Global Youth Exchange (GYE) Program and Virtual Exhibit
Minneapolis Institute of Art | May 2020

GYE participants visited Ananya Dance Theater in March 2020, where they took part in a movement workshop and learned about local Southeast Asian performance artists.

What is the Global Youth Exchange?

The Global Youth Exchange (GYE) Program was envisioned as a way for Mia to foster greater cultural understanding among ten young people in Minnesota (ages 14–18) and ten young people in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The program, which ran from January through May 2020, was designed to offer an art-based curriculum and travel experience and then culminate in a group exhibition.
GYE has been an opportunity for young participants to expand their global perspectives and develop critical-thinking skills and self-confidence through the exploration of the following themes: U.S. and Vietnamese History and Culture, Art and Storytelling, Identity and Narrative, and Empathy and Perspective.

Sadly, due to the coronavirus pandemic, GYE participants were not able to travel to Vietnam, host Vietnam-based youth in Minnesota, or have an in-person art exhibition at Mia. Instead, GYE participants will have the opportunity in the coming year to take Southeast Asian language and cultural workshops through the Southeast Asian Diaspora Project. GYE art-making sessions shifted to virtual sessions after March 15, 2020. GYE participants have put together a virtual exhibition, below, to highlight their experiences, artwork, and stories.

**Generous support for this program is provided by the Gale Family Endowment.**

**Global Youth Exchange Partners**

![Mia](image1.png) ![SEAD](image2.png) ![Renaissance](image3.png)

GYE themes and curriculum have been developed in collaboration with Mia’s project partners the SEAD Project and Renaissance International School Saigon. The GYE Virtual Exhibition highlights the experiences and journey of the ten Minnesota-based
GYE participants and shares how they have connected with the Vietnam-based GYE participants throughout the process.

**GYE Virtual Exhibition: Our Journey: Co-curated by GYE Participants and Program Leads**

*The beginning of our GYE journey: GYE participants gathered at the youth and guardian orientation session, December 2019.*
In our GYE journey, we read the book *Planting SEADS: Southeast Asian Diaspora Stories*, edited by Chanida Phaengdara Potter, M. K. Nguyen, Narate Keys, and Pheng Thao. We were able to use this text as a tool to learn more about Southeast Asian diaspora communities and their stories and reflect on our own identities and stories.

We journaled and reflected on the following questions:

- What are some similarities and differences you notice in the histories and experiences of Southeast Asian nations and ethnic groups?
- If you could meet one of the storytellers, whom would you want to meet and why?
- In reading these real-life stories about trauma and healing, what have you learned? How do you find healing on your own and/or with your family?
“After reading the stories and learning more in depth about people and their journeys within their culture, identity, and homeland, it made me more open to learning about others and their stories by connecting perspectives and sharing our own personal narratives.” —Mackenzie

“Reading through *Planting SEADS* allowed a lot of time for us students to explore the individual stories, personalities, and experiences of various survivors in the Southeast Asian diaspora, and, through reading and thinking about them, we could better understand art in the form of the human life, in its pain, in its grief, and in its continuation. It deepened the culture of the location we were exploring, and I found it powerful for us to be able to experience it.” —Maxwell

“After getting the chance to read and learn the stories in the SEADS book, it has helped me by giving me a better glimpse of traumas people have faced. I was able to read some of the primary-sources stories that they’ve faced, and it really took a toll on how I viewed survivors in the Southeast Asian diaspora. These survivors didn’t just explain their stories but they went in depth with how they were left with pains, scars, wounds, etc. This book has taught me that all traumas come with all sorts of different and unique stories. It got them to where they are now.” —Christina

“The stories in the SEAD book were a huge contribution to my better understanding of SEA experiences of tragedies, wars, and colonization. After reading various stories, I
was reminded that not all Southeast Asians went through similar experiences.”

—Nouchi

“Through reading the SEADS book, I was able to understand the context of the people and their feelings and experiences. The stories in the book represented real people and not just statistics. The story also brought light to the importance of resilience. And how each story is significant and unique in its own right, but the stories are still quilted together through culture.” —Asharia

“Reading this book I learned that sharing stories about a tragic past is an important way that leads to healing. As I read through the book I was faced with knowledge that was kept hidden and was not told.” —Touger
What do we already know about history and culture in Vietnam and the United States? What do we remember? What have we learned? Whose stories are we missing?

In January 2020, we participated in a workshop with Saengmany Ratsabout of the University of Minnesota’s Immigration History Research Center (front row, right), where we learned about Southeast Asian (SEA) history and the SEA diaspora community.

Beginning Our Journey: Here and There

In workshops with local scholars from the University of Minnesota and the Southeast Asian Diaspora Project, we learned about SEA history that was often left out of American textbooks. We also explored the power of storytelling through art-making.

“I personally thought it was so interesting, educational, and mind blowing because in my eleven years of school I can’t remember this information being shared. It helped me
connect with other things that have happened in history and follow patterns and decisions by the United States.” —Inayah

“Southeast Asian history, specifically, is often left untouched by most American scholars: Was it because of the mistakes made and shadows of guilt? Is it an issue of pride and an omission based on shame? Or is there a reason as to why there was erasure? From pieces of history that both SEAD and Saengmany were able to share, it gave substance to the Southeast Asian experience.” —Maxwell
Molly and Sachan engage in a “memory mapping” exercise, which highlights the SEA historical timeline.

Inayah and Molly enjoyed Vietnamese banh mi from Minneapolis restaurant Jasmine Deli, during a GYE session lunch break in February 2020.
What is the story we want to tell through our art? How can we express our stories through art?

In early February 2020, artist Anh-Hoa Nguyen (left) led us through an art-making workshop focused on values, symbols, and astrology.

Nouchi worked on her hanging sculpture in the constellation art-making workshop.
Sachan created a hanging sculpture in Anh-Hoa Nguyen’s art-making workshop.

Exploring identity and narrative: what are the communities, histories, lived experiences, and heritages that make up who we are?
In late February 2020, we participated in an art-making workshop with local artist and activist Akiko Ostlund (back row, fourth from left), which focused on critical thinking and narrative building.

“It was a lot of fun diving into the art workshops and being guided through making art but also being supported and listened to by artists in context of putting our own personal spin or art on their ideas. I was reminded constantly to ‘just do it’ and put my ideas on paper and actually bring them to life, which inspired me even in my own artwork process” —Inayah

“I think exploring the different mediums of art was really beneficial; we were able to see forms of self-expression for individual intents and purposes. Through art, from mobiles to collages to drawings or poetry, you are able to honor a person, fight a society, persuade a community, teach others on an overlooked subject. You do it all through the expression of yourself. It’s a language told through images, and we explored many ways of it.” —Maxwell

“What I was able to take away from these workshops was that art is anything creative that could explain/express how you’re feeling, I was able to learn that not all art needs to have a description; just the image itself can hold up so many different stories! These workshops have helped me view other people’s art in different ways than before.” —Christina
“The workshops that involved creating art helped me express my thoughts and improve my skills in storytelling the message behind my art.” —Nouchi

“Art is essential to storytelling. It is all about perspective, even for some of us who are more right brained, or claim they are not artistic. Art is for everyone.” —Asharia

“What I took away from the workshops is that art is shaped by perspective and it allows you to share your own perspective but also leave room for the audience to perceive it as they choose. I learned how to focus on the narrative I am trying to tell and how to express myself through art.” —Sachan
Empathy and Perspective: How do we focus on humans? How do we feel for, connect with, and understand one another?

In March 2020, we participated in a workshop with the University of Minnesota’s Vietnamese Student Association of Minnesota (VSAM), where we learned about Vietnamese customs, traditions, and manners.
Artistic associate and dancer at Ananya Dance Theatre Kealoha (Kea) Ferreira led us in a movement workshop. She asked us to answer the question “Where are you from?” using only our body movements.
Journaling and Sketching

Journal Entry and Reflection by Molly

“The questions that were given alongside the reading were: Which storyteller would we want to meet, what are the differences between the groups and experiences, what are the differences between us and a peer, and how can we better communicate those differences? I chose to present this journal entry because I really liked the questions and what they led me to think about. I got to reflect on how these things relate to my own life and culture, and think about the impact of religion in every culture. It is also one of the few prompts that I sketched for instead of just writing. Along with that, I also wrote some things in Hmong so it felt more personal.”
Journal Entry and Reflection by Christina

“One page that I'd like to share is actually the very first page I wrote on. Not only did I remember it bringing me so much joy, but I was determined (still am!) to get the chance to learn more in depth about Southeast Asian history. It was the best thing ever, and it has changed my perspective! And, with all that, it brings me back to these questions again: What is Mia? Who is Mia? To be so awesome and kind to give kids these amazing opportunities!

Journal Entry and Reflection by Asharia

“Our first art project was based on powerful words that connect with our past, present, and future. We were supposed to make a mural based on one of the words on the list, and the word my group chose was ‘power.’ When coming up with concepts, I drew a baby with a spoon in its mouth, based on the expression, ‘Born with a silver spoon in his mouth.’ This kind of wealth, which is often associated with power, is often kept in the family, meaning this person never had to work for the payoff.

“The bib reads ‘spoiled as milk,’ showing how power can affect the minds of those who have it, and how easily someone can take advantage of it, no matter what age.”
Journal Entry and Reflection by Nouchi

“This journal entry is a rough draft of one of my projects with another GYE youth participant. The focus of this project was to tell a story about an issue that we wanted to address. Me and my partner focused on the stereotypes of women in our culture. This is one of my favorite journal entries because I loved how I could connect with my culture and also address common issues that were still occurring. The process of making this draft was self-reflecting. There were many ways I could relate to it, from suffering gender stereotypes to rebelling against those stereotypes to become who I truly am.”

Journal Entry and Reflection by Maxwell

“I chose this journal entry because it was one of my first. Molly and I went around [the museum] and found this big Chinese portrait of a hundred children playing, the common medium being nature. We connect to it, the children, through their laughter and our shared memories of playing, of hanging on the thin limbs of trees. I think this specific entry helped open my mind for this program and, while it’s not unique or special or
well-written, the idea of the art and our interpretation of it is something that everyone carries when they are lonely.”

Journal Entry and Reflection by Mackenzie

“These are my rough sketches and brainstorming. We had to create an art piece based on different themes such as diaspora, culture, power, and so on.”

Journal Entry and Reflection by Janet

“I wanted to share this reflection because it shows how much I’ve grown since the beginning of the program. I was afraid and nervous about what I could bring to the group, but things have gone better than I could ever wish for.”
Journal Entry and Reflection by Inayah

“I started getting really into pen art and lines and volume.” —Inayah

Journal Entry and Reflection by Touger

“I drew this on February 7, 2020. The reason why I picked this drawing is because the cherry blossoms are my favorite tree, although I have never seen one. Cherry blossom trees are meaningful to me because they mean passion, peace, beauty.”
**Journal Entry and Reflection by Sachan**

“I chose this page because I felt like it was more interesting to look at than just answers to questions or unrelated sketches, and I thought that it showed what we’ve been doing in the program. For me, that means understanding the story I want to tell and finding a way to portray that through art. This page shows both what I was trying to show in the collage and how I was going to try to send that message.”

**Sharing Vietnamese Culture**

Student participants from Renaissance International School Saigon (RISS) created the following videos to share with us in preparation for international travel to each other’s countries and societies.

**How to cross a Vietnamese street**

[Vietnamese Cultural Do’s and Don’ts](#)

[Vietnamese Cultural Do’s and Don’ts #2](#)
Sharing American Culture

We created the following projects for our youth partners at RISS. We wanted to share our interpretations of American culture.

**Greeting to Vietnam-based youth**

**American Culture**

![American Culture Collage by Nouchi](image-url)
Reflections on Our Change of Plans: COVID-19

“When hearing the news of our plans and having to do our sessions virtually, it was difficult for me to adjust to it. Especially because we are all in our homes and practicing social distance, it’s hard to have motivation and do things at a quicker pace. As of now, my adjustments to doing everything virtually are going all right, but I would rather meet my peers soon and hopefully be able to explore Vietnam.” —Mackenzie

“After hearing about different institutions closing because of the virus, I was disappointed to hear that our Vietnam trip had been canceled. I didn’t know what procedures we would take next. Luckily, we were all still able to keep in touch and work with each other remotely. (Who ever said technology is a bad thing?) We even got to meet our Vietnam-based students. It’s been great being able to reach out to everyone.” —Asharia

“The announcement about our Vietnam trip being postponed due to COVID-19 was heartbreaking. Me and the others were so excited to explore the Vietnam culture and meet our Vietnam-based peers. However, we didn’t let COVID-19 stop us! We video chatted and connected with each other through social media. Although it is devastating to not meet in person with my peers, I am thankful that my peers are being active in the video chats.” —Nouchi
“To hear the news of our trip getting postponed was very saddening. Me and my group members were all waiting so long for that day. However, it didn’t stop us from staying in touch and communicating about different plans coming our way! I am excited every time we communicate again and just getting the chance to hear from everybody else!”

—Christina

**Shifting to Virtual Sessions and Art-making at Home**

A screenshot from our first virtual session, meeting Vietnam-based youth from Renaissance International School of Saigon.

“The video chat with the Renaissance youth was one of the best and most exciting video chats I ever had in my life.” —Nouchi

“We have heard so much about them, so it was exhilarating to be able to actually meet them and get to know them.” —Asharia
I Am From … Poems

By Nouchi

I am from a family of 9

11 if you count the dogs

I am from a childhood filled with sorrows and joy

Day goes by fast when I’m outside of the house

Running with kids I never met before

I am from a mother who cares for her young ones

Money spent for the taste of sweetness and happiness

I am from a father who is overprotective

Constantly asking about my whereabouts and health

I am from a generation that struggles to keep my native culture and traditions alive

from gender stereotype to assimilation

I lost a part of me that should have been implanted in me from birth

I am from failure is a lesson

No one is perfect

I am from ashes

Spreading my wings high

Soaring for the impossible

I am from “fear is beatable”

Challenging myself to go beyond my fears

I am from a soul that expands her self-acceptance
By Asharia

I am from; localization, causing me frustration, confused in my nation

I am from; but nowhere else to go, so I’ll stay here, it’s all that I know.

I am from; pretend content, I am hell bent, on loving the land from where I have been sent.

I am from; the love art, that’s where I start, and the music seeps into my brain, continuing all through my veins. This feeling cannot be tamed. And with every paint stroke relieved a choke and a pencil pressed against paper, every lead curve makes me feel safer. Arts not meant to be held, it’s meant to be shared, I have to loosen my grip, and shift my cares.

I am from; my thoughts everywhere, no time to focus, my thoughts in the air

I am from; daydreams, they take control of me, and take up all my time, to a lesser degree.

I am from; somethings will never be written, they will remain in the brain that they live in

I am from; an uncemented tree, that branches out, beyond belief. But the leaves that are closest to me, are the ones I find the most relief. They are my favorite reflection to see. And so refreshing,
feelings as deep as the sea. The only faces that I want to see.
I am from; maybe temptation, the sensation, of having power.
I am from; owning every hour, like time is mine but it’s not really ours.
I am from; Time will leave me behind, and it’s something I still yearn to find, and the clock will be a visual remind, it’s just one way that I’m defined.

By Janet
I am from a fine point sharpie
From post it notes and pencils
I am from the middle of nowhere, empty and quiet, but smells of life
I am from the vast waters, full of secrets, beauty, fear, and experiences
I’m from 30 dishes and 18 clans
But specifically, from Thaos and Xions
I’m from stubborn, but well meant words
And difficult, but ambitious minds
From the faults that hold me back and hopes that keep me going
I’m from two worlds, one I am blinded of and one I’ve been kept from
I’m from the room that desperately awaited the morning,
meals that take 3 ingredients but also 3 hours,
and a language rewritten for nationless fighters
From the barrier-breaking marriage within a home of the old world,
The grant to live nine lives, and the boxes that bear more years than I have
I am from more than a fine point sharpie, post it notes, and pencils

By Mackenzie
I am from books
From pencil to paper
I am from the picture frame
gentle, alive, and filled with sounds of laughter
I am from baby’s breath
Something my grandma cherished as if it were her own child
I’m from sewing and ghost stories
From my mom teaching me how to stitch to my dad telling about his life as a kid
I’m from the many homes I’ve lived in and the scent of burning joss paper
I’m from the strands of a special bracelet to protect me from bad omen
From the time my grandpa fought in a war to my parents leaving their homeland for a better future
Holding the journey of who I am

By Molly
I am from calloused hands that carry our family, hardships, and breaks through the barriers
I am from Saturday mornings at the farmers market with strangers who are somehow still the closest family we knew

I am from boiled and chicken that fed our bodies and souls and gave us the strength to run

I am from the music from our fathers that reminds us where our hearts lay

I am from the needles through the cloth that binds our past and future

I am from eyes that continue to watch even if the body is no longer present

I am from the music of flutes and the banging of the drum that keeps our spirits alive

I am from the ancestors that guide us through the dark forests and bring us lights

I am from our mother tongue that screams stories of bravery and whispers opportunities of change

I am from our people that have the world in our hands

By Touger

I am from crops that my mom and dad work months for

I am from a family that smile when hard time come so the little ones won't worry

I am from the tragic war that my ancestors were forced to face

I am from the caring mother and father that has a hard time showing their love

I am from, Yellow River where my ancestors built their house near there although I was born in America

I am from gratitude that the earth was here to let me breathe its air and live on its land

I am from what they call,
“The Land Of Opportunities”

I am from the lost knowledge of my culture waiting for it to be found

I am from couches that I sat on everyday watching Wild Kratts when I was little

I am from papers that was assigned to me so I wouldn’t forget what I learn

I am from books that store knowledge of my culture

By Christina

I am from a father who no longer knows how to give respect

I am from a father who is no longer considerate of his words

I am from a father who has made me stay up countless nights in my thoughts

I am from a father who used to be lovable

I am from a father who has worked at a job he dislike to be able to support his family

I am from a father who used to be so well known for his generosity

I am from a father who’s experienced lots of loss and forced himself to stay strong or it’s a sign of weakness

I am from a brave father who has came a long way

I am a daughter who has built a tight bond with a father that now has changed, yet still holds the same love

I am once called a daddy's girl.
What We Learned from the GYE Journey

“Throughout this journey, I have gained lots of knowledge on not just my culture but others as well. Being able to work as a diverse group has made it possible to connect more on how others view things and learn from each other. It has definitely made me more open-minded on global perspectives, etc.” —Christina

“Through the GYE program, I was able to not only connect with my native culture, but also learn about other cultures. I was able to expand my global perspective and address social/cultural issues and my identity through many forms of art”. —Nouchi

“During my time in the GYE program I have been inspired countless times; I have felt a sense of connectedness and vulnerability among strangers that I now consider peers/friends. My eyes and ears have been opened up some more, and my motivation to create meaningful art from on the stage or in a discussion has grown. Everyone has a story to tell and none of them are the same and opening up to hearing other’s lived experiences has helped me live in mine. I think that’s what the world needs—more listening.” —Inayah

“In the GYE program, I learned a lot about exploring narrative, and I was able to explore my own narrative and also that of other cultures. Having a lot of different perspectives in the group helped me connect, expand my thinking, and ask questions.” —Sachan
“I got the ability to focus on the importance of narrative when it comes to learning about others and their culture. Having the opportunity to exchange our stories with one another is so essential when expanding our thinking. I got the chance to learn about the Southeast Asian diaspora, where I otherwise never got the opportunity. I got the chance to expand my knowledge. I feel like there is always an opportunity to learn more, and I’m a little more closed off than I may think. I should make more of an effort on continuing to expand.” —Asharia

“During my time in the program, I’ve gotten to express myself through art, learn the history about different cultures/societies, and gain an open perspective on the world. It’s also made me feel more connected with others as we share our strengths and weaknesses.” —Mackenzie

“Being a part of GYE has given me opportunities to learn about identity and narrative and how that plays into my growth and experience as a Hmong woman living in America. It has allowed me to be vulnerable and converse on more intense topics, especially around Southeast Asians and just social issues in general. Once we were able to get into these conversations, we could take what we’ve learned from one another and create art that reflects our own personal narratives and the messages we want to bring to light.” —Molly
“I learned a lot from being a part of the GYE Program, and I’m very honored to have been able to learn alongside peers who are passionate in our experience. Through the program leads, Wennicha and Crystal, the many guests we had gotten to meet, and the content to which we were exposed, I was able to explore much deeper about art for art’s sake: the expression of the human heart.” —Maxwell

“During the program I learned about other race’s identities and cultures. The Global Youth Exchange has given me so many opportunities to meet such amazing people who would come in and tell us stories of how they came into the U.S and many other activities. As I continue with this program to the end, I learn about diaspora, history that was barely taught to me, perspective, and much more. This program has opened my eyes to see the world in a whole new light” —Touger

Jumping for joy after the second GYE session at Mia.

Thank you for joining us on our GYE journey!