Artist Statement from Trinh Mai

The Stars Will Tell Us, 2015, Acrylic, charcoal, coffee, color pencil, gouache, graphite, ink, joss and tissue paper on cotton paper, 25 x 31”.

In 1981, Trần Văn Dũng was hired as the captain of a boat that carried 80 Vietnamese refugees away from the bloodshed of their fallen Sài Gòn. During their three-day, two-night escape across the Gulf of Thailand, their boat was raided four times by Thai pirates. During the fourth attack, the pirates stole Mr. Trần's golden compass. To compensate, one of the pirates wrote on his map the coordinates that would help bring them to land—"You go to 230 degrees". With only these notes on hand, the captain was able to use the constellations overhead to navigate their way to the shores of Songkhla, Thailand, where they arrived in the dark of night.

The stars—these bright lights that shine upon us to offer a deeper understanding of the things that might not be seen otherwise. Like the stars that guided their boat to safety, Mr. Trần's testimony brings light to this historical event, this story of human courage and the arrival of a people. His willingness to share this tumultuous and triumphant experience enlightens what we can now know to be a lived history.

Created upon a replica of the original map that he has carried with him all these years, this piece pays respect to the experiences that Chú Dũng and countless other Vietnamese refugees survived and lived to tell about.

Learn more about the work at trinhmai.com/generations-of-stories