

ART REFLECTS IMMIGRANT SUFFERING;
DE ANZA SHOW COUNTERS PROP. 187 SENTIMENT

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Body

Black and white oblong shapes fill the canvas of "The Great Escape." Boats hang on one side, body bags on the other in a powerful juxtaposition.

For San Jose artist Vi Ly, one depicts the harrowing manner in which so many immigrants flee to the United States, while the other represents the emotional or physical death they may face if they are forced back to their homeland.

At the Euphrat Museum of Art at De Anza College in Cupertino, a collection of art works tell the story of the trauma, strain and sacrifice so many immigrants face in their journey to a new land.

Artists and visitors say they hope the exhibit serves not only as inspiration but also as a counterpoint to the backlash against immigration -- illegal and otherwise -- that has grown even more apparent with the recent passage of Proposition 187.

"I think people are not just against illegal immigrants but all immigrants," said museum director Jan Rindfleisch. "They think there are too many immigrants, period, and too much cultural change."

"The art represents shared experiences that all people can relate to," she added. "It's a way to get a connection to others."

The artists see another benefit.

"I hope the show reminds people that we are examples of immigrants who are not on welfare, who are productive," said Ly, who fled Vietnam at age 11 with 600 other people aboard a boat and spent 14 months in a refugee camp. "We came and we made it and we're not just sitting around."

The exhibit, "Coming Across: Art by Recent Immigrants, Part 2," embodies the sentiments of artists from countries such as Ethiopia, Cambodia, Iran and the former Soviet Union, who have immigrated to the United States, most since 1980, and who now make their home in the Bay Area.

Artists such as Jose Meza Velasquez, a native of Mexico, communicate the hopes and dreams that define this country. In a photo of his mural "Homage to America" which hangs on the Fruitvale post office building in Oakland, the vivid, colorful center panel shows a man and a woman, future leaders, against a backdrop of the Statue of Liberty.

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Su-Chen Hung and Gigi Janchang, both originally from Taiwan, created a dozen oversize black and white photos displayed behind cracked glass, a reminder of the borders and barriers that immigrants face.

In one photo titled "Why My Accent?" a 37-year-old Filipino accountant who came to the United States in 1982 stands with his back to the camera. His quotation at the bottom of the photo, reads, "People are impolite and impatient about my accent. Why is a European accent considered cute and ours not?"

Visitors can convey their reactions about the exhibit by typing comments into a computer in the corner of the gallery.

One anonymous person wrote, "Thank you for the exhibit. Proposition 187 is a painful reminder that we need more awareness in our society."

Another man typed, "In this world, one never knows what's out there until one's eyes are opened."

Angelica Carrasco, a 20-year-old De Anza student who toured the exhibit Wednesday was touched by the strong messages of the artists.

"Their work seems to say they don't feel like they have a place here," she said. "People from here can never feel the way these people do. But if you see these works, you can get some idea of what they went through to get here."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The Euphrat Museum exhibit at De Anza College, Stevens Creek Boulevard at Mary Avenue in Cupertino, runs through Dec. 8. The museum is open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Wednesday nights, 6 to 8 p.m.; and on Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, call: (408) 864-8836.

Graphic

Photo;

PHOTO: JIM GENSHEIMER -- MERCURY NEWS

Student Bee Lin Ong at a computer that is part of the exhibit.

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