

# Midway Contemporary Art

**Pao Houa Her**

*My grandfather turned into a tiger*

**February 10 – April 7, 2018**

Pao Houa Her's exhibition at Midway, *My grandfather turned into a tiger*, is comprised of a new series of black and white, color, and lenticular photographs conceived as an installation. Her uses images taken in Minneapolis/St Paul and in Laos, which she has visited several times in recent years. The title of the exhibition arises from family lore about her grandfather's death during the Vietnam war. After dreaming of her husband leaving her once more the night before she was informed of his death, Her's grandmother mourned him, telling the universe about their life together; the next morning she found a dead boar on her doorstep. There were sightings of a tiger haunting the village, and every so often the neighbors' livestock would be left on her doorstep. This story about shapeshifting alludes to the themes of mythology and illusion found throughout the work.

Her's previous work has largely focused on documentary photography, studio portraiture, and still life. In this newest series, she moves fluidly between many different photographic genres. The works reflect Her's interest in photo manipulation and the idea of the constructed image. She makes slight adjustments — stitching, doubling, and mirroring — or breaks the images apart to create a three-dimensional effect in the lenticulars. She also turns her camera on the notion of constructed environments, such as studio sets or conservatories.

Her mixes and combines images that range from a Laos plain littered with ancient large stone jars associated with burial sites and portraits of elderly men and women to empty studio backdrops and kitsch plastic flowers. The images live together but can function separately; they combine to form part of the Hmong American narrative. Like any history, this larger story is not based on a single straightforward account. Her's interest in folkloric narrative aligns with her views of photography: "I don't think of photography as just memory. For me photography is never real. It's fiction. Photography is selected memory."

Pao Houa Her was born in Laos in 1982. She received an MFA in Photography from Yale University in 2012 and attended the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. She has had solo exhibitions at Bockley Gallery; Minneapolis Institute of Art; the Eli and Edyth Broad Art Museum, East Lansing MI; and Bindery Projects, St. Paul. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston; MAIIAM, Chiang Mai, Thailand; SA SA BASSAC, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Telemark Art Center, Skien, Norway; the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; and Camera Club of New York, New York City. She is represented by Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis, and lives and works in the Twin Cities.