



Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

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The American War

February 6 – March 21, 2020 at ARTS at King Street Station

Opening reception Thursday, February 6, 2020, 5 – 7 p.m.

SEATTLE—*The American War* will be on view at ARTS at King Street Station February 6 through March 21, 2020. Artists Pao Houa Her and Sadie Wechsler designed the exhibition taking inspiration from layout of an archives' research room. It features photographic and video works, both created and found by the artists, that expose the legacy and residue that remains in Southeast Asia and the United States in the aftermath of what is known stateside as the Vietnam War.



The American War, which is the common name used for the Vietnam War (1955 – 1975) in Southeast Asia, caused more than 3 million casualties and a legacy of lasting trauma for the people and the lands of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and the United States. The war also contained conflicts in countries outside of Vietnam, including The Secret War in Laos. The Secret War, run by the CIA and executed by the US Air Force, ravaged over 30 percent of the countryside, contributed to nearly half-million Lao refugees. To this day unexploded ordnance in Laos is still detonating, taking life and land from the folks in the countryside. Her and Wechsler look at the scar of these wars and how they continue to shape lives and land across the world.



“We invite visitors to enter our place of research, to examine the complicated connections, and the rippling effects of war on the people and the countries that have been impacted,” says Pao Houa Her and Sadie Wechsler. “We also are addressing how openness, curiosity and dialogue are catalysts for new and deeper relationships and learning.”

The exhibition will consist of over 40 objects including contemporary photography by Her and Wechsler, historical images, poetry and video for visitors to explore. Her and Wechsler created and collected materials, including works from the National Archive in Washington, D.C., that reflect the life altering effects the war continues to have on the people who lived in the region - especially the Hmong people from Laos. Accompanying the exhibition, the artists have produced a double-sided poster featuring



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artwork by both artists, alongside a commissioned poem by Hmong American poet May Lee Yang. This publication is free for all who attend the show.

Pao Houa Her works across multiple genres and technologies of photography to address Hmong identity and related notions of desire and belonging within the Hmong American community. Her was born in the northern jungles of Laos in 1982. With her family she fled the conflict resulting from the American War in Vietnam – like many others, by crossing the Mekong River on her mother’s back. After living in refugee camps within Thailand’s borders, Pao and her family were sent to the United States in 1986.

In conversation with Her’s images are Wechsler’s photographs. They are evidence of Wechsler’s attempts to understand and ultimately take responsibility for the continued bloodshed of the United States. She visits museums, sites of death, and locations of memorial in Laos and Southeast Asia to have a glimpse into how the United States wars are felt after they are “finished.” Wechsler also engages in military archives in the US to visualize state sanctioned impacts of these wars. Friends and collaborators, Her and Wechsler met through the MFA photography program at Yale. Together Her and Wechsler visited Laos, where they initiated a conversation that both dissected and complicated their different relationships to the global impact of the war. This show is the first physical manifestation of their ongoing dialogue.

Pao Houa Her was born in 1982 in Laos, and was raised in Saint Paul, MN. She currently lives in the Twin Cities region. She received a MFA in Photography from the Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT in 2012 and a BFA in Photography from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 2009. Her received a Jerome Fellowship for Emerging Artists in 2013 and was awarded Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board in 2009 and 2012. She also received an Alice Kimball Fellowship in 2012.

Sadie Wechsler (born in Seattle) received a BA from Bard College in 2007 and an MFA from Yale School of Art in 2013. Her work has been show nationally and internationally and was included in Format Festival England and Beijing. She has been included in group shows at Aperture Gallery, Belfast School of Art, Photoville, and Newspace Center for Photography, and has had solo shows at DeSoto Gallery and Gallery 4Culture. Wechsler has received the Delivan grant from Bard College and the smArt Ventures Grant from the City of Seattle. She has been an artist in residence at Anderson Ranch Art Center and the Arctic Circle Expedition. In 2016, she self-published her first monograph Part I: Redo and her work can be found in the collections of the Yale University Library, the Hammer Art Museum, the Getty Research Institute and the King County Portable Collection.

ARTS at King Street Station is a new kind of cultural space where communities of color have increased opportunities to present their work and be seen and heard. Grounded in community leadership, the public programming and cultural space on the third floor of King Street Station are incubators for artists and communities, experimenting with the best ways to respond to the cultural needs of an ever-changing city. A cohort of King Street Station Advisors select and respond to community exhibition and programming ideas. ARTS’ goal for King Street Station is to be a resource for the city and the



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embodiment of the Office's commitment to racial equity. Admission is free, Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm, First Thursdays, 10 am - 8 pm.

Image credits: Sadie Wechsler, *Legs for Display*, 2018; Inkjet print; 22.75" x 30". Pao Houa Her, *Guy cousin in Thailand*, 2017; Inkjet print. 8"x10"

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