Arriving in Vietnam I had no idea what to expect. Vietnam is like a world on its own, its land and culture, architecture and people are unlike any I’ve witnessed before. When I first arrived in Vietnam, I wanted to truly understand how the people lived and not the glorified tinted version. Consequently, I looked down as many alleyways and peered into as many windows as I possibly could. Once I started looking for authenticity, I found imperfections in beautiful ways. My portfolio is broken into two sections. The first is my search past the façade to find authenticity and the second is what I found.

I named this group of images Passageways. Photographs of alleyways, doorways and windows lead the viewer into some sort of public, sacred, abandoned, or famous place. The message is that you explore all you want, cross through any passage you choose, but the mystery will always be there. The first image was a seemingly endless hallway at the Imperial City in Hue. I saw the hallway that kings walked but I will never truly know what it was like. The fifth image is of a sleeping pregnant lady from a quiet rural village. All I knew was what I saw, what I didn’t know was her life. The second and third images are from different locations at an abandoned aquarium and waterpark called Hồ Thuỷ Tiên. The third image was taken while climbing stairs in a dragon’s throat leading toward his mouth. At the top, the walls were covered in graffiti and the view was amazing, I hope that lookout was open to the public or paying customers when the park was open. Other photographs in this series are of locations explored but it felt like information was held back, like we saw the truth but not the whole truth.

Traveling to a communist country I was afraid that they would hide what they could and show tourists the best. I was correct in that assumption, yet once I explored the area I found that the things they hide are no different than our own struggles here in America. In my second set of photographs I tried to show the struggles along with how beautiful the land and culture were. In my first image, the sun is setting on Ha Long Bay, a natural wonder, but the boats and cruise ships plague the waters. Over the past few years this natural wonder has become polluted with tourists and commercialism, which is a common struggle. My second image can relate to a trash truck in America. Throughout the entire time in Vietnam, I saw maybe two or three trash cans. You couldn’t find them in the public parks, restaurants, stores, markets, museums, or palaces. Therefore when I came across this cart collecting trash, I was so hopeful and happy to know that people still tried to avoid littering. The third image is of a peacefully meditating woman. I assume this location to be her home after passing her multiple times on three different days. It represented the struggle of the homeless, but she stayed peaceful and content. The fourth image is of a Buddhist man cleaning up his Shrine. It was a beautiful and exotic arrangement, but the food had gone bad. He proceeded to haphazardly throw everything into a pile in the street where he lit it on fire and walked away. The final photograph is taken while standing on a bridge during a Buddhist celebration in Hoi An. Behind the camera was a vibrant scene of paper lanterns, people, parties, rowboats, bright lights, and illuminated lotus flowers floating in the water. In front of the camera, on the opposite side of the bridge, it’s darker, less populated, fewer lanterns, and huge construction machinery. Like the first image, this scene clearly represents tourism and commercialism versus reality. Overall, I tried to understand the Vietnamese life and create a portfolio to explain my adventure.