

Nam Chau: MY MOTHER'S CAMP
(Artist Statement)

vietnam - c'est fini

My mother grew up in a refugee camp in Southern France. She never told me anything about it. I also never asked. I know next to nothing about it.

My mother was three years old when she emigrated with her family from Vietnam to France. There she lived with her mother and her grandmother and her seven siblings in the refugee camp. My mother never told me anything about her childhood in the camp.

My grandmother never told my mother anything about Vietnam: "Vietnam c'est fini." She was 12 years old when the Vietnam War began and when it ended she was 22 years old. My mother's mother and grandmother often listened quietly to the radio, when it said something about the war in Vietnam. During all that time, they didn't speak with my mother about the war one single time. My Mother told me that she was never allowed to ask about Vietnam and the war.

what I know

I have never visited the camp where my mother grew up. All that I have is a few stories my mother had told me and some photographs from the internet. There are no family photographs from the camp. Either no photos were taken or they were all thrown away. There is Super-8 film showing the family walking through the vineyards.

the project

I took some black and white photos from the web, which were

taken at the time my family lived there. I painted them. This had something forbidden about it. It was as if I were not allowed to show it or reveal the image. This is perhaps why I blurred the paintings all over again. One of the first paintings I called: "This is not my family."

the theme

There are the first group of paintings of the camp (my imagination about what one should not talk about). There are no pictures of the war (my mother's imagination about what one is not allowed to talk about.).

There is a dual "wall". My mother never told me about her childhood and her mother and grandmother never told her about Vietnam and neither about the war. My mother always says: "Pourquoi je garderais un souvenir de quelque chose que je ne veux pas savoir?" ("Why should I keep a memory of something that I don't want to know?")

doubts

The paintings are very important to me and I doubt sometimes if I had enough experience to paint them. What do I know of all these things? As much as nothing! Can I paint, what I can not imagine? Is the painting able to say something that I do not want to know? Are my hands able to paint what I can't remember?

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