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Selected Poems

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and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Selected Poems

by
Jim Vongsouvanh

2087 (after Ginsberg's Howl)
(Dedicated to my mother)

I've seen the best minds of the last generation
lost within an existential cyberspace-
the mind's own mechanical memory.

Oh, you'd be ashamed mother,
of all that's been abandoned.
of holy books burnt,
and ancient recipes deleted.

All to create this replicant floating city;
this broken apocalyptic paradise.

My childhood seems so vintage now
and I'm beyond due for an upgrade.

The Angkor temple is crowded of cyber genetic ghosts:
all tired, naked, and illuminating nothing but a sigh.

The Mekong river hovers above empty bridges
and skyscrapers playing a smooth, harmonic, jazz
like the sounds from a deserted train
off in the distance departing into midnight.

The streetlamps flicker like fireflies trying to sleep.
A garden full of smoking monks hold up crystallized candles in awe,
all wired to the electric sky of neon clouds.



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Your holographic coffin is being transferred
to the backup cemetery geobyte storage,
where techno monks will regenerate your soul
through a ferris wheel, and power giant singing statues
of gods we used to bow down to.

This supernatural presence keeps
my pulse from skipping a beat.
I refuse to become fully technolyzed,
and give the rest of my blood
merely for a bigger hard drive.

This unnatural city carries around false deities
on their synthetic flash drives.

I long for your comfort and your warmth
the atmospheric fog is dead to me now
And its techno lullabies no longer make me feel safe
in this city that never breathes.

The eerie static that has been programmed
into the small drums of my ear
have finally breached my encrypted transmission.
I cannot survive only on microscopic rice grains,
so I have hacked my data chip to self destruct,
please acknowledge my farewell:
Phohp gan mai

American Asian
(Dedicated to myself)

I have never been to Champasak
to witness the wonders of Wat Phu.
Nor have I laid eyes on the sight
of the bold and beautiful Buddha park.
I've yet to see the full length of the Mekong
like a child first stretching it's arms out for a hug.

For I was born near skyscrapers and museums
where larger cities surrounded me.
I've seen the illumination
of the glowing orange golden gate bridge.
And I've walked along the beach of the Pacific
which stretches as if even beyond infinity.

Vongsouvanh—*Selected Poems*

I've never bought pho'
on a boat from a widow of seven.
But I've sat next to James Dean in a booth
at two in the morning
and had eggs benedict.

I've never tasted freshly baked barbeque buns
on the street from a boy
who is just starting school.
But I've walked down the street
to catch coffee with a friend
before we departed to our morning routines.

I've tasted Chicago hot dogs, New York slices,
Portland beer, and Coney island cotton candy,
but never catfish roasted over a fire with sticky rice.

I've never heard the Nam Song breathing
or the unified hums of monks chanting
that could lull me into a peaceful sleep.
But I've heard The Smiths come on the radio
after a 14 hour shift.

I've survived the bitter and bipolar
Minnesota winters.
But I've never felt rain
inside my own home
during the seasons of monsoons.

I can pass by the bakery in the morning
And smell the muffins out of the oven,
Or pass the café' with newly roasted coffee beans.
But I'll never smell the nature of the sun
Rising over the horizon
with incense from Ban Nakhangxang
and that nothingness from a bamboo.

I can read, and I can write.
I can sing, and laugh, and recite Shakespeare,
And I can solve encrypted ancient mysteries,
But as I sit and stare out of my apartment,
There is nothing I long more for
Than to go home.

About the Author



Jim Vongsouvanh is a second generation Laotian American who was born in San Jose, California in 1989. He is a graduate of the AFA in Creative Writing program at Normandale Community College. His poetry has appeared in *The Paper Lantern*. When he is not reading or writing, you can catch him geeking out in the record shop, comic store, or local bookstore. He has not returned to his native country of Laos yet, but plans to one day. He currently resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



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