1975: Anida Yoeu Ali, Amy Lee Sanford and LinDa Saphan
Curated by Chương-Đài Vô. Long Beach City College Art Gallery, Long Beach CA, USA, 26 March–3 May 2014

The folds of faded paper are as fragile and transparent as the memories of immigrant and refugee childhoods conjured by the intimate sound of lightly uncrinkling parchment of the thinnest magnitude. The smells of a faintly familiar but far-gone home emanate from each gesture of unwrapping, the shaky handwritten and encased “par avion” occasionally misspelled or misshapen on the envelope due to the relative’s French colonial (mis)education or tear-stained smear. The affective jumble of elation, sadness and dread rumbles in one’s stomach in anticipation of what news would be found once flattened. I had kept this uncharacteristic sentimentality to myself while fixated on Amy Lee Sanford’s Unfolding Series (2013) (fig. 1), until Thai American artist Nuttaphol Ma showed me his own goosebumps.

As a motley assortment of Southeast Asian diasporic arts enthusiasts gathered for a private curatorial tour, we loitered about and remarked fondly and nostalgically on the stylized communal and architecturally miniaturized mosquito netting construction in Anida Yoeu Ali’s mixed-media single-channel

FIGURE 1  Amy Lee Sanford’s Unfolding Series (2013)
video installation piece, *Living Camp* (2013), until we fell numb and dumb from seeing the full range of images of the twenty minute visual projection. Representative of the impact of the exhibition as a whole, the global political horror and historical violence of US-Cambodia/Southeast Asia relations serves as one—but only one—of the apparently embryonic influences for this truly collaborative exhibition between a purposeful curator and innovative, dynamic artists. Curator Chương-Dài Võ’s investments focus on how war, migration, and global capital affect aesthetic cultural production and the politics of representation. Featuring the works of Anida Yoeu Ali, Amy Lee Sanford, and LinDa Saphan, the group exhibition *1975* premiered at Topaz Arts in New York City, 27 April–26 May 2013 before arriving at Long Beach City College Art Gallery. Each venue attracted diverse audiences from the urban art scene in NYC to the large Asian diasporic, multiracial, and panethnic refugee populations in Long Beach, California.

The year 1975 is often memorialized and rhetoricized as the end of one large theatrical scene of the Cold War, and specifically the end of the staged Vietnam War. Such simplistic mainstream formulations render invisible and inaudible the countless other players victimized and decentered by that arena of militarism, such as the Khmer/Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, and Khmu, among others, forced to flee or perish. In fact, 17 April 1975 (rather than 30 April 1975, otherwise known as the “Fall of Saigon”) was the date that the Khmer Rouge seized power and began its genocidal purging of two million Cambodians—one-fifth of the national population—including nearly all artists and intellectuals. This year also marked the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian refugees and migrants to the rest of the world, particularly to the US, France, Canada, Australia, and other parts of Asia and Southeast Asia—essentially the inception of the critical mass of a Southeast Asian diaspora. Indeed, 1975 is a year long overdue for more complex stirrings of the imagination.

This second leg of the group exhibition *1975* (it travels next to Boston in 2015) was held in one of the largest concentrations of Khmer residents outside of Cambodia—Long Beach, California—which boasts its own “Cambodia Town” street signage, community and business centres, and tourist attractions. Ali, who is credited for initiating this collaboration, is a transnational artist and scholar trained in Chicago, whose works in poetry, performance and installation art, political art and video contribute to her collaborative partnership with the independent artist-run media lab Studio Revolt based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her pieces in this exhibition include silk screen prints in addition to her installation, *Living Camp*.

Recently an artist-in-residence at Earthdance and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council as part of the *Season of Cambodia* multi-arts festival in New