

Our Journeys

50 YEARS AFTER THE FALL

PRESENTED BY  VIETNAMESE
BOAT
PEOPLE

On April 30, 1975, the 'Fall of Saigon' marked the defeat of South Vietnam after a long civil war in the country. During the days leading up to April 30, thousands fled, mostly through American organized evacuations, fearing what would happen to them and the country under the Communist regime. For the millions left behind, the suffering persisted long after the war's end.

The mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees began in 1975 and continued into the early 1990s, with a peak between 1979 and 1985. Nearly two million people attempted to escape during this period, though precise numbers remain elusive. Tragically, many did not survive the perilous journey; estimates suggest that as many as 600,000 people perished due to pirate attacks, rape, torture, persecution, drowning, and starvation. Around 800,000 to 1 million Vietnamese "boat people" successfully reached asylum countries. These refugees were fleeing in search of safety, shelter, and the basic human dignity that everyone deserves.

Vietnamese Boat People, a nonprofit organization, was founded as a tribute to the millions of refugees who fled Vietnam by boat. Today, it is dedicated to honoring and preserving the stories of the entire Vietnamese diaspora community.

Our Journeys

50 YEARS AFTER THE FALL

A traveling exhibition
debuting in New York City in 2025

www.vietnameseboatpeople.org

This exhibition commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, a pivotal moment in our Vietnamese diaspora community. 2025 will be a transformative year for Vietnamese people around the world filled with reflections on our journeys and how our families and communities have evolved.

We feel a sense of urgency with many stories and experiences being forgotten over the course of 50 years and even more at threat of being lost with our aging parents and elders. The exhibition is a thoughtfully curated show, drawing from over 250 stories we've collected. We aim to bridge past to present with narratives across different generations to foster a deeper understanding of the Vietnamese diaspora experience.

THE EXHIBITION IS THOUGHTFULLY CURATED AROUND THREE CENTRAL THEMES

Endurance and Flight

In the aftermath of the Fall of Saigon, Vietnamese citizens endured unimaginable hardships. Decades of war and over a century of foreign rule had left Vietnam's land scarred, its infrastructure in ruins, and its industries underdeveloped. Our storytellers share their experiences under the new regime: farmlands, personal possessions, and private businesses were seized, and people were stripped of their livelihoods.

Many were condemned to brutal "reeducation camps," and citizens lived under constant surveillance, deprived of their freedom to act, think, and move freely, trapped in a state of fear.

Despite enduring such oppressive conditions, the stories highlight the unbroken spirit of hope among the Vietnamese people.

Adaptation and Identity

After treacherous journeys and spending months (sometimes years) at refugee camps living in poor conditions, many refugees struggled with cultural assimilation and post-traumatic stress.

The process of adaptation was not an easy one and was complicated even further when resettled into different cities across the United States where there were few Asian ethnic groups.

The stories featured explores the process of assimilation for these families and individuals. Especially for children of refugees who found themselves stuck in hybrid worlds, feeling neither connected to their past nor a sense of belonging in their present.

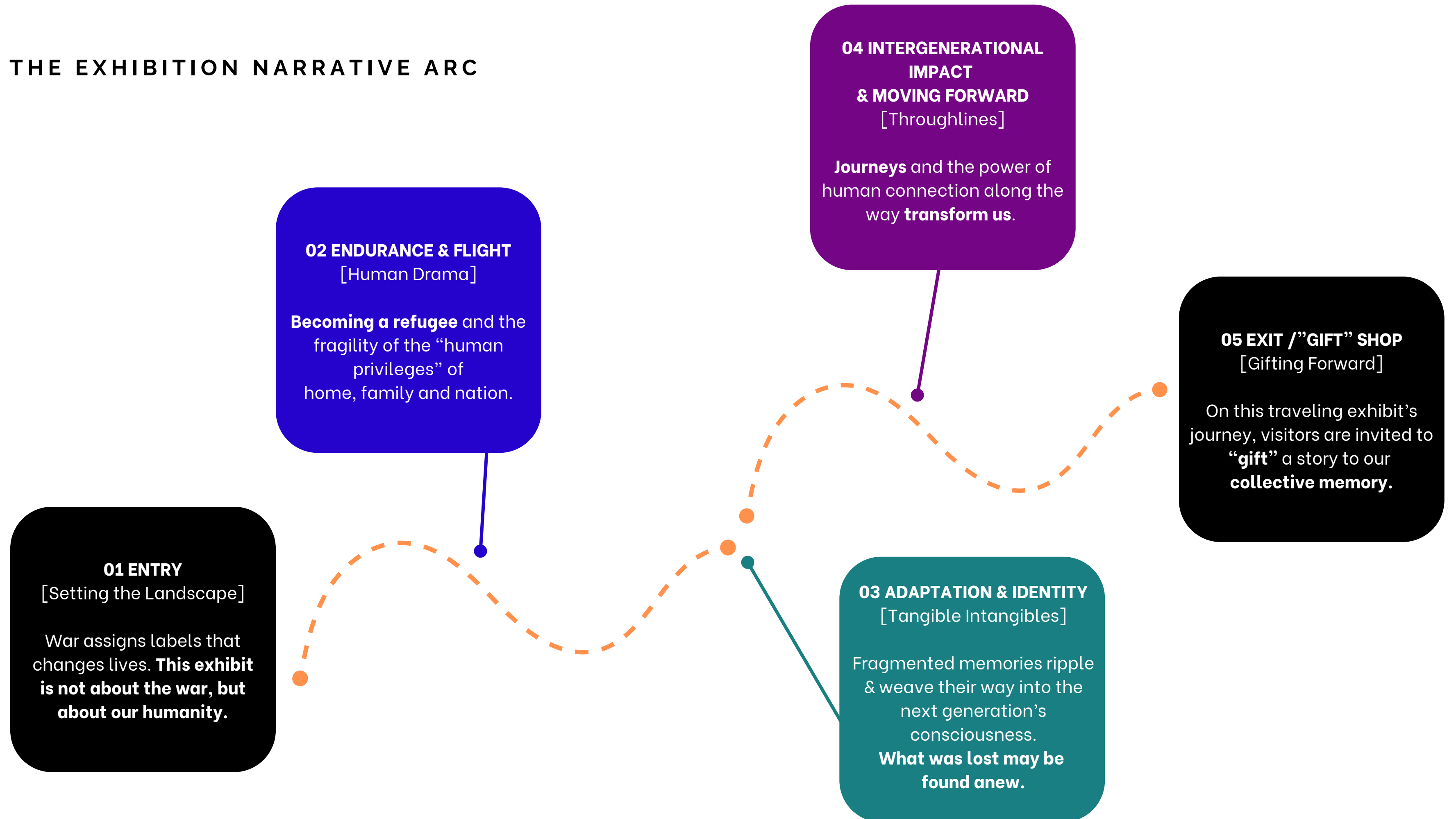
Intergenerational Impact and Moving Forward

Historically, the experiences of the Vietnamese diasporic community have been largely told from an outsider's perspective. While we have seen an increase in stories told by Vietnamese diaspora authors and filmmakers, many stories remain untold, not just in society but also within families.

Children continue to explore the meaning of their family's past and its impact on their lives today. Some families have thrived despite the adversity, while others continue to struggle, quietly bear the scars of the past.

Younger generations are reclaiming our narrative through intergenerational dialogue, retelling their family stories, and reinterpreting the impact. These stories are creating the representation that was previously absent, helping our community connect, heal, and move forward.

THE EXHIBITION NARRATIVE ARC



Our Journeys: IPOP Engagement Arc

02 ENDURANCE & FLIGHT

- **Hear and Read** stories of decision-making and flight
- **View** rotating silhouettes moving across landscape

04 INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT & MOVING FORWARD

- **Pin and connect** the points on a journey map
- **Write** your story
- **Begin a conversation** using prompt cards

05 EXIT / "GIFT" SHOP

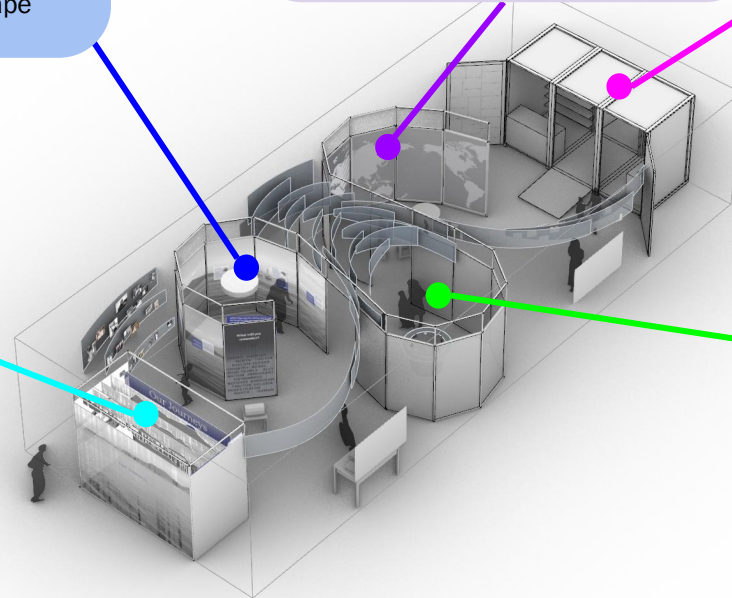
- **Gift** a photo & story-caption
- **See** submitted photo stories and **hear** (Vietnamese & English) captions
- **Send** a message to the next community

01 ENTRY

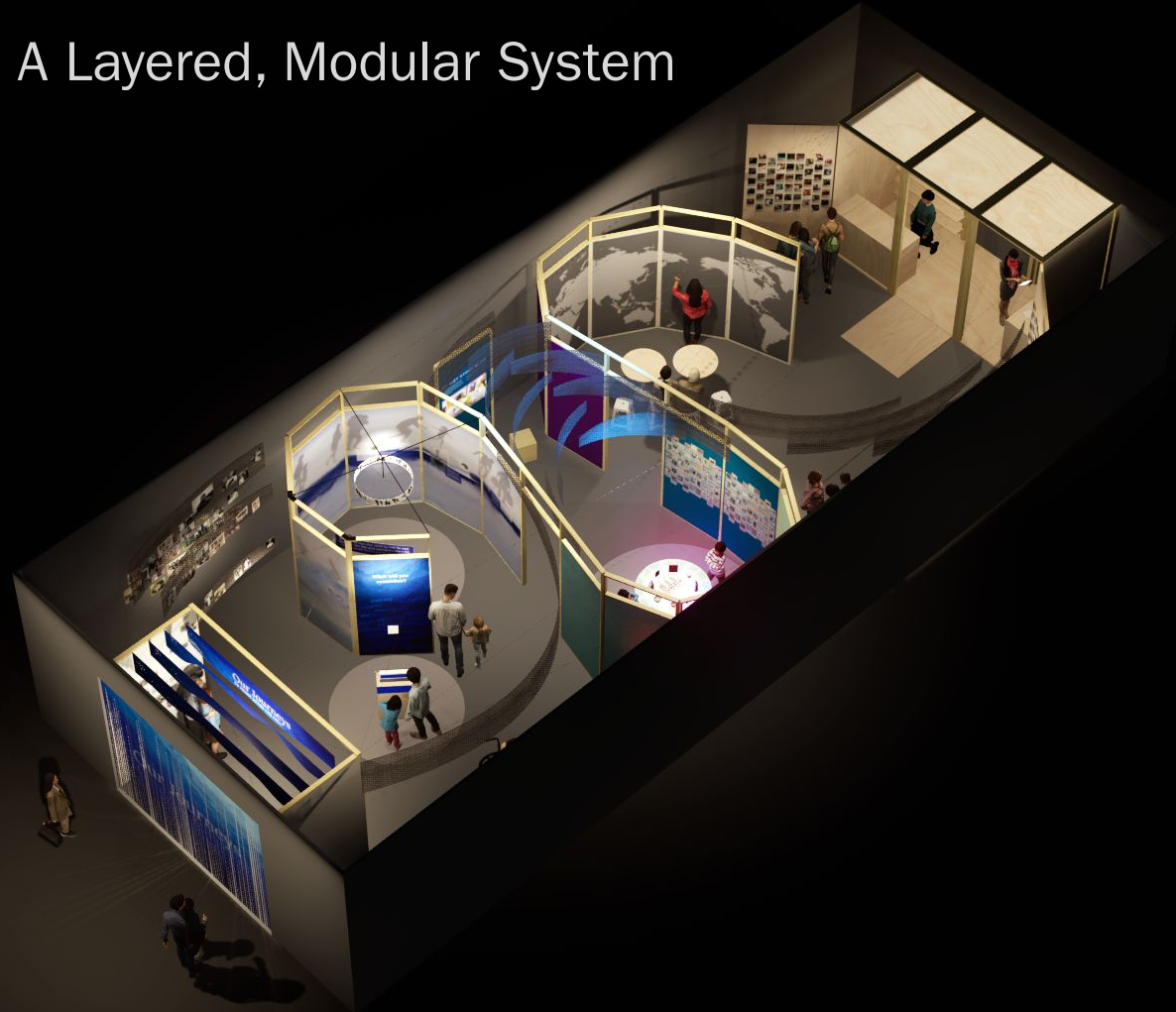
- **Enter through** an image of moving water
- **Read** a timeline/ map
- **Watch** (silent) news broadcasts
- **Hear** Vietnamese associated with timeline events
- **Spin** to reveal questions

03 ADAPTATION & IDENTITY

- **Hear** Voices of Vietnamese Diaspora
- **Read** stories connected to meaningful objects
- **Touch and rotate** totem object color wheel
- **Write** a thank-you card
- **Create** a poem with VBP word cloud
- **Watch** a Story Slam video



Our Journeys: A Layered, Modular System



Our Journeys

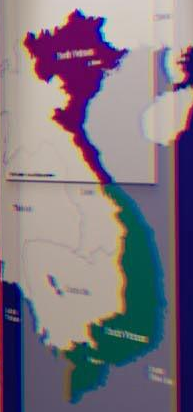
50 YEARS AFTER THE FALL

Reality starts sinking in, because here's our little bitty boat on this vast ocean, and there's no land ... What's going to happen next?

Thanh Ha Lai, when she was 12 years old

What will you remember?

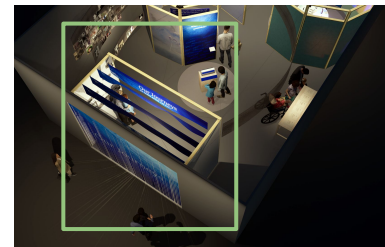
ENERGY REFUGEE
SOUTH IMMIGRANT
VICTIM NORTH
BOAT PEOPLE ALLY
ASYLUM SEEKER
VIETNAMESE
TRAITOR



1975

1976

01 Entry: Components



Enter through an abstract image that suggests moving waters



Watch American news broadcasts [silent with subtitles]

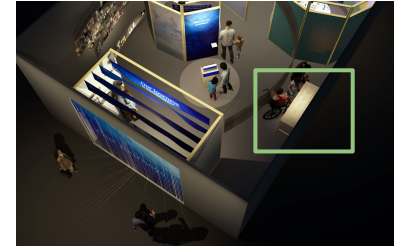
Read timeline (1954-1978) as personal photos float above

Hear Vietnamese spoken in association with timeline events

01 Entry: Components



Read the timeline as it continues in the form of stacked files and quotes floating above. The stacked files suggest bureaucratic paperwork and policies that have outsized impact on individual lives.



Reality starts sinking in ...

here's our little bitty boat on this vast ocean ...

I look out there, and there's no land...

What's going to happen next?

-Thanh Ha Lai (at 12 years old)

Following the Fall of Saigon, those who were from the south were sent to 'reeducation camps' where conditions were life-threatening and torturous. Leaving Vietnam was considered an illegal act by the government.

Bất chấp điều kiện sống không khấp, việc rời khỏi Việt Nam bị chính phủ coi là một hành động bất hợp pháp. Không từ bỏ hy vọng, người dân Việt Nam bắt đầu hình thành những cuộc vượt ngục bí mật.

1979

July
Geneva Conference for Temporary Asylum

Geneva Conference for temporary asylum to resettlement in a third country. This was done to control the amount of boat people by having direct, legal departures from Vietnam.

Bất chấp điều kiện sống không khấp, việc rời khỏi Việt Nam bị chính phủ coi là một hành động bất hợp pháp. Không từ bỏ hy vọng, người dân

1988

March
Amerasian Homecoming Act
The Amerasian Homecoming Act was an Act of Congress giving preferential immigration status to children fathered by a U.S. citizen in Vietnam.

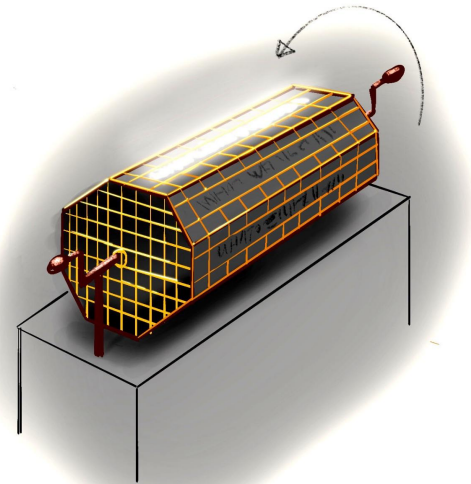
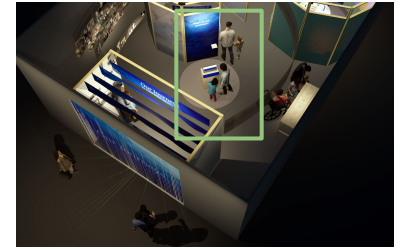
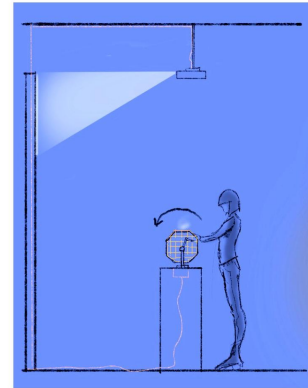
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01 Entry: Question Lottery



Spin the drum to reveal difficult questions refugees must face

- What do you leave behind?
- What can you carry?
- Who do you leave behind?
- Who do you take with you?
- When do you leave?
- Where do you go?
- Why stay?
- Why leave?
- When will you return?
- What will you forget?
- Who will you tell your story?



02 Endurance & Flight: Movement

02 ENDURANCE & FLIGHT

[Human Drama]

Becoming a refugee and the fragility of the “human privileges” of home, family and nation.

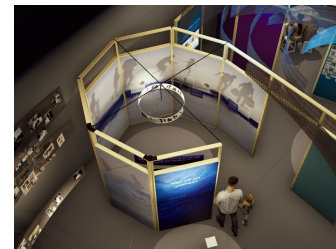


Single color

Moving scapes



02 Endurance & Flight: Components




Listen to audio loop of 3 narrators. Activate QR code to access full content.



View rotating silhouettes of people moving across the landscape and read additional story excerpts.

02 Endurance & Flight: Components



Nhung & Tinh Trinh

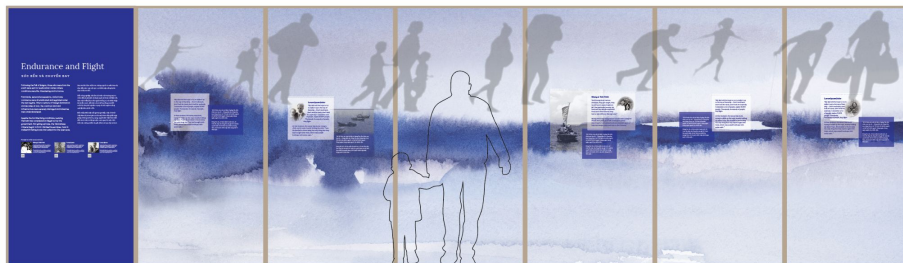
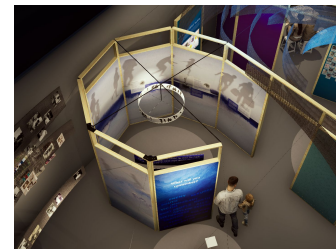
"And during those various attempts, they got caught, they would have to spend nights in jail. One particular journey, my mom and my dad got separated from each other because they had to take different fishing boats."

Nhung Trinh was imprisoned in re-education camp for almost four years, and Tinh Trinh spent years searching for her husband and coordinated a plan to help him escape camp and then to flee Vietnam."

"Bố tôi bảo các cậu bé hãy cố gắng lên đến đỉnh con tàu đó ... Đừng nhìn lại, đừng tìm mẹ, đừng tìm ai cả. Tôi nhớ rất nhiều người, có thể là 10.000 người. Hàng ngàn, hàng ngàn người, họ chiến đấu.

Đứng lúc đó, cô bảo mẫu bị mắc kẹt, cố trèo lên dẫy, ôm lỏng lẻo em gái tôi. Anh ấy quyết định vứt bỏ thứ duy nhất họ mang theo, đó là một chiếc cặp nhỏ đựng một ít tiền mặt..."

Hear and Read dramatic moments of decision-making and flight



Read a "Thank you card" that expresses gratitude to the narrators for the gift of sharing their stories

03 Adaptation & Identity: Coalescence

03 ADAPTATION & IDENTITY

[Tangible Intangibles]

Fragmented memories ripple
+ weave their way into the
next generation's
consciousness.

**What was lost may be
found anew.**



Layered colors

Object totems

Gathering threads



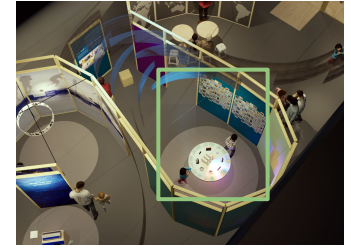
Adaptation and Identity

TRUCK BİR KİŞİ VEYA BİR GRUPTUR

Adaptation and identity are two concepts that are closely linked. Adaptation is the process of adjusting to a new environment, while identity is the sense of self. In a multicultural society, individuals may face challenges in adapting to a new culture while maintaining their own identity. This exhibit explores the experiences of immigrants and how they navigate these challenges.

Adaptation and identity are not mutually exclusive. Many individuals find ways to integrate their original culture with the new one, creating a unique hybrid identity. This process can be a source of strength and resilience, allowing individuals to thrive in a diverse environment.

03 Adaptation & Identity: Components



Hear Voices of Vietnamese Diaspora

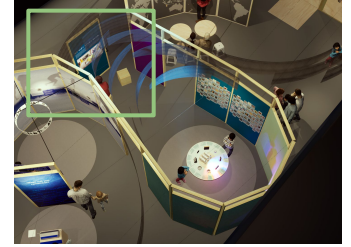
Touch and rotate object totem color wheel

View submitted photos & stories connected to meaningful objects

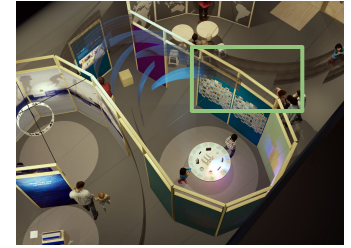
03 Adaptation & Identity: Components



Watch VBP Story Slam videos



03 Adaptation & Identity: Magnetic Poetry Wall

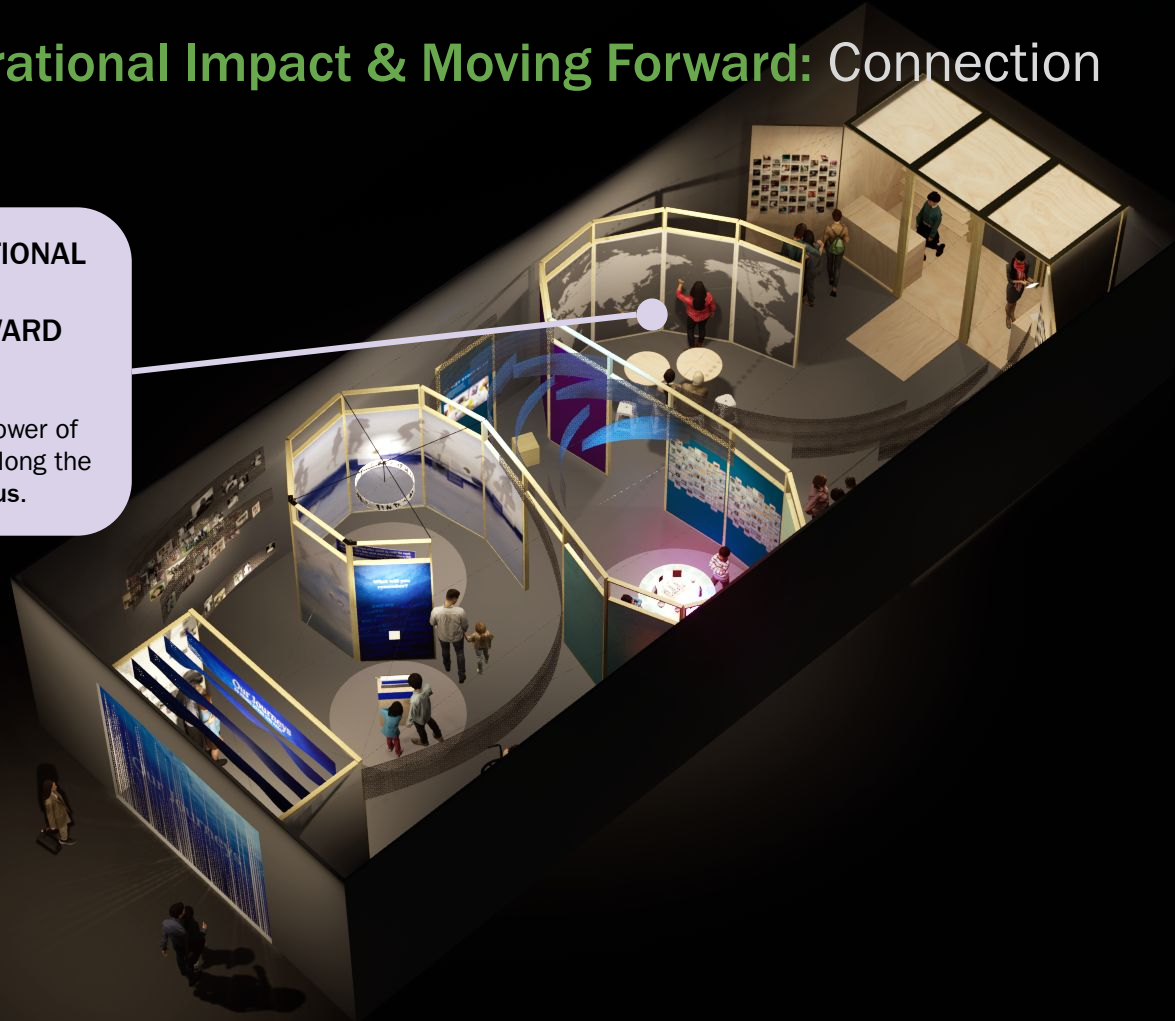


Create a “story-poem” with a magnetic bi-lingual word/phrase cloud.
Take a selfie with your #poem/message

04 Intergenerational Impact & Moving Forward: Connection

04 INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT & MOVING FORWARD [Throughlines]

Journeys and the power of
human connection along the
way **transform** us.



Multicolored

Journey Map

Weaving threads

Intergenerational Impact and Moving Forward

Tác động giữa các thế hệ và tiến về phía trước

Đến thăm và tham gia vào các hoạt động tương tác để khám phá những thách thức và cơ hội mà các thế hệ khác nhau đang đối mặt. Chúng ta có thể cùng nhau xây dựng một tương lai bền vững và thịnh vượng cho tất cả mọi người.

Workshop area with a wooden counter holding various colored threads and spools, including purple, teal, yellow, and blue. A small green box sits on a table in front of the counter.



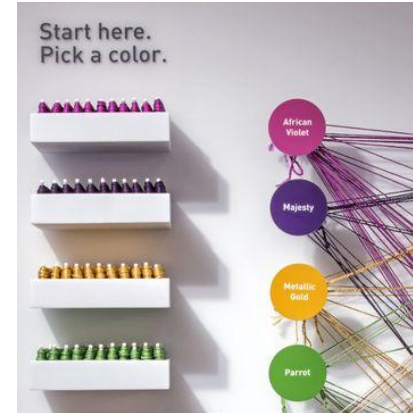
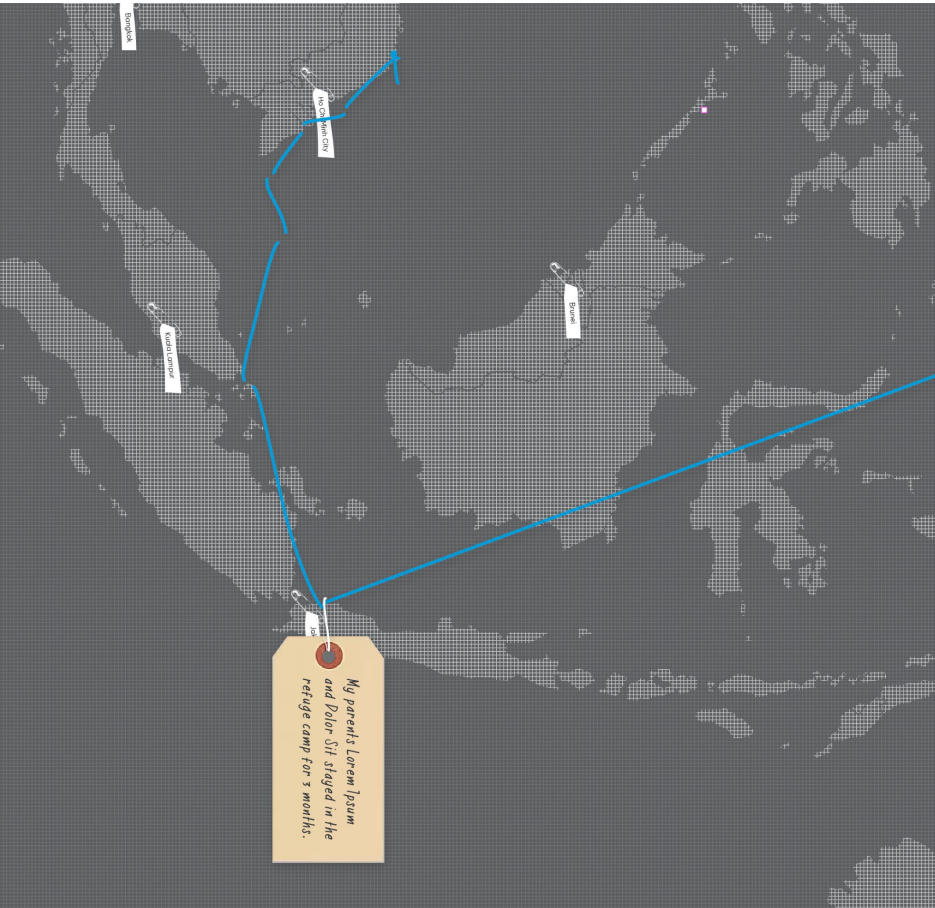
04 Intergenerational Impact & Moving Forward: Components



I always wanted to know....
I've tried to imagine....
I never want to forget....
I wanted to but couldn't forget....
The most difficult decision I've made was....
The easiest decision I've made was....
I found refuge in....

Begin a conversation using prompt cards

04 Intergenerational Impact & Moving Forward: Journey Map



**Pin and connect the points on a journey map.
Write and attach your story.**

05 Exit / “Gift” Shop: Revelation

05 EXIT / “GIFT” SHOP

[Gifting Forward]

On this traveling exhibit’s journey, visitors are invited to “gift” a story to our collective memory.



Vietnamese & English audio

“Worth a Thousand Words”
photo collage

Photo-realistic



05 Exit / "Gift" Shop: Components



See submitted photo stories and hear (Vietnamese+English) captions

Visit the Gift Shop

Gift a photo & story-caption at the laptop station

Write a thank you (post)card

05 Exit / "Gift" Shop: Donor Wall



OPTIONS: 1. Vertical, attached to the Gift Shop door / 2. Horizontal, on gallery wall / 3. Freestanding, hinged two vertical panels