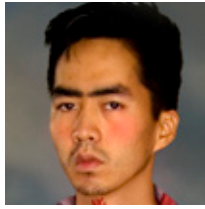


2011/12 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Young Photographer's Alliance Award



KEVIN TRUONG

Photography
Junior
Pratt Institute



One night in 1981 my mom got in a fishing boat. It was rickety I'm sure. I imagine the wood was rotting, the paint was flaking. It had a motor, but not anything any rational minded person would feel safe using for a voyage across the South China Sea. But when you've spent the day hiding in tall grasses, waiting for the night, about to flee a country—the only life you've ever known—rationality tends to be trumped by fear, fear by desperation, and desperation by the only way to make it through it all—hope. So my mom, with two young daughters and pregnant with me, got in that boat with a couple dozen other refugees and headed out into the water—towards that hope. That's the story of my mother. The night she fled Vietnam.

Not too long after my own story would begin—born in a refugee camp in Kuala Lumpur, a small four-walled wooden structure—then a childhood spent amongst the fir trees of Oregon. Having been fortunate enough to have been raised in this country for most of my life, it's easy to mistake my current circumstance as something that just happened. I really do believe I can accomplish anything I want in life. The opportunities I have been given, every door that has been opened for me and every window cracked, are things that have been fought for. It's all a testament to my mother—a single mom who raised three



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children on her own—a woman who went through so much just to get me to this country, to give me opportunities, to save me from the desperation and fear she felt in a life she once had. And it has been this conscious acknowledgement of my mother’s own sacrifice that has inspired me to try my best to pay it forward.

I spent four years working in nonprofits—getting books to kids in Orange County, CA; directly working with at-risks youths and Somali refugee children in Portland—I even worked in New Orleans with children directly affected by Hurricane Katrina. This work meant a great deal to me, but I felt my natural creative talents weren’t being best utilized. So in 2008 I returned to school to pursue an education in the fine arts. As a photographer, it is my intent to marry my passion for social awareness and my belief in the power of art as a tool for visual communication. As a staff photographer for an after-school children’s literacy program in Brooklyn, I am already doing this. I visually document the experiences of these children and give them a platform to bring their stories to a larger audience. I also feel it is important to work within the communities with which one belongs. I’m currently doing a series of portraits of gay men in New York City, with the intent of showing the many diverse faces of gay men, both physically and metaphorically—hopefully to break down inaccurate stereotypes that may exist. I use my art as a catalyst for discussion, and to help give a platform to those who need it. I want to seek out and share stories like that of my own mother—stories that need to be told.

