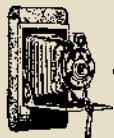


Bugs Bunny



THE KID HOLDING the Bugs Bunny backpack could be me, 50 years earlier. He doesn't look too happy: his expression (scowl, uncertainty, defiance, ambivalence?) is made even more poignant or absurd by the buck-toothed cartoon he clutches.

Does the mother have any inkling of the powers and implications of the bunny? Has anything prepared her for the onslaught of culture that will distance her from her children? Will she herself acclimate or remain a social anomaly? Will she understand that Disney is not a theme park but that America itself is the theme park, and we are all just customers?

Perhaps I'm reading too much into this. But as the only non-immigrant in my family—the only one not from a tiny village in China—born and raised as a Minnesotan, I see that backpack as symbolizing the diasporic gulf of understanding that will never be quite bridged but will impact this boy's every future relationship, for the wabbit is wascally in his seductiveness.

My mother never learned to speak English and an essential part of her never left that village, while I have yet to make the sojourn to the ancestral home. My mom made me pray every Chinese New Year to Buddha (standing behind me, clasping my hands together in hers while I repeated the Chinese words of which I had little comprehension), but it was really Jesus Christ Superstar that



Wing Young Huie, The Springs, California, 2007

(COURTESY THE ARTIST)



Youa Moua Mai, Residents of Frogtown, St. Paul (MHS COLLECTIONS)

became my cultural touchstone. And ultimately, white pop culture became my religion.

Several years ago, in an area called The Springs (adjacent to wine-rich Sonoma in California), I took a photograph of a father and his two adult sons—all migrant workers—sitting on a bed in a small, low-rent apartment they shared with a dozen other men who also worked in the wine fields. Each is holding a photo of loved ones back in Mexico. Behind them on a wall is one lonely indulgence—a poster of Disneyland, in front of which a votive candle was carefully placed.

Through an interpreter I asked why, of all things, are Mickey and Minnie placed in such reverence? The answer, of course, was that when they were in Mexico their dream was one day to visit the home of the famous mouse. Only then would they know they had truly arrived. They were still waiting.

—Wing Young Huie

Wing Young Huie's many photographic projects document the dizzying socioeconomic and cultural realities of American society, much of it centered on the urban cores of his home state of Minnesota. His public installations—Frogtown (1995), Lake Street USA (2000) and The University Avenue Project (2010)—transformed major Twin Cities' thoroughfares into epic photo galleries, reflecting the everyday lives of thousands of citizens in the midst of some of the most diverse concentrations of international immigrants in the country.

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