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Stories of the Elderly and the Hmong People Explored in UU Art Gallery Exhibit

The next exhibit at Cal Poly's University Art Gallery (Feb. 11-March 10) features Kim Abeles and Sheila Pinkel, two artists-educators whose work combines extensive historical research with art enabling viewers to experience the culture of two diverse groups: the elderly, and the Hmong people of Laos and Thailand.

Abeles, a CSU Northridge art professor, has created "Frankenstein's Hearts," an interactive installation comprising pictorial narratives that reflect the histories of elderly people in two communities and help viewers explore issues about aging in American culture. In the center of the installation is a copper and satin sarcophagus housing the silhouette of a symbolic woman's body 12 feet wide by 20 feet long. Collage elements occupy the positions of various organs to represent the stories of individuals who are elderly or who have died.

Abeles spearheaded this collaborative project that involves more than 40 individuals from Northern and Southern California and demonstrates how research can become visually expressed as communal art. The exhibit, originally shown at Intersection Gallery in San Francisco, was produced through the efforts of Abeles, the San Francisco Art Institute's Youth Arts Collaborative, the Youth Leadership Academy, and CSU Northridge.

Pinkel, a Pomona College professor, is an artist, writer, independent curator and political activist. Her photographic exhibit, "Dialogues with History," presents the narrative of a different community. Her work is an homage to the history and plight of the Hmong people that features 40 17- by 22-inch computer-generated prints integrating oral histories with layered images and text to contrast aspects of daily Hmong life in Laos and Thailand with daily Hmong life in the United States.

"The image-text relationships in the photos create a compelling visual essay that provides an intimate and political view of the changes in
the lives of the Hmong," said Michael Miller, curator of the show.

The exhibit traces the global dispersion of the Hmong people, which began in Laotian refugee camps in the 1975 and ends in present-day America, narrating one of the tragic themes of our times, where the chaos of migration and cultural cleansing has become the political fallout of global economics, Miller said. "Pinkel's powerfully charged visual dialogue enunciates the poignant vocabulary of Diaspora that many cultures have experienced."

An artists' reception is planned from 5 to 7 p.m. Feb. 14 in the University Art Gallery. Following the reception, both artists will give a slide show and lecture from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in Room 27-E in the Science Building on campus.

The University Art Gallery is in the Dexter Building and is open to the public every day from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m.

For more information, call Barbara Morningstar, University Art Gallery coordinator at 756-1571 or the gallery at 756-6038.

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