

Artist Biography & Statement

Both my parents were raised on farms in Nebraska often working someone else's land for shares. During my childhood, my father worked in San Francisco as a foreman in a can factory, and my mother raised four kids and took in other peoples children for income. They chose to live in the city of Palo Alto, because of its public schools' excellent reputation. Palo Alto had a middle-class white side and a black and brown East side; rarely did the two sides meet. Though I had few academic achievements in school, when I graduated high school I felt well equipped to understand the injustice of class and prejudice.

The artwork I created at Foothill Community College in the '60s did not reflect my developing political consciousness except for one ceramic self-portrait. It depicted an image of myself blackened with Napalm burns. On the pedestal beside the work stood my singed draft card. One semester after completing the sculpture, I left for Canada, a country not at war with Viet Nam and without a military draft. At my immigration hearing I was asked, "What is your profession?" I replied, "artist." The border official smiled and stamped my application, "Rejected."

In 1969, with the help of the Hayward State College soccer coach, I entered California State University, East Bay, to study art. Again, one semester short of graduating with a degree, and unmoved by the draft board threats of jail, I dropped out of college anxious to become a practicing artist.

In order to pay for art supplies and necessities, I began a series of what I thought would be temporary factory jobs. At each job I was welcomed to the turbulent shop floor by organizers fluent in Marxist economics and with a serve-the-people art philosophy—all new to me. These dedicated activists were Black Panthers, communist revolutionaries and trade unionists. I soon found myself in the role of shop steward and participated in unionization drives, contract negotiations and strikes. This practical art and class education still guides my work today.

– *Doug Minkler*