

Palimpsest for Generation 1.5

When Y-Dang came to know my work, I had moved away from autobiographical writing and was reinventing myself in Cambodia, my birth country, when it was necessary to take residency outside of America. During this reinvention period, I decided not to make angry work that would mine my family and personal history for material. It was a period during which I wanted to feel free and more experimental in art-making. Making art in Cambodia brought Y-Dang into my life.

Years later, I was pulled to re-perform *Palimpsest* in Boston, but I didn't initially know why. Sometimes, you go with your instincts in the hopes the answers reveal themselves later. Before my performance, I was introduced to a professor who taught Asian American studies at Brandeis University. She happened to be the adviser of a Cambodian American student. This professor, whom I had never met, brought up Y-Dang's scholarship in our conversation. She said that she was just sharing the scholarship of a Cambodian Canadian scholar who worked with memory, literature, refugee studies, and resettlement in the Cambodian diaspora community. She said it was a scholar who had recently passed away. I said, "You mean Y-Dang Troeung? That's my friend!"

Then it made sense to me. Y-Dang. I was re-performing this piece, the only piece in my entire repertoire that uses autobiographical text, for Y-Dang.

**Inscriptions: The actual words written on my back, then wiped away,
with the next text reinscribed**

father school
teacher
Nixon orders
bombings
Climb coconut trees
Khmer Rouge
regime
year zero
father mother secret
dates
enlisted to pick up
cow dung
**3 years 8 months 20
days**
father Abdullah
born
Muslims targeted
brother lived for 7
days
mother Souraya
born
90% artists killed
motorcycle scar
brother Mustafa
born
no food. no breast
milk

**no exact birthdate. I
am a fire sign.**
nightmare of
walking
family trip Refugee
camps
family trip Chicago
family trip first
home
family trip Malaysia
family trip Niagara
Falls
family trip distant
cousins
family trip Hawaii
home somewhere
else
**16-hour labor. Born
a libra.**
factory job \$3.75/hr
grandfather soldier
no one left
unmarked
no end in sight.
no choice but to
leave
gutsy grandmother
house egged

Madonna, Michael
Jackson, & Cindy
Lauper rock my
world
**I witness her last
breath**
9/11 in my bathrobe
reunited after 10
years
father PTSD panic
attacks.
return after 15 years
return after 25 years
return after 30 years
never returned
**site of tourism &
atrocities**
sugar palm trees
Graceland chapel
**married 60 years.
died 61 days apart.**
tribunals begin
First to graduate
with \$70K debt
**we arrive with
nothing but the
clothes on our back**



Fig. 1. Performance still of Anida Yoeu Ali's durational re-performance of *Palimpsest for Generation 1.5* at Brandeis University on April 2, 2024, assisted by Cambodian American student Veronica Vong.

Artwork Label

Anida Yoeu Ali

Palimpsest for Generation 1.5

Performance–Installation, 2024

Materials: 15 feet of hair, silkscreened cloth diapers, ink, cloth rag, wooden stool, white bowl, body of a genocide survivor, a live scribe.

Palimpsest for Generation 1.5 is a performance that includes inscriptions written on the artist's back, which are then washed away. This act of writing, inscribing, and erasing is repeated over and over for up to two hours. The performance involves original text written by the performance artist, a local scribe, and a live audience to witness the act.

Anida Yoeu Ali is an artist, educator, and global agitator whose works span performance, installation, new media, public encounters, and political agitation. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to artmaking, her installation and performance works investigate the artistic, spiritual, and political collisions of a hybrid transnational identity. Ali has performed and exhibited around the world including at the Palais de Tokyo, the Malay Heritage Centre, the Smithsonian, the Shangri-La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture and Design, the Seattle Asian Art Museum, and more.