titrate the supplemental oxygen needs down, and the patient's oxygen levels would be stable for a short while, but then it can quickly decrease, and we would need to titrate the oxygen levels up again.

Although this device improved oxygen levels, the pressure is very hard on the patient's oral cavity including the throat. This would make it challenging for them to speak, drink, and eat. Every movement was very crucial and could affect their oxygen levels. Some of these patients couldn't even tolerate using the bathroom, so we would help them use the urinal or bed pan. Even talking with short sentences could affect their levels, so it was difficult watching them try to communicate with their families. Once they didn't require supplemental anymore, the patients would be to be seen by Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) to assess their swallowing ability. This was to ensure that patients were still able to swallow different textures of food and clear their airway effectively.

Along with the main hospitalists, patients would be seen by specialty doctors including pulmonary, intensivist, and infectious disease doctors to determine the plan of care. As nurses, we would report to these doctors how the patients were tolerating their current treatment plan. If a patient's condition wasn't improving, there would be conversations about transferring a patient to the ICU and



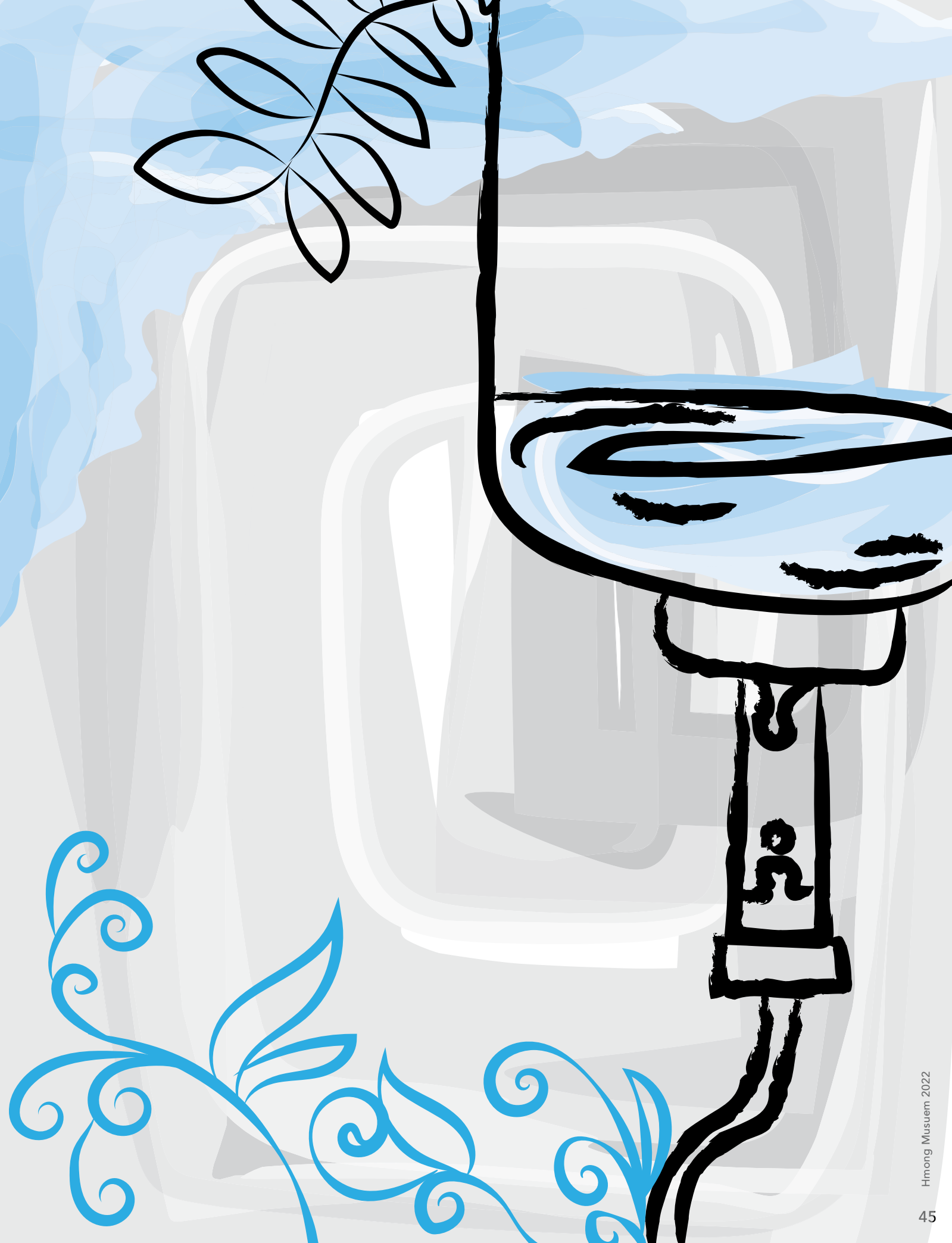
nurses would have to prepare the patients for the transfer. I remember a patient asking me if she would be awake during this time, how would she eat, how does she use the bathroom, and if she would feel any pain. This was one of the hardest conversations I've had with my patients as I witnessed how fearful she became. I always left work with such a heavy heart because these patients would call their families and discuss the risks and benefits of intubation and ventilation. There are very strict no visitor policies for covid patients and being separated during this time made things even harder.

I highly respect Respiratory Therapists (RTs) because they are the core staff members who see all the COVID-19 patients. They are the experts for treating patients with breathing difficulties and they manage the settings on all breathing machines, such as titrating the oxygen levels and pressures. RTs has been there from the very beginning of the pandemic, and they've treated the sickest covid patients.

There was a time when I was transferring a patient from the Cardiac Unit to the Cardiac ICU that is only a short walk down the hall. We packed the patient's belongings, prepared the oxygen monitor, defibrillator, oxygen tank and a With the help of the RT, we coordinated the time when we disconnected the patient's oxygen source from the hospital wall and replaced it with oxygen tanks and started our commute down the hall. While

I pushed and guided the hospital bed, the RT was monitoring the patient's oxygen and breathing. Although it was a very short walk, I remember feeling super anxious and being afraid that the patient wasn't going to tolerate the commute. It was the most terrifying and longest 3 minute walk I've ever experienced.

Working as a COVID-19 nurse is a humbling experience that I will forever remember and be thankful for. Although patients were sick and at their worse, their strength and determination to get better was always inspiring to me. Now I administer covid vaccines to communities and I'm hopeful for what the future will bring.





Untitled

From Hmong before American

By M Tsab

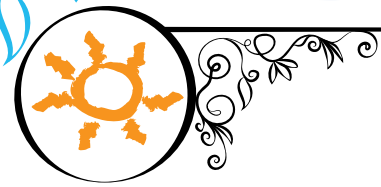
2021

600dpi: 4.2" x 5.3"

Digital

In the "Hmong before American" series, M's feelings of displacement within her Hmong identity were illuminated through a series of staged family portraits. Borrowing from old family photographs taken within the refugee camps in Thailand and utilizing practical lighting effects, they were able to stitch together the past and present into one fever dream.





tshav ntuj

By Cha Lor

there are days where I	muaj tej hnuv ua kuv
don't want to leave	tsis xav sawv
my place of sleep	ntawm kuv lub chaw pw
the sun shines brightly	hnuv ci ci
into my eyes	kuv lub qhov muag
the soul passes by	plig hla mus rau
into an old place	ib qho chaw qub
you had asked me	koj tau nug kuv
how long do you want me to stay with you	koj xav kom kuv nyob nrog koj ntev npaum li cas
my two hands and arms	kuv ob txhais tes thiab caj npab
gesture a wide and long length	yov dav dav thiab ntev
this long I answered	ntev npaum lis no kuv hos teb
stay with me for a long long time	nyob ntev ntev nrog kuv os
the sunshine warms my back	tshav ntuj sov kuv nrob qaum
the blankets cradle me back to sleep	daim pam puag kuv rov qab mus pw

dej hiav txwv

By Cha Lor

my kuv
heart lub plawv
is aligned with nrog nraim
the ocean dej hiav txwv

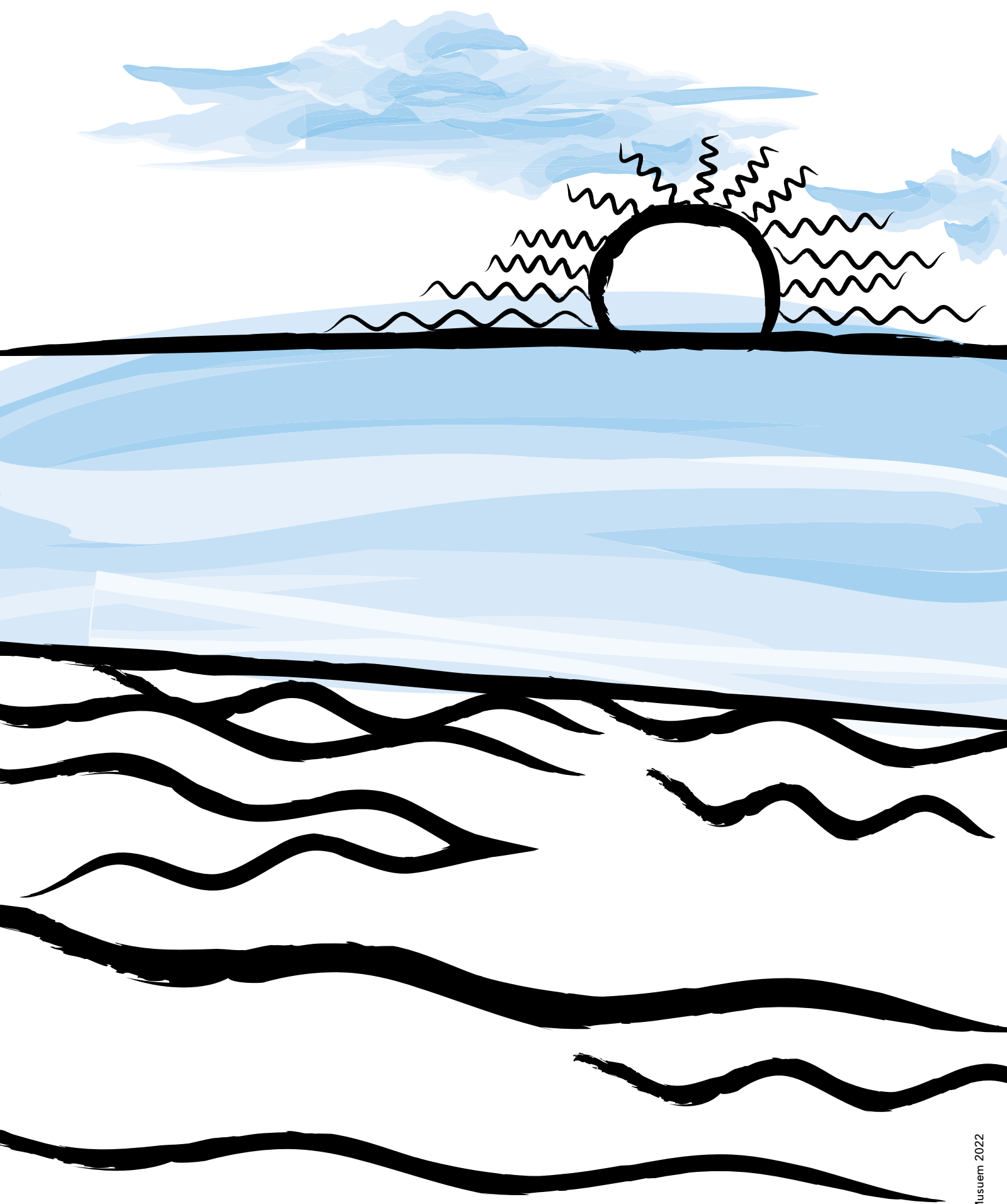
reminiscing about when xav txog thaum
we both wb ob leeg
were together nyob ua ke
i am by your side kuv nyob ntawm koj ib sab

playfully converse hais lus ua si
smile luag ntxhi
stay until sunset nyob txog hnuv poob

we walk on the same path wb taug ib kev ua ke
along the ocean ntug hiav txwv

do you still remember koj puas nco lawv os

This is a set of poems. They were originally written in Hmong and then I translated each line into English. My poems were written in this way to accommodate my Hmong American readers. To feel no shame in not knowing how to read/ understand the Hmong language, but to use my poems to get a grasp of how poetic the Hmong language is. And of course, since the poems were originally written in Hmong. I truly wanted my poems to touch the older generation too. In a way, my poems metaphorically breach both younger and older generations. Both poems play with simple and difficult Hmong words and phrases in an abstract way. The first poem; “tshav ntuj”, tackles my long journey with depression, losing my Yawv Txiv (grandfather) to suicide, but during the pandemic I finally give myself the chance to let him go with warmth and healing intentions. The second poem, “dej hiav txwv”, opens up a memory within my new life during the pandemic. I fell in love, learned what unconditional love is, and I started living in the present. For me, the pandemic was a restart button; it gave me the chance to heal and create healthier/new foundations.





Cultivation

By Ma Lee Xiong

2022

Digital iPad Procreate

This illustration depicts a scene of a Hmong girl standing in water while the Earth, sun, moon, and stars are there to witness. The story behind this artwork illustrates what I believe is the lesson I have learned throughout this pandemic season - about the purposes of cultivation.

The small sprouted seed reflects my future aspirations, dreams and ambition. From the plant flows water and illuminates a light. This is depicting hope that the seed will grow and believing that if I take time to cultivate this gift, my future dreams will eventually follow along.





Lug Txaj Ncu Hluas Nkauj

By Tou Long Xiong

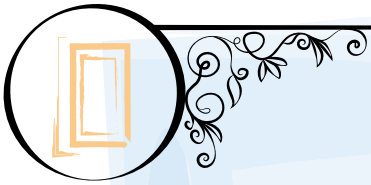
Digital film



Scan here for video or visit website

hmongmuseummn.org/collection/tou-long-xiong-film





“Broken Canvas” is about being a daughter in the Hmong community and the struggles of being a girl in this world. Hmong families paint such a terrible and scary world for their daughters. Saying things that they’d obviously wouldn’t say to their sons. COVID-19 has also heavily affected the Hmong community. It gave us girls more of a reason to be terrified of this world and it kept us locked inside for the longest time.

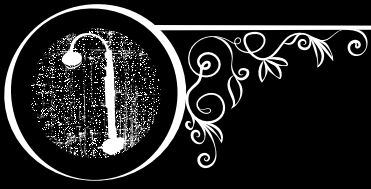


Broken Canvas

By Sona Xiong

the world you painted for me was so terrifying
i was more terrified of the streets than forgetting how to live
i feared every single person i passed,
i lived because of fear, all i am is fear
just because i'm a girl

in sickness, and in health
i was bounded to your worries
with this virus going around,
it gave you yet another reason to keep me safe;
when i really felt like a prisoner
i am not so fragile anymore
so please let me go
let me paint my own picture of a world beyond just "terrible people"



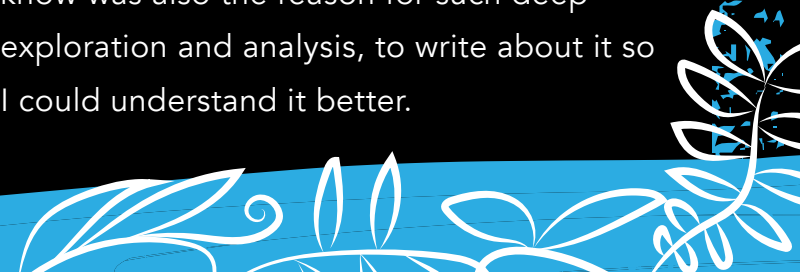
When the Sky was Low

By Chee Vang

On March 29th, 2020, my mother called to tell me, "lub ntuj qis qis."

Her voice was hoarse as she instructed me to go outside to the big pine tree in front of my house and cut off one twig for the front door, one for the back and one for the patio door. This was to prepare for what would happen on March 30th, 2020, where dab, or evil spirits would roam freely among the living.

"Why?" I asked because as a writer, the spiritual and supernatural ways that I didn't understand within the Hmong culture became the source of inspiration for my stories. The curiosity into what I didn't know was also the reason for such deep exploration and analysis, to write about it so I could understand it better.



My mother explained in Hmong and because my Hmong is elementary level, my interpretation was: "They are counting the people, the population, yes that's what's happening on the human side. But the spirits are counting too, and if the numbers are off, the spirits will even it out."

I began formulating a story in my head. The sky was low. The veil between the living and the spirits was thin, and a portal opened. Spirits crawled out to take the number of lives that were owed, anyone who might've escaped death in the last decade.

"Tell your sisters," my mother told me. "Put the twigs up on each entry so that spirits cannot come through to your home and take any of my family member's souls. Okay." She spoke to me in Hmong, but occasionally threw in English words to ensure I understood what she was talking about.

I texted my sisters immediately after, telling them there was a portal opening, and for them to put a branch or twig on their doors. Each sister responded in a myriad of ways, but I mostly remember my youngest sister who lived in an apartment. She replied that she would just put up broccoli instead of searching for branches.

Later in the evening, my husband came through the front while my son and I were laying on the ground in the fort he made. He asked why a twig from the pine tree was taped to the side of the door. I relayed my mother's warning, to which he laughed, waving his hands back and forth.

"Oooh... well if a death spirit comes, I will volunteer to go."

"Don't say that! It really makes me mad when you say stuff like that" I snapped.

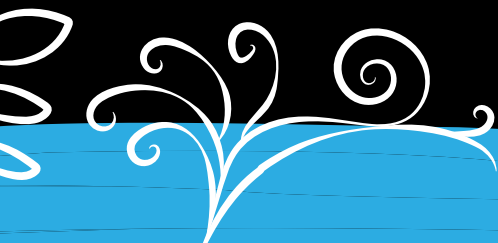
"Okay okay," he reached his hand down to me as an apology to which I slapped away.

"I'm just saying," he began, taking his hand back, "hear me out. If it were real then wouldn't it have already?"

I stood up to his level. "Well it probably did, but you just didn't know. Whether you believe it or not, wouldn't you rather just be careful to be safe?" I asked.

Even though my husband's father was a shaman so he grew up around it, he never believed shaman ceremonies worked.

"Sure. Whatever to make you happy," he said in a way that recalling the moment makes me believe he had patted my head like a child.



On March 30th, 2020, the day my mother said spirits would come to find souls to take, my son was playing in the living room while my husband and I were in the kitchen. It was late in the evening and dark outside and there was a small pine tree branch hanging from my front screen door as well as the back and patio door. I remember it was quite windy that evening as well, shaking up the windows of our two story home. Then, a loud knock came from our front door and my son screamed in fear, running to my husband and I. My heartbeat with fear, and I tried to look for anything that could be used in self-defense.

My husband yelled, "Who is it?" to which there was no answer. After a few seconds, he says loudly, "I'm going to grab my gun!".

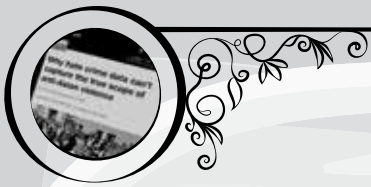
I looked out the window to see who was at the door, but there was no one there. I ran upstairs for a better view, scanning up and down the road, but there was only the glowing orange streetlights.





This true short story is about a day in March 2020 where several Hmong people believed we had to spiritually protect our homes in addition to the physical dangers of COVID-19 pandemic and quarantining.





Untitled

By Skye Lee

Digital film



Scan here for video or visit website

hmongmuseummn.org/collection/skye-lee-film

This art piece was made to spread awareness and to stop Asian hate crimes all over the world. In 2021, I experienced my very first public hate crime on school grounds by another classmate. I was asked to photograph and volunteer for a class. A student came up to me asking about my work experience and position at Augsburg University then spoke out to say that I don't belong in the course because I am not of Black/African American descent and mock my position. I hope you all can take my piece & experience to stop Asian Hate Crime.





Do What You Must

By Eli Vang



Some whipped coffee while others made bread, living shadows of the lives they've always wanted. And then there are those who retreated into their houses filled with dread, curtains pulled taught, doors locked, bathrooms stocked – suspicious of everyone.

And still there are those who sojourned into philosophy. Diving into the wilds of imagination and ideation, to write poetry on virtue and faith, inspired by sonnets and secondhand books of those long dead forgotten in soil nooks.

You must find a way to make it out of a silenced world, sentenced to calamity and mortality. To not feel the weight of the burden hurled upon you: to stand at arm's length and keep your loved ones at bay -- a weight that bends you backwards to the earth you almost break. But you don't, or at least, you haven't yet. But you are confused, alone, afraid.

So do what you must to keep to going, to stay sane in a world that will be your grave.

And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace constructed by daydreams and broken hopes, in the mournful hours between noon and five, when you wake again from your second, third, fourth, fifth nap, when the drunkenness of melancholy has subsided just enough, ask the groaning, the ticking, the stars, the fluorescent lights, the empty messages, and the sleep paralysis demon you've seen more than your best of friends in the recent months, ask what there is to do, and surely they will say to you,

"Do what you must."





**Meet the
Artists, Writers,
Filmmakers**



Alina Yang

Deadline Nightmare

My name is Alina Yang, I'm a college student at Hennepin Technical College in Brooklyn Park MN. I'm going to graduate this spring in May class of 2022. I major in graphic design. My passion is to become a well-known graphic designer and to be an entrepreneur that can design and create many projects for my clients. As for now I am still new and won't be able to give out a lot to my community but, hopefully with more time and knowledge I will do my best to deliver the tasks.

Fun facts about me I've always love to express myself in any art form from painting, traditional drawing, digital drawing, photography, crafting, and singing.

[instagram.com/ayanggraphic_design](https://www.instagram.com/ayanggraphic_design)

[@ayanggraphic_design](https://www.instagram.com/ayanggraphic_design)



Asia Moua

Covid Cocoon

Asia Moua is an aspiring creator floating through life. They enjoy writing as an expressive and creative outlet. She hopes her work can heal, bring hope, and offer an outlet for your imagination.

Bekki Lee

Survive

Born and raised in the diverse heart of Saint Paul Minnesota, Bekki is an artist and creator. She graduated from Sanford Brown College in Visual Communications and worked as a graphic designer and photographer for years before dwelling into painting and other art forms such as sewing and film.

[instagram.com/ahblis](https://www.instagram.com/ahblis)

@ahblis



Boonmee Yang

The Invisible Rice Bag

Boonmee Yang is a St. Paul resident and teacher who enjoys working with the ELL population.



Cha Lor

tshav ntuj

dej hiav txwv

My name is Cha Lor. I am a Hmong American woman. I was born and raised on East Side St. Paul, Minnesota. I am a signed model in Minneapolis and New York. I am also a writer and creative.

My work consists of topics about my family, death, mental health, generational trauma, and self-acceptance.

chalar.co/

facebook.com/cha.lor.925

instagram.com/mischavous/

@mischavous



Chee Vang

When the Sky was Low

Chee Vang is a writer from St. Paul, MN.

Choua Yang

The Distance Between Death and Me

Choua Yang writes poetry and short fiction. Her Hmong culture inspires her to write about the spiritual and transcendental, and she hopes that one day her words will reach places and audiences all over the world. In addition to writing, she paints and enjoys walking along the beachside.

yangchoua.wordpress.com



Diane Xiong Yang

First Time Mom Teaching During The Pandemic

Diane Xiong Yang attended CSU Sacramento where she received her BA in Liberal Studies and teaching credentials through the Bilingual Multicultural Education Department. She later got her MA in teaching with a focus on social justice and multiculturalism from CSU Fresno. She has been an elementary teacher for 12 years in Sacramento, CA where she resides with her husband Thavee Yang and their two sons, a 2-year old and a 4 month old.



Eli Vang

Do What You Must

Passionate about meaning making through the use of language, Eli endeavors to craft stories that compel us to dream big and inspire hope.

Jay Vang

Depression in the Hmong Community

Hi, my name is Jay Vang. I am currently a senior at UW-Stout in Wisconsin. My major is Video Production. As for hobbies, I enjoy socializing with people, playing ukulele and piano, video games, volleyball and tennis, and creative writing time to time.

[facebook.com/JV17669](https://www.facebook.com/JV17669)

[instagram.com/jayruvee/](https://www.instagram.com/jayruvee/)

[@jayruvee](https://www.instagram.com/jayruvee/)



Kassi Moua

To Be All Before I am Mine

a brief discussion on intergenerational trauma (and the words of a Hmong daughter)

Kassi Moua is an aspiring writer with a passion for self-growth and healing. Her work reflects her own journey inward.

Krystal Kazi

Tally Marks

My name is Krystal Kazi and I am seventeen years old. I've had a passion for reading and writing ever since I was in elementary school.

I was also Hmong dancer for eight years. I enjoy working with kids and hope to have a career in the teaching field for English. My culture has always strongly impacted my identity. I love being Hmong and strive to make our people better known and our stories heard.

[instagram.com/kazikrystal/](https://www.instagram.com/kazikrystal/)

[@kazikrystal](https://www.instagram.com/kazikrystal)

[youtube.com/channel/UC_6caF-bAhNdVBQ7POO-mDg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_6caF-bAhNdVBQ7POO-mDg)



M Tsab

Untitled

From Hmong before American (2021)

M Tsab is a former refugee who immigrated to the United States from Thailand in the early 90s. They are multidisciplinary artist specializing in photography and short form video creation.

Ma Lee Xiong

Cultivation

I am a college student who is aspiring to be a fashion designer. On the side, I like to illustrate Hmong art, write poetry, and creative journal. I aspire to create beauty, express emotions and story tell through art and writing.

linktr.ee/Xionggirlstudios



Maitzeng Chang

Unfinished Sample

Hello, my name is Maitzeng Chang. I am 25 years old and during this pandemic, I have thrown myself into writing. Lately I have been inspired by my friends and surroundings to create work that accurately reflects my emotions and thoughts.



Pa Doua Chee Moua

The Experience of Nurse Pa

Pa graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Nursing. She was inspired to pursue a nursing career to represent and advocate for minority groups. She has worked in the hospital setting in specialized units including Medical Surgical, Pediatrics, Cardiac Stepdown, Covid, and currently works as a Mother Baby/Postpartum nurse. She also works as a Remote Nurse and volunteers to administer Covid vaccines in the community.

[facebook.com/padouachee](https://www.facebook.com/padouachee)



Savanna Thao

Hmask Up

Savanna Thao (she/they) is an artist born and raised in Oklahoma; currently living in Minnesota. Growing up, she has always loved exploring different art forms and mediums, such as drawing, dance, painting, food, sewing, and more. Art has always helped Thao process the world within and around her, as well as help her cope with her mental health. One day, if possible or meant to be, she hopes to not only make art her life's passion but also her full-time career.

<https://linktr.ee/sthao.art>

[instagram.com/sthao.art](https://www.instagram.com/sthao.art)

[@sthao.art](https://www.instagram.com/sthao.art)

Shoua Yang

Ib Nhab Xwb

I was born in a refugee camp called BanVinai and later immigrated to the United States. My family resettled in Massachusetts where I found my passion for art. I completed my undergrad and received my Bachelor's degree in Studio Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Afterward, I started my small business CEEVTSEG PRESS to share my work with the community. My inspirations come from the Hmong American experience, where I focus on areas about our culture and self-identity. Outside of art I enjoy going on bike rides with my wife and daughter.

[instagram.com/ceevtsegpress](https://www.instagram.com/ceevtsegpress)

[@ceevtsegpress](https://www.instagram.com/ceevtsegpress)



Skye Lee

Untitled

Skye Lee is a local filmmaker and photographer located in the Twins Cities of MN. She is a recent graduate from Augsburg University with a Bachelor of Arts in Film Productions. Skye has worked alongside many artists and organizations around Minnesota in both videography and photography. Her work specializes in a variety of styles and genres. Photography art she takes part of are portraits, real estate, nature, live events, dance, fashion, landscape and much more. Film projects she's worked and created consist of music, awareness that revolves around the Asian Community, awareness of Minnesota's community, short films and documentaries.

facebook.com/skye.lee.7/

instagram.com/skyelee99/

[@skyelee99](https://twitter.com/skyelee99)



Sona Xiong

Broken Canvas

Sona Xiong is a student in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is apart of her middle school's student council team and takes part as the student council president. She has many great friends and likes being with them all the time. She lives her life comfortably at home with her family, though she does like her personal time. Her biggest role model in life has been herself and will continue staying that way hopefully for a very long time.



Tou Long Xiong

Lug Txaj Ncu Hluas Nkauj

Born and raised in Merced, California, Tou Long Xiong is the youngest of 11 siblings. At the age of 10, he was inspired to learn the traditional Hmong art of Lug Txaj by Miss Hmong International 2005, Ashley Thao. He was fortunate to learn and craft the art of Lug Txaj through the teachings of his mother, Xyooj Maim Thoj, who was also well-versed in Lug Txaj. At the age of 19, he competed and won the title of Mr. Hmong California 2014 during the Sacramento Hmong New Year Pageant. His platform is to inspire the younger Hmong generation to learn the Hmong language and preserve the traditional Hmong art of Lug Txaj Moob Leeg. Throughout the years, Tou Long has been invited by many local Hmong organizations to sing Lug Txaj at numerous events including the opening of the annual Hmong New Year celebrations. In his free time, he enjoys cooking, hiking, and singing. With great admiration to the traditional Hmong art of Lug Txaj, this piece is one of his many "Lug Txaj Ncu Hluas Nkauj".



facebook.com/xiongtoulong/

Txhee Belinda Xiong

Penultimate Moments

Txhee Belinda Xiong is a Hmong-American female artist in the Twin Cities. She graduated from St. Catherine University with a B.A. in English, Creative Writing and a minor in Women in the Arts. She has worked as a writer for the community newspaper, Hmong Pages. She has published an article on MNopedia which is an online encyclopedia by the Minnesota History Center. Among other projects, she spends her time writing screenplays and working on short films. She is currently a recipient of the MSAB 2022 Creative Support for Individuals grant for her upcoming memoir.



Xai Lor

Untitled

Xai S. Lor was born a refugee in Thailand, emigrated as a young child to the United States, and grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He is a contemporary artist, working primarily in painting and drawing. The colors in his paintings are influenced by the bright colors in Paj Ntaub (Flower Cloth), a type of artistic expression from his community. His painting has been shown at various museums and galleries. He earned degrees from the University of North Dakota, the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, and two other colleges. He has taught Drawing at the University of North Dakota.

xaislor.com

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[@xais_lor](https://www.instagram.com/xais_lor)

Yuepheng Xiong

Jump

Yuepheng Xiong is a student in 8th grade

Zena Vue

CoronaVirus 2020

Zena Vue is a Hmong-American graphic designer and poet.

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[@z.na.rt](https://www.instagram.com/z.na.rt/)









Meet the Editor and Designer



Npaus Baim Her

Program Coordinator

Npaus Baim Her is a Hmong American woman, a third generation from a family of refugees, and an educator and storyteller. As someone who comes from a storytelling culture, she has learned most of her own history and culture from her grandparents and parents' personal experiences. This is why she is truly passionate about creative nonfiction and collecting narratives of Asian Americans. In 2019 to 2021, she was published in #MinneAsianStories with Coalition of Asian American Leaders, Staring Down the Tiger, and The Summit Review. Outside of writing, she loves hiking and chasing waterfalls.

facebook.com/npausbaimisabelle.her

instagram.com/butterflyhawj

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Bob Xiong

Designer

Bob Xiong is a Graphic Designer graduate from San Diego State University, California. He loves working with graphics, animation, and illustrations. Most of his design experience comes from working with garments, printing, and in teams. Bob loves strolling into small businesses and local communities to explore the local artworks. He has done work for local businesses and non-profits and it brings him joy to contribute towards the community.

Growing up in San Diego has always been fun and fast paced. There are multicultural communities that influence all types of arts, crafts, foods, and sounds. I do lots of nature walks and hiking. There's always something to discover in mother nature, even when it's the same trail I've done before.

[instagram.com/bxphotographee](https://www.instagram.com/bxphotographee)

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