

Magnolia Yang Sao Yia Transcription

“What is Hmong Dance?”

Who am I?

Who are we?

All I remember is...dance.

Dance was the only thing that kept me going...

And the only tangible memory that allowed me to transport back into (*Pause*) feelings.

Fuzzy feelings, anxious feelings, exhilarating feelings, sublime feelings.

Feelings that could transport me to a time of my ancestors.

My Hmong ancestors.

What is Hmong?

What is to dance?

What is Hmong dance?

Hmong dance, are dances.

Hmong dance is a cultural practice done by the Hmong.

Hmong dance is a communal experience.

Hmong dance is a performance,

A representation,

An exploration,

A bodily research,

An archive.

(*Pause*)

Hmong dance is an identity formation.

To practice Hmong dance is to practice culture.

To practice Hmong dance is to preserve culture.

Hmong dance comes from the vast hills of China.

Hmong dance dreams from the harvests of Laotian lands.

Hmong dance dwells in a Thai refugee camp.

Hmong dance is also Indian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese and...

Hmong dance is *American*.

Hmong dance *belongs* to no one.

Hmong dance *belongs* to everyone.

Hmong dance is the practice of borrowing from different cultures.

Hmong dance is an appropriation of different cultures.

Hmong dance is a social movement.

Hmong dance is the act of moving, (*go fast*)

It is continuously moving,

It is an immigrant dance,

A refugee dance,

A survival dance,

A negotiation of multiple identities,

Anti-assimilation and assimilation.

(*normal speed*)

It's creating traditions,

And losing traditions.

Hmong dance *is not* static.

Hmong dance *is not* sustainable.

Hmong dance *is not* practicing Hmong dance.

Hmong dance is ultimately a *product* of colonialism,

And ripples through the superimposed identities and lies we swallow and become.

Hmong dance is contemporary.

It's solidifying a place of belonging.

Hmong dance is Asian.

Hmong dance is American.

Hmong dance is global.

But, Hmong dance *is* American....

Phenomenon.

(Pause)

Hmong dance dissipates in transnationalism.

It is displaced,

And stateless.

It's a search for continuity,

Voice,

And equity.

It's for the people,

And sustains the people.

Hmong dance is a courtship dance.

Hmong dance is choreographed *for* the male gaze.

It is mainly practiced by girls and women.

It sexualizes the female body.

It objectifies the female body.

Hmong dance is patriarchal.

(Pause)

Hmong dance is a commodity.

Hmong dance consumes.

Hmong dance disposes.

Hmong dance sells.

Because Hmong dance is entertainment.

It's a competition.

It's first place.

It's political.

It's ambiguous,

Invisible,

Famous,
Nostalgic,
Here,
There,
Absent,
Pertinent,
Violent.

Hmong dance is to be Hmong.
Hmong dance is collective.
Hmong dance is community.
Hmong dance is finding a home.
Hmong dance is homeless.
Hmong dance is complex.
Hmong dance is me.