

Mai
Nuoc

We Can't
Go Back

A Short Documentary by Q. Lê
CNTV 410 Summer 2019



The Vietnam War, 44 Years Later

On April 30th, 1975, thousands of Vietnamese fled the encroaching Northern Vietnamese Communists as the Southern Vietnamese Nationalists succumbed to defeat.

The Vietnamese refugee diaspora is one of history's most devastating examples of individuals seeking a new sense of home and stability amid a collective trauma of loss, disenfranchisement, and dreams adrift at sea.

Purpose

The Vietnamese community is still processing the trauma of displacement. This collective trauma has manifested into various physical, mental, and psychological health ailments such as depression, anxiety, dementia, PTSD, and much more.

While the common narrative of the Vietnamese diaspora is dominated by stories of regaining and reestablishing wealth through the mechanisms of capitalism, this documentary examines how one Vietnamese refugee has processed her trauma by engaging in collective community healing through social work and volunteering.

This is the story of Võ Thi Minh Phượng.





Võ Thi Minh Phượng

Documentary Subject & Filmmaker's Mother



Born on February 17th, 1959, Ms. Võ was only 16 years old when she and her family were forced to evacuate onto one of the thousands of refugee boats to escape persecution and death.



After settling in Orange County, CA by way of Baltimore, she completed a Bachelors of Science in Chemistry and worked as an industrial chemist before becoming a high school chemistry teacher in 2001.



She raised her three children by herself until they reached their respective adulthoods. She refined her English through borrowing books from the local library and reading bedtime stories to help her children fall asleep.

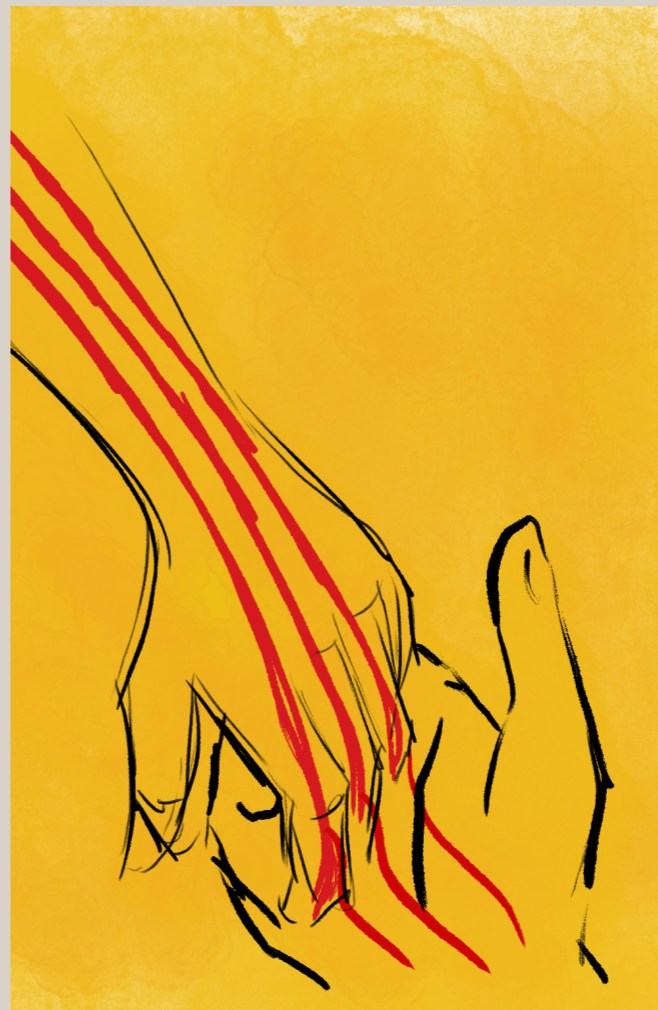


During her free time, she volunteers within the local Vietnamese community to help elderly members and recent immigrants adjust to every day stressors. She loves nature, books, writing, and helping out those in need.

Documentary Style

In addition to cinéma vérité traditions and an audio interview, this short documentary will incorporate archival footage, photographs, news clips, and animation to illustrate – both figuratively and literally – the fractured components of how trauma informs memory.

Animation was specifically chosen for certain segments of the subject's interview due to a few reasons: pragmatically, documentation of the subject's life during certain periods does not exist due to the extreme instability of displacement; ethically, the filmmaker did not believe it was appropriate to depict certain memories with live action; and stylistically, traditional animation allows audiences to connect the essence of emotion more freely than the realistic constraints of live action.





Influences

Q. Lê cites the following films as major influences for her short documentary:

Live Action:

- “In the Kingdom of Dreams and Madness” – Mami Sunada, 2013
- “The Missing Picture” – Rithy Panh, 2014
- “The Scent of Green Papaya” – Trần Anh Hùng, 1993

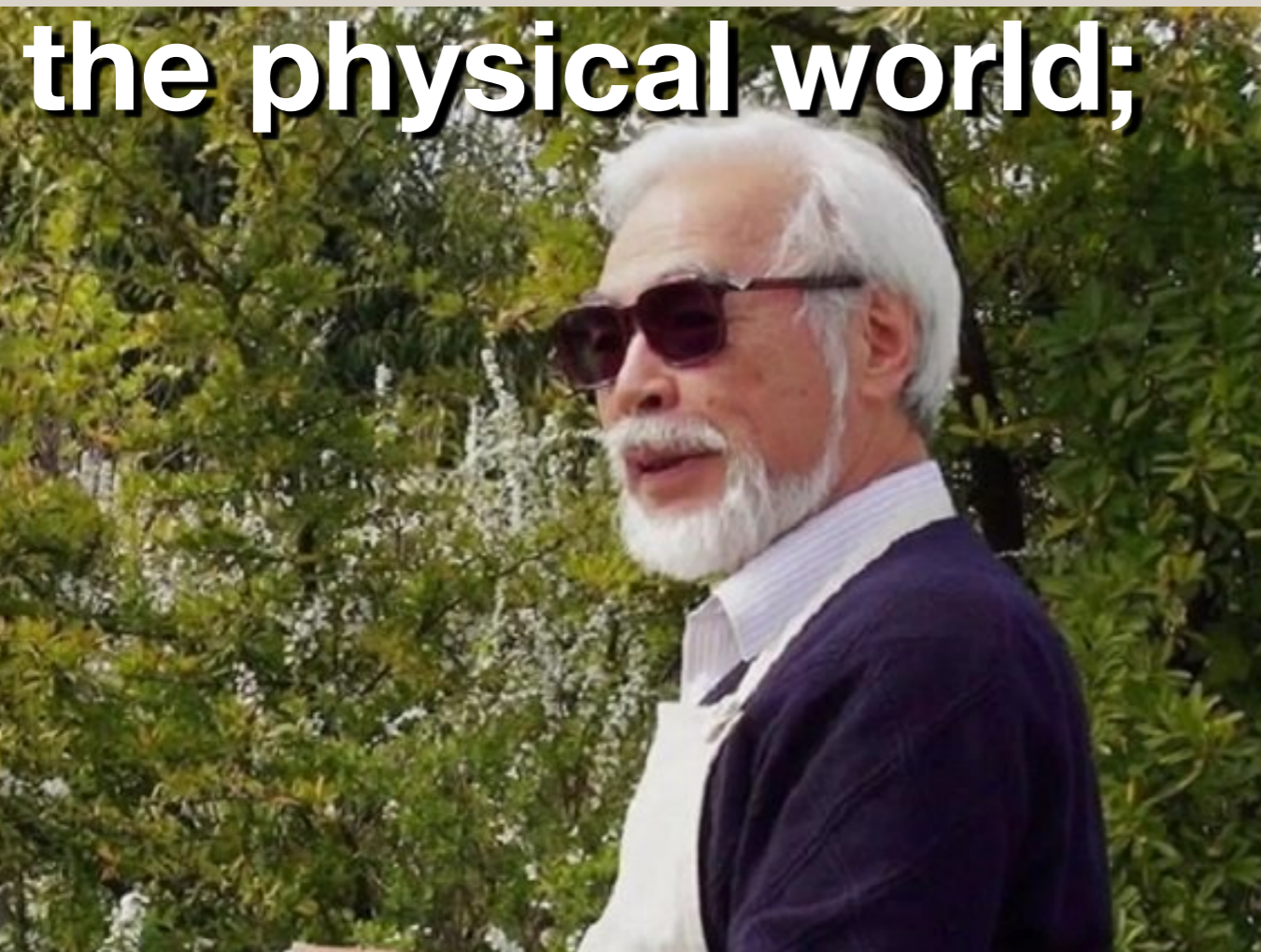
Animation:

- “The Tale of Princess Kaguya” – Isao Takahata, 2013
- “Paprika” – Satoshi Kon, 2006
- “Grave of the Fireflies” – Isao Takahata, 1988





**Realistic films show
the physical world;**





Animation shows

its essence.

Roger Ebert





Q. Lê

Filmmaker, Public Health Practitioner & Documentary Subject's Daughter



Q. Lê grew up immersed in the local library and feverishly rewatching movies on her family's VCR any time her mother and brothers were asleep. She's been aware of her cinephilia since she was 9 years old.



Raised to be globally, politically, and socially aware, she pursued her undergraduate and graduate degrees in public health with the intent of helping vulnerable communities through a systemic and interpersonal level.



While pursuing formal education in public health, she spent her free time learning and refining her knowledge and practice of film criticism, film theory and filmmaking with the guidance of mentors like Roger Ebert and friends in critical cinema studies programs.



She works at USC in clinical and translational science and is currently applying for her PhD to further study community trauma through the process and practice of filmmaking. She can frequently be found reading, rock climbing, and wrangling her cat.



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