

# WHO WANTS TO REMEMBER A WAR

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## LINES

EXHIBITIONS FROM  
THE DATO' N.  
PARAMESWARAN  
COLLECTION OF  
DRAWINGS AND  
POSTERS FROM  
THE VIETNAM WAR



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**NUS** MUSEUM



Published on the occasion of the exhibition  
**Who Wants to Remember a War;** and  
**Lines**

From June 2016 - 2017

Cover

**Tran Mai**, *Doi Moi (Reconstruction) / Going Forward*, 1991

Printed poster on paper, 78 x 54.5cm

Back cover

**Le Nhung**, *Uncle (Ho Chi Minh) Says "Win", So We Have to Win* (undated)

Printed poster, 88 x 58 cm

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This brochure brings together essays and materials presented in three exhibitions NUS Museum has produced – *Vietnam 1954-1975* (26 June 2015 - 21 April 2016); **Who Wants to Remember a War;** and **Lines** (both 14 June 2016 – ongoing till 2017) – utilising the loan of Dato' N. Parameswaran's Collection of Prints, Posters and Drawings from the Vietnam War. This collection of 1126 works is one of the largest known singular private collection outside Vietnam of artworks from the Vietnam War, and is on loan to the NUS (National University of Singapore) Museum from 17 December 2014 to 31 July 2018, to exhibit, to prospect research and to facilitate teaching.

The Collection comprises 803 drawings in various media (oil, gouache, water colour, pastel, charcoal, pen, ink, and pencil); 139 handpainted posters (including studies); 71 printed posters; 68 woodcuts; 39 photographs; and 6 framed paintings (oil on canvas, water colour on silk and lacquer on wood). Assembled by Ambassador Dato' N Parameswaran during his appointment to Hanoi as Ambassador of Malaysia to Vietnam (1990-1993), the collection was subsequently documented systematically and catalogued over the last five years by Ms Charmian Chelvam.

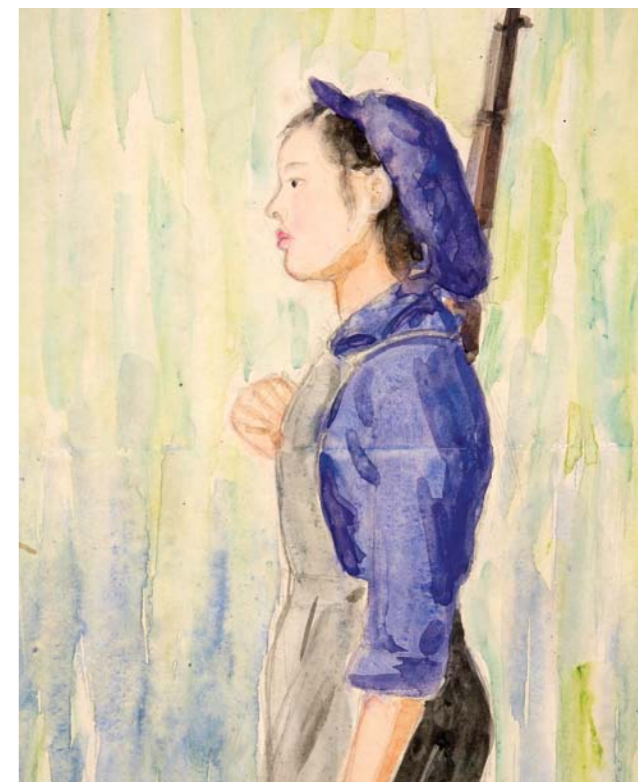
Broad and diverse in its themes, the collection invites further study and research on several subjects: stylistic differences among the artists; a study of the different media (e.g. hand-drawn, woodcuts, lithographic prints); women at war; depiction of battles or of the war; prisoners-of-wars; political personalities; equipment and machinery; propaganda campaigns, and more. The body of artworks represents the Vietnam War from a primarily North Vietnamese perspective, and provides information on the role of art and artists as instruments of war communications and propaganda. The prints and drawings allow us to glimpse into general attempts by artists to mediate between their artistic inclinations and their duty to a common struggle, and stylistically, allow hints into the creative and ideological differences that exists behind united slogans and imageries.

Among the many prospective themes that invite investigations, as a body of historical materials, the collection allows for posits on, and explorations

about, subject matters that include: the complexities of American intervention in Vietnam from 1945 – 1975, and the tensions of North and South Vietnam relations (be it between communists and republicans, or the North Vietnamese Army versus the National Liberation Front in the South.) Area studies also examine Vietnam's alliances with other nations. In the context proposed by the current exhibitions: the historiography of the Vietnam War in relation to economic liberalisation and contemporary geopolitics is also covered. The place of honour conferred to official heroes and unnamed soldiers is also an area of potential research, into the sociology and politics of commemoration.

Textual materials gathered in this brochure include essays/texts produced for the previous exhibition, with a new introduction accompanying the current displays. Selected primary source materials used as exhibition texts are included in the appendix. This combination reflects the museum's cumulative approach in producing new exhibitions, building up on materials previously assembled, offered as a compact resource to prospect and find new channels of inquiry out of these, as we look toward a finale exhibition and catalogue to be produced in 2018.

*Van Giau, Untitled (Civilian Guard), Tinh Tuc (1963)*  
Watercolour on paper, 33.6 x 24.3cm



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## CURATOR’S INTRODUCTION: WHO WANTS TO REMEMBER A WAR / LINES: CHANG YUEH SIANG

In the 1990s, when Dato’ N. Parameswaran was stationed in Hanoi and began acquiring the prints and drawings that now make up the collection on loan to NUS Museum, the economic liberalisation policies of Vietnam and changes brought about by the open market also meant that there were others also in search of similar materials: Sherry Buchanan’s important oral history research among veteran artists quotes the artist Thai Ha exclaiming: “Buy, buy, buy, they come all the way from the US, they buy everything. They come here, and only want to buy drawings with guns.” “They” turn out to be veteran GIs, and the more bloody the object, the more desirable.<sup>1</sup> Dato Parameswaran’s interest in the war-time material stemmed from a deeply rooted interest in the subject of History; Dominic Scriven, the founder of the Dogma Collection, started amassing propaganda art from the Vietnam War period, convinced that “one key part of Vietnam’s cultural heritage – Propaganda Art – was being neglected in the focus on reform and modernization. This crystallized a desire to study, preserve, and share the remarkable character of Vietnam’s political, mobilizing art form; an art form combining revolution, resistance, thought leadership, and aesthetics.”<sup>2</sup>

Anxiety about the loss of collective memory seems to come from parts of the world that have developed

the resources and means of retaining and preserving “heritage.” A nostalgia industry subsists on keeping vestiges of yesteryear alive. Yet during the time of economic and national reconstruction, wartime artists readily parted with drawings made “under fire.”<sup>3</sup> Huynh Phuong Dong reckons that he made around seven thousand drawings during the war period.<sup>4</sup> The numbers of works that were sold and collected during this time numbers also in the thousands. Why were the artists so ready to give up their body of work? Why were these so readily sold to foreign collectors? and apart from the collections of the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi and the Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts, it appears that the foreign collectors met with little competition from the Vietnamese, because “Who wants to remember a war! They were trying to forget the war.”<sup>5</sup> The exhibition takes its title from this question, and explores the dynamics and complexities of memory, heritage, and commemoration.

Not everyone intended to efface the memories of the war. It would be impossible to obliterate collective memory of the traumatic events of the long Vietnam War and to pretend nothing happened. Selected (and perhaps, selective) “memory” serves a purpose: the question is who remembers what, and to what end?

<sup>1</sup> Sherry Buchanan, *Mekong Diaries*, University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp.17-18.  
<sup>2</sup> <http://dogmacollection.com/dominic-scriven-obe> ; last accessed 27 Dec 2016.  
<sup>3</sup> Sherry Buchanan (ed.), *Drawing Under Fire*, London: Asia Ink. 2005.  
<sup>4</sup> Buchanan, *Mekong Diaries*, 2008, p.19  
<sup>5</sup> Exhibition Brochure, “Vietnam 1954 - 1975: War Drawings and Posters From The Ambassador Dato’ N. Parameswaran Collection”, NUS Museum: 2015; p. 14



Interspersed with the artworks produced during the war, arranged thematically, are video clips used as visual “footnotes” to annotate, and discourse with, the contexts behind (i) the production of the artworks, and (ii) the collection (and consumption) of the artworks. How are the events of 1954 - 1975 celebrated by the incumbent victors led by Hanoi?<sup>6</sup> Footage of the marching past of the South Vietnamese Republican flag in the context of Tet Celebrations overseas invite questions of how, and what, the ‘remnants’ of the diasporic Republic of South Vietnam commemorate.<sup>7</sup> What about those who, in fleeing, have no luxury of commemoration (such as French subjects of Indochinese descent repatriated to France after the Geneva Accord of 1954)<sup>8</sup>; or those who stayed, and lived through the war, what do they remember? Cited by Hoenik Kwon in *After the Massacre* (University of California Press, 2006, p.23), “Paul Connerton writes, “[I]f there is such a thing as social memory, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies. Commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative in so far as they are performative...”<sup>9</sup> What are the variations of personal reminiscences and experiences against the public

expectations of ‘remembrances observed,’ especially for soldiers who had fallen fighting for the ‘wrong’ side, the side of the ‘puppet regime’ in the South, who “have no right to the space of the virtuous war dead?”<sup>10</sup> Jakeb Anh Vu’s “Betel Tree”<sup>11</sup> offers us a glimpse into the personal memories of a pair of grandparents who lived through the division of Vietnam, and whose personal reminiscences provide a foil to official lines of commemoration, even though what is in common with official thought is ‘reconstructing and moving on.’

### Lines

Most of the materials in this collection come from artists aligned to the Communist North; the paucity of organised productions and propaganda from the Republican South are interesting to investigate. A second display, “Lines”, is held concurrently to “Who Wants to Remember a War?” Relating the two exhibitions together are a video work showing Dinh Q Le discussing an installation made at the Rice Gallery, “Crossing the Farther Shore,”<sup>12</sup> which introduces an important presence from the Southern perspective.



While the monologue contains reminiscences, the film is also curatorially employed strategically to signpost the importance of the wartime artists’ agency in the production of the artworks.

Many of the artists had some degree of association with the Hanoi Ecole des beaux-arts in the North, and the Gia Dinh School of Applied Arts in the South, either as alumni, or students of those who had received their training in the respective schools. Both institutions were established during French colonial times, and the drawing technique was a fundamental component of French pedagogy. The exhibition of drawings seeks to underscore the formation and the technique that underpinned the prolific output at the frontlines. Clearly the artists’ talents were put to the employ of the official propaganda machinery; yet even as official campaign messages were tightly programmed, even as many of the drawings are meant to be documentary, the 800 numbers of drawings in this collection of slightly more than 1000 works is bound to include renditions that are more liberal in personal expressions. Even as Ho Chi Minh reminds the frontline artists that “you,

in the artistic field, have your own responsibilities – to serve the resistance, the Fatherland and the people, first and foremost the workers, peasants and soldiers,”<sup>13</sup> and while

**“From the commanding officers’ point of view, we, the artists, were part of psychological warfare. As artists we thought differently. I could only paint if I felt inspired. I painted with my instinct, ban nang. If I didn’t feel a strong emotion, I wasn’t able to paint. When I was drawing for a reason, to get a message across to an audience, that was propaganda.”<sup>14</sup>**

In other words, explicitly or not, the artists exercised more of a creative mediation than they probably articulated during the war. The creative and ideological tensions within and among the artists are detectable in the collection, and Lines proposes a starting point for the investigation of the wartime period to unearth the layers of complexities in Vietnamese art history (and its artists) during this time. ♦

<sup>6</sup> “Vietnam marks 40yrs since end of war with parade” *Russia Today*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNdhaxwetVM> ; last accessed 27 Dec 2016

<sup>7</sup> “Little Saigon Tet Parade,” *Vietnam’s Nation Council Television*. <https://youtu.be/zREMJKW9ubk> ; last accessed 27 Dec 2016

<sup>8</sup> “CAFI: Le Quartier Déraciné (CAFI: The Uprooted District),” 2009, Florian Rouliès et Marie Casabonne. <https://youtu.be/9pypYMx3TB0> ; last accessed 27 Dec 2016

<sup>9</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.71.

<sup>10</sup> Kwon, *After the Massacre*, p.21.

<sup>11</sup> *The Betel Tree (Cây Cau)*, Jakeb Anhvu (Director) (2009), <https://youtu.be/ra0l2n8XK4E>; last accessed 27 Dec 2016

<sup>12</sup> “Dinh Q. Lê: *Crossing the Farther Shore*”, Walley Films (Producer) (2014); [www.ricegallery.org/dinh-q-le](http://www.ricegallery.org/dinh-q-le), last accessed 27 Dec 2016

<sup>13</sup> Ho Chi Minh, “Message sent to the artists on the occasion of the 1951 Paintings Exhibition (December 10, 1951)”, *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh Vol. 3*, Publisher: Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Reproduced on <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1951/12/10.htm> (Last accessed 27 Dec 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Quach Phong, *Interview with Sherry Buchanan*, in Jessica Harrison Hall, *Vietnam Behind the Lines: Images from the War 1965-1975*, London: Art Media Resources (2002).

VIETNAM 1954 – 1975  
CHANG YUEH SIANG

This essay was first published in the brochure produced for the exhibition ‘Vietnam 1954 - 1975’ (accessible from <https://nus.edu/2iRxu1q>)

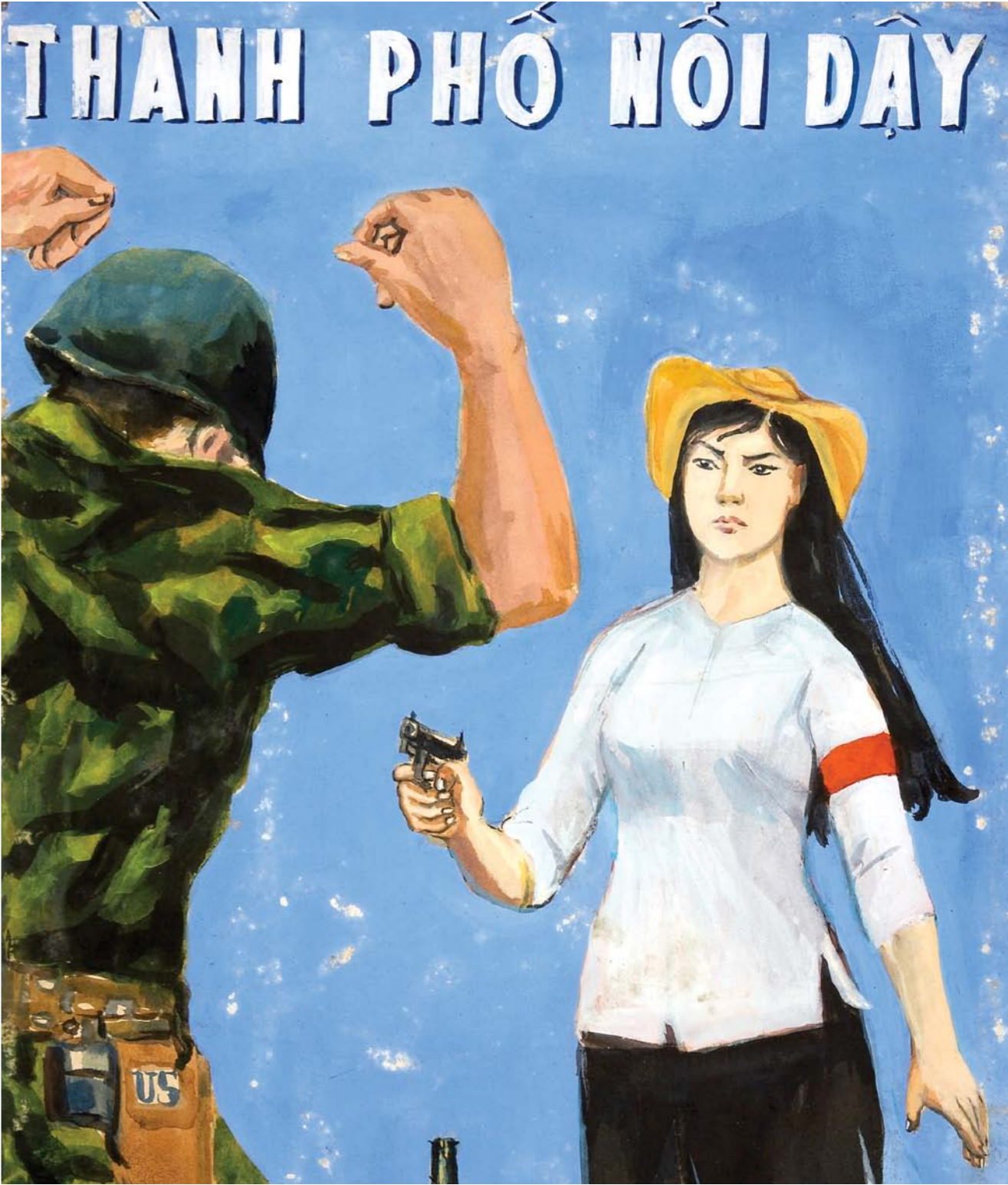
The conflict that we know of as the Vietnam War had its antecedents in post-war anti-colonialism, beginning in 1945 when Ho Chi Minh-led North Vietnamese army launched an attack to drive the French out of Vietnam. The decision to divide Vietnam at the 17 Parallel at the Geneva Conference in 1954 separated Vietnam into a Soviet- and Chinese-supported North, against a Southern Republic reinforced by the United States of America. Ngo Dinh Diem, President of South Vietnam, reneged on his commitment made at Geneva to hold elections for the unification of Vietnam in 1956. This is followed by Communist infiltration of the South in 1957, with the aim of bringing down Ngo’s government. The escalation of the conflict brings the United States more deeply entrenched into Vietnamese affairs; as Ho Chi Minh articulated in a French interview in 1964, from the perspective of the Vietnamese, the Americans were effectively conducting an undeclared war on the Vietnamese people.<sup>1</sup>

It may be interesting to consider the imbalance of power between the belligerent factors in the Vietnam War, or simply in the Cold War: the relative wealth and development of the Western meant that, while Vietnam was at War with France and America, the Soviets were preparing to exhibit the Sputnik at the 1958 Brussels International Exposition; Neil Armstrong landed on the moon in 1969; and, as demonstrated by the exhibition “Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970” at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2008), in developed nations, the Cold War inspired design in lifestyle and consumer products. The chasm of wealth between

Vietnam and her Western opponents was vast, and yet the Vietnamese defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu with manual logistics and strategies rather than military technology. At the end of the Second World War the USA was supporting the rebuilding of allied European nations through the Marshall Plan <sup>2</sup>, not forgetting that at this time, the US had already begun giving France military and financial support for their campaign against Ho Chi Minh as well.

This collection of war posters and drawings is a remnant of that period. As Dato Parameswaran recounts in the interview accompanying this exhibition, the artists that he met were not particularly nostalgic about these drawings and posters when he approached them to acquire pieces: “Who wants to remember a war!” There is nothing luxurious in these objects as a collection from the Cold War: the artworks encapsulate an aspiration, doubtlessly; but unlike the aspirations projected by the promise of a ‘modern lifestyle’ in the Western world, the hopes projected by these posters were the defeat of imperialist enemies and a united Vietnam.

The posters and drawings give valuable insight to the Vietnamese wartime experience mainly from the Northern perspective, underwent by combatants on the frontline, or by ordinary civilians called to arms. Occasionally, the images are indicative of actual events in the background, such as “Operation Rolling Thunder.” in 1965.<sup>3</sup> The series of posters dating to around 1968-69 reflect the ferocity of the Vietnamese



Duy Chu, *The City Rises* (1969)  
Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 55 x 36.5cm

<sup>1</sup> From the episode “De nos envoyés spéciaux au Nord-Vietnam » for the series *Cinq Colonnes à la Une*, produced by The Office of French Radiodiffision and Television. Broadcast on 6 Jun 1964. Collection of l’Institut National de l’audiovisuel, Paris.  
<sup>2</sup> The United States disbursed around \$13 billion (approximately \$120 billion in current dollar value) in economic support to help rebuild European economies after the end of World War II.  
<sup>3</sup> Operation Rolling Thunder was the name given to a sustained aerial campaign conducted against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese forces between 1965 and 1968.



Minh Tuyen, *Hand Over the Government to the People!* (1969)  
Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 35.8 x 48.7 cm

led Tet Offensive; and when the Vietnamese have gained good ground, the messages are directed to maintenances and self-protection. By and large, the messages present a clear anti-colonial and anti-imperial message. Naturally, some of the propaganda posters flew the flag for the Communist-North, and the propaganda strategies are likely to have been inspired by Soviet and Communist-Chinese methods. Without calling the works featured in this collection “social realist”, for all intents and purposes, this art had a political intention, and conforms to, Ho Chi Minh’s call, at the beginning of the Indochinese War, for the spirit of resistance against the enemy to be the essential item in Vietnamese culture; this in term would give the war of resistance its cultural dimension.<sup>4</sup>

In Ho Chi Minh’s conception of the culture of New Vietnam (he is credited as the founder of the principles of new Vietnamese culture in a 1943 Thesis on Vietnamese Culture), art and cultural development would stimulate the intellectual and artistic creativity of the people: “Culture is seen as a powerful motor of development, and cultural identity as a constant in the harmonious development of society and the individual.” This new Cultural identity must search from within Vietnamese tradition for the highest of values, to edify the Vietnamese people as to their national characteristics.<sup>5</sup> This was the principle underpinning the deployment of so many war artists, that they may document the realities of war for the people, valorizing the courage and determination of combatants at the frontline to edify the masses, and pointing the people to their aspirations of becoming a truly free and independent Vietnamese nation.

<sup>4</sup> Cu Huy Can, *Culture et la politique culturelle en republique socialiste du Vietnam*, Paris: UNESCO (1985), p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Nora Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*, University of Hawaii Press (2009), p.61



Huynh Van Thuan, *Women Ploughing* (1954)  
Watercolour and pen on paper, 22x29cm

In other words, the artists are deployed to capture action by ordinary Vietnamese combatants, truly self-determined and independent of colonial or imperialist influences, providing the Vietnamese people with Vietnamese examples of courage and liberty. Therefore beyond the propaganda posters, drawings and paintings of life on the battle fronts depicting the daily activities of soldiers and other personnel were just as important visual materials to cultivate the individual and society in Vietnam.

Only a small number of the propaganda posters lent were included in the exhibition, in part due to space considerations; nevertheless they are crucial to the story. While the French came to concede defeat after Dien Bien Phu, and the Americans were increasingly questioning the extent they should be involved in Vietnam, the Communist-led Vietnamese armies were

in no doubt that this was a total war for independence. From the images, the message appears to present one united Vietnam against the enemy: indeed, this is the intended effect of the propaganda posters, to unite the people in one common purpose against the enemy:

**“No allusions to the suffering of the Vietnamese people were made unless they referred to that inflicted by American soldiers. No sadness was expressed... Images such as those presented in the propaganda posters and paintings of the time were key indicators of how the population was to perceive the environment, the government, and the future. The posters and paintings were sometimes the only voices the people heard, the only clues they had to knowing what was happening and how to respond.”<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.26-27

The exhibition focuses largely on drawings in the collection: these capture the urgency of battle, giving a glimpse of life on the frontline. Who were the war artists, and where did they come from? Several of the wartime artists in the collection had been students at the Hanoi College of Fine Arts, which had previously been the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine during the colonial period, between 1925 – 1945. In fact Tran Van Can (author of a woodcut poster celebrating Vietnam-Indonesian ties, 1910-1994) had himself been a student, and later on had been appointed director of the College in 1957, after the school came under the administration of the Northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

In the immediate years following the division at the 17th Parallel there appeared to have been some degree of movement and exchange between artists and teachers from schools in both North and South. Quach Phong (b.1938 Vinh Long, South Vietnam) had trained at the Ecole des Arts Appliqués in Saigon (later the Gia Dinh School of Art), following an art course in French. It was here that he took courses in revolutionary art from clandestine Resistance artists. Around 1955, he moved to Hanoi, graduating from the Hanoi College of Fine Art in 1962. Hearing then that the military command in the South had set up an Arts and Letters department, he applied for permission to return south to join the Art units there.<sup>7</sup> Nguyen Toan Thi, former director of the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Fine Art, was also from the South, was also taught by teachers from the Gia Dinh Art School, until artists such as Huynh Phuong Dong and Le Lam arrived from Hanoi to set up classes, which were held outdoors in the woods until severe bombing drove the classes underground.<sup>8</sup>

“Since cameras were scarce, sketches of the battlefield and the soldiers’ lives in the makeshift barracks of the maquis made by the artists of the Resistance Class are, in many ways, the only documents pertaining



Tran Van Cam, *Vietnam-Indonesia Friendship* (1965)  
Woodcut on special paper, 42 x 27.1cm

to that event.”<sup>9</sup> This was written about artists in the French phase of the Indochinese War, and more details may be found in Pham Thanh Tam’s wartime diary, published as *Drawing Under Fire: War Diary of a Young Vietnamese Artist*;<sup>10</sup> but the same may be said about drawings made during the American War. Sketching (*le croquis rapide*) was a technique that had been taught by the French<sup>11</sup>, and as art supplies were generally scarce, artists “sketched and drew quickly in pencil, with pens made from scrap metal, ink, watercolor, and acrylic on any piece of paper available – old magazines or notebooks...”<sup>12</sup> Economy was gained not only in terms of the materials used, but also in the strokes expended to produce the imagery.

Tam, already a frontline artist during the French Indochinese war, returned after 1963 to cover the

American war for military publications and magazines, thereafter capturing the Tet Offensive (1968) at the front. The difference between the French and American phases of the long Vietnam War, as Nguyen Van Truc would come to reminisce, was that “The American War was far more cruel than the French War.”<sup>13</sup>

Unlike civilian artists, frontline artists were also guerilla fighters, who were also armed. “To produce these war sketches, artists were caught in the crossfire. Many died or were killed while they were working, their hand still holding onto their paintbrush.”<sup>14</sup> Very little of this violence is seen in the collection: the main reason was of course



Thanh Chau, *A Guerrilla in the Rain, An Giang Province* (1971)  
Watercolour on paper, 27.5 x 19cm

the explicit guidelines given to the artists to mainly depict a determined and victorious people. Behind the lines though, the artists themselves had reasons for not depicting the ferocity of the war unnecessarily: “I didn’t draw fallen soldiers. Soldiers didn’t like to see that.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, against the brutality of war, drawing offered some psychological respite to those fighting, as Quach Phong recalled:

**The soldiers liked to watch me draw. I was calm; it helped calm them down. They asked to have their portraits done in case they died. It made them feel part of history. As I sketched, they would talk to me about their hopes and dreams and their plans for peacetime. They wanted to get married and to be happy.”**<sup>16</sup>

Another common factor in this collection is that they were mainly collected in the North: as Dato Parameswaran will recount, he was based in the North, and met artists who lived in the North; and he did not come across similar materials or get to know other war artists in the South. One might also speculate that counter-propaganda materials might not have survived the post-unification period, as these were directly subversive to the Hanoi-based regime. Nonetheless a counterpropaganda movement existed in Saigon, and the Australian War Museum has a collection of counter-propaganda leaflets that provide another perspective to the Vietnamese conflict. Several of these carry questions designed to cast doubts to those wavering in their dedication to the long drawn-out fighting, such as:

**Why are you here? What are you achieving?  
You are not helping the people to live happy lives.  
The people do not really want you.**<sup>17</sup>

In another leaflet designed to unnerve Viet Cong troops, the front of the leaflet contain the instructions, overlaid with red skull motifs:

<sup>7</sup> Quach Phong, oral history recording by Sherry Buchanan, *Mekong Diaries*, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p.141.

<sup>8</sup> Nguyen Toan Thi, quoted in *Mekong Diaries*, p. 39

<sup>9</sup> Nora Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi*, p. 50

<sup>10</sup> Edited by Sherry Buchanan, London: Asia Ink Books, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Quach Phong’s reminiscences, in *Mekong Diaries*, p.141

<sup>12</sup> Nguyen Thoan Thi, , *Mekong Diaries*, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> *Mekong Diaries*, p.136

<sup>14</sup> Nguyen Thoan Thi, *Mekong Diaries*, pg. 39

<sup>15</sup> Nguyen Van Truc, *Mekong Diaries*, p.135

<sup>16</sup> Quach Phong, *Mekong Diaries*, p. 147

<sup>17</sup> 1st Psychological Operations Unit of Republic of Vietnam, Hand-disseminated leaflet: “Question Beliefs”; produced in Phuoc Tuy Province, Nui Dat, 2 October 1970. Last retrieved on [www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02857/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02857/) 16 June 2015.

**Your camp has been discovered:  
You are no longer safe.  
Fill out the spaces on the back of this notice  
and keep it with you. When we find your body  
we will use it to give you a proper burial.**

The back of the leaflet carried fields to be filled in for Full Name; Rank; Religion; Next of Kin; Date of Birth; Unit.<sup>18</sup>

The divide was not as simple as North versus South, and as the diaries of Dr Dang Thuy Tram show<sup>19</sup>, the unity projected by propaganda images were at times tenuous. Born in an intellectual family in Hue and obtaining a medical degree from Hanoi, Thuy embraced the cause of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam fully, and yet, perhaps in an early indication of communist suspicion against intellectuals, she never really found her place in Party ranks, only to be held up after her untimely death in an American ambush in 1970:

**25 May 1968:  
These are dark days in my soul. Something  
presses heavily upon me. My wounded heart  
still bleeds from my own petty woes,  
but I also feel the weight of the inequities  
plaguimg society. Ugly injustices happen all  
around me every day. There are worms and  
mites gnawing away within the Party; if those  
vermin are not eliminated, they will gradually  
erode the people’s faith and love for the Party.  
I am very disappointed the Party has not seen  
fit to let me join the ranks of its members so  
that I can fight these parasites. Perhaps that’s  
why they still hesitate to accept me into the  
Party despite urgent requests for an expeditious  
resolution of my political rights from all Party  
members in this sub-branch, from people in  
charge in the district and the province.  
The more I think about it, the sadder I feel.  
I want to confide my anger in dear ones,  
but I stay silent. Would anyone understand me?**

<sup>18</sup> 1st Psychological Operations Unit of Republic of Vietnam, Hand-disseminated leaflet: “Death Notice”; produced in Phuoc Tuy Province, Nui Dat, 26 February 1971. Last retrieved on [www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02857/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02857/) 16 June 2015.



Huynh Van Thuan, *Vigilant / F111 / Ready to Fight* (1973)  
Gouache on paper, 59.7 x 32.5cm

<sup>19</sup> Dang Thuy Tram, *Last Night I Dreamt of Peace*, New York: Harmony Books, 2007.

Similarly, not all in the South felt a sense of nationalism necessarily, in their response to the battle for Vietnamese independence. By the twentieth century, a sizeable Chinese overseas community had already existed in Saigon and the hoa community were a driving force in South Vietnam economy. Yet, as the Viet-hoa did not see Vietnam as their homeland, when the South Vietnamese government drafted all youths for military service on 3 March 1963, the Chinese community were ambivalent and reluctant to be embroiled in this war of North and South.<sup>20</sup> Correspondingly Sino-Vietnamese poetry lacked the element of patriotism; instead, the themes of wartime poetry from the Chinese community were lamentations of lives and friends lost, and reflected a sense of helplessness and desperation towards the war

**What is History  
What is War?  
War is a polluted river  
That has flown into the pristine classrooms  
of our children  
Grounded itself onto our blackboards that  
have no meaning  
Spread itself out onto the green identity cards  
Of our eighteen year olds, as words and  
characters  
Frozen behind the short-sighted glasses  
Of the teacher discharged from battle,  
in his glass eye  
History is, war  
We must study it daily, bleeding  
To practice the damned subject**

**War  
(Remembering K) by “Us”,  
23 November 1971, Danang <sup>21</sup>**

Correspondingly then, the hoa response to the Fall of Saigon was more ambivalent about politics than it was about the sense of emptiness

<sup>20</sup> Fong Ming, *The History of Chinese Modern Poetry in Vietnam: Also on War Poems by Vietnamese Chinese (1960 - 1975) Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Tam Kang University, 2011 , p.85*

**The flag is under the taxi cab  
The taxi cab is on the bewildered street  
Boots backpacks helmets  
M16 and grenades  
Officers and prostitutes on the corridor of the  
American retreat  
We enter the ruins  
The ruins were the lights of the yesterday’s city  
Born of the womb born from eggs born in water  
All beings  
must enter the cycle of birth, life and death<sup>22</sup>**

**“Yao He” Impressions of Saigon (April 1975) ,  
August 1975, Saigon**

These voices, contemporary to the war, are then further complicated by post-war reminiscences, such as published in Bao Ninh’s novel, *The Sorrows of War* (translated to English in 1990), which cast doubt on the unchallenged portrayal of victory presented by war drawings depicting the ‘liberation’ of Saigon:

In later years, when he heard stories of V-Day or watched the scenes of the Fall of Saigon on film, with cheering, flags, flowers, triumphant soldiers and joyful people, his heart would ache with sadness and envy. He and his mates had not felt that soaring, brilliant happiness he saw on film. True, in the days following 30 April he had experienced unforgettable joys after the victory. But on the night itself they’d had that suffocating feeling at the airport. And why not? They’d just stepped out of their trenches.<sup>23</sup>

The excerpts quoted above now find their place in the specific genre of war-time literature: it is so easy to forget that the authors cited here were themselves soldiers or had served in the military during the war; as were the artists who braved the front to produce these images, now vestiges of the long Vietnam War. ♦

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. Translated by curator.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125. Translated by curator.  
<sup>23</sup> Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*, p.99, 1990

FROM THE FRONTLINES:  
COLLECTING POSTERS AND DRAWINGS  
FROM THE VIETNAM WAR

Conversation with Ambassador Dato N’ Parameswaran,  
Collector and Charmian Chelvam, Collections Manager, June 2015



Born in Perak, Malaysia in 1948, career diplomat Dato’ N. Parameswaran spent three years as Ambassador of Malaysia to Vietnam from 1990 to 1993. Stationed in Hanoi, he presided over the Malaysian Consulate-General in Ho Chi Minh City and facilitated Malaysian economic projects taking place in Danang. His work across these major Vietnamese cities and others provided a backdrop to his entry into the nascent, yet evolving Vietnamese art scene.

He began collecting art around 1985 before his Vietnam posting. Having graduated in History from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur years earlier, his interests for Vietnamese war drawings and posters evolved naturally. Arriving in Vietnam in 1990, he recalled seeing visual records and commemorations of the long-drawn wars that Vietnam had undergone in its history – in posters, photographs, exhibits and memorials, in his own words, “Memories of the wars were everywhere, all over the country. This drew me to the war drawings, posters and other records about the wars.” The collection, although chiefly collected during Dato’ N Parameswaran’s ambassadorship, continued to grow after the end of his official posting to Vietnam. The collection was systematically catalogued by Charmian Chelvam recently. This interview traces the beginnings of the collection: Dato’ N. Parameswaran’s impressions of the Vietnamese art scene, his interactions with artists and

the broader political contexts that frame these artists and their works.

The following are excerpts from the full interview with Dato’ Parameswaran first published in the brochure produced for the exhibition ‘Vietnam 1954 - 1975’ (accessible from <https://nus.edu/2iRxu1q>)

**Chang Yueh Siang (CYS): What was the period you were stationed in Vietnam?**

**Dato Parameswaran (DP):** 1. I was Ambassador of Malaysia to Vietnam from June 1990 till mid-1993, a period of 3 years. I was stationed in Hanoi (North Vietnam).In the early part of my posting, Malaysia opened a Consulate-General in Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon) (South Vietnam) and that office too came under my purview. Malaysia was also involved in a big economic project in Danang (Central Vietnam) and this took me to Danang nearly 14 times in 3 years. So, I did travel quite a lot during my tour of duty in Vietnam and did get to personally meet many Vietnamese artists.

**CYS: So, can you say a little bit about what the art scene was like in Vietnam during this time?**

**DP:** There was no art scene as we understand the term. There was no serious art scene as such in Hanoi then.



One could visit the Museum of Fine Art and the different war museums in Hanoi and also in Ho Chi Minh City which had on display excellent Vietnamese works of art and also military and war-related exhibits.

There were no galleries then of the kind we know about today. Nobody operated something as a gallery. What they had were exhibitions quite frequently, in one of the main roads in Hanoi, called Trang Tien Street. They called it the “Book Street”, because you could buy all sorts of books and everything.

That was very near the Pullman Hotel, which was closed when I went back to Vietnam, after I’d left. They had a lot of exhibitions there. That’s where I saw people reading newspapers against the wall. [They cannot afford to buy the paper, so they’d paint the wall [with glue], and paper it with newspaper, then people would come and read.]

There were many “exhibitions.” You could meet the artists there; you could buy paintings there. Art also revolved around artists, many of whom were from the Hanoi College of Fine Arts and other local art schools, and art exhibitions that were held in different venues in Hanoi (and also in Ho Chi Minh City). Most of my art was bought directly from the artists whom I used to meet very often in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Hue and also in other parts of Vietnam. I spent

hours and hours with these artists and I got to know them well.

Another informal centre of Vietnamese art in Hanoi, among those who knew, was Café Lam, a café run by Uncle Lam and his wife. Many famous Hanoi artists frequented the place. The coffee was terrific! Many artists paid for their drinks over a period of time with their art works. These beautiful works adorned the walls of Café Lam during the period that I was there. Uncle Lam became a great collector of fine Vietnamese art, perhaps by accident. I frequented Café Lam often and got to know well Uncle Lam and his wife. It was very interesting; all those things you would hear at the coffee shop; artists and photographers gathered there, and there were paintings there.

Then you could also buy from, say, souvenir shops, in hotels in Hanoi that were frequented by foreigners. At that time, one of the top hotels was this hotel called Thang Loi Hotel, I think it was also called the Unity Hotel, designed by the Cubans, near the West Lake. In all the souvenir shops, if you went to look around, they would have woodcuts, for example the old woodcuts with folklore subjects from Dong Ho village, outside Hanoi, have been there for centuries.

It was there that I bought my first Van Giao, from a souvenir shop in Thang Loi Hotel! They became



Hoang Trung,  
*Saigon Resists!* (Undated),  
Gouache on paper,  
52x33.6 cm

familiar with what I liked, and the next time they would bring some more. That was how I became interested; I saw the watercolours, unbelievable! This was in the 1990.

For most of the works in this collection, I was actually searching for them. They didn't come to you. Most of these, you go see, you search for them. There was this old couple, with very interesting woodcuts, the artist Pham Van Don and his wife, very old, in their seventies. I used to wait for them downstairs; they stayed upstairs. I would come in the afternoon; they said they would come back eventually. I bought quite a few from them, when I look back.

Then I used to travel to Saigon very often, because we had a Consulate-General there. Then from there I through Hanoi friends, they would tell me to meet this person and that. I had interpreters, so we just made the contacts and went to see them to talk. Then, they would take me to other places, saying this or that artist also made art, and they would take me to see another artist.

Then I got to Danang, where I had good friends: the guy who was the former director of the Cham museum, he himself was an artist, he can draw. He would take me along to meet artists.

Then I went to Hue, where I met other artists, including the guy who trained at Rome.<sup>1</sup> The works that I bought, which were made out of earth materials, sewn, and all that, were from Hue.

Then when I returned to Hanoi I would go to Haiphong, when I heard that there was an artist, or I would go to Quang Ninh, where Halong Bay is. People tell you where (the art is)! I had ministers and friends who knew I liked art, and who would take me to the villages, their home village, and they would see who drew, and they would show me their art.



Hoang Dinh Tai, *Captured Pilot Hnat (Quang Nam)* (1970)  
Watercolour on paper, 52 x 38cm

So, it went like that! I didn't buy a painting from a gallery. None of these war paintings, none of these posters, nothing from the war was bought from galleries, in this collection.

**CYS: So, at that period in time, would you say there was local interest in this part of history, or there was no local interest even in their own art?**

**DP:** No, there was no interest, except at the Hanoi College of Fine Arts. There were some lacquers, very beautiful lacquers you see, which were depicting the war. These were considered important. But were they interested in collecting [these posters]? No, they were interested in collecting the other masters; artists like Tran Van Can, Bui Xuan Phai, Nguyen Sang, Nguyen Phan Chan, People were interested in that kind of things. There were a couple of private collectors.

**CYS: So would you say that at this period in time, one reason the war-time artists were not collected**

<sup>1</sup> This probably refers to the artist Nguyen Vinh Phoi (b.1938, Hue), graduate of the Ecole des beaux-arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi. He studied in Rome between 1961-1963.

**was that attention was mainly on the great masters of fine arts? Were there any reasons why people were not interested in this kind of material? That maybe they were not considered “artistic”...**

**DP:** But who wants to remember a war! They were trying to forget the war. So the saying in Vietnam is that, if a young child asks the mother what is peace, she would say “ask your grandmother”. She never saw peace! She only saw war, war, war. Why would you want to remember things that were so bad. You want to forget it! That time when I was living there, they were slowly becoming more open, you know. The Doi Moi policy of the government was 1988<sup>2</sup>, (and the period that) I went was 1990. So slowly they began to liberalise. The diehard communists became softened. So there was a period where they were opening up; you could see musical shows and other entertainments, which you could never have seen before.

So if you ask me about Vietnamese interest in these prints and drawings then, no, they were not interested.

**CYS: When you went to see the artists, were they ready to bring out their artworks?**

**DP:** Yes, my interpreter would talk to them.. I got along very well with the Vietnamese, and they liked me. And at that time, the relationship between Malaysia and Vietnam was also very good.

Then I had very good relations with the prime ministers, the officials. Once I wanted going to go and see the most famous Vietnamese lacquer guy, Nguyen Gia Tri, in Saigon. At the beginning they said no, you cannot see him. They didn’t want foreigners to see him, because there was a Japanese company trying to buy off his big panels, now in the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Fine Arts. But that was the sort of control that they exerted; they didn’t want his work to leave Vietnam.

**CYS: And that was because lacquer was considered fine art, and Nguyen Gia Tri was seen as a national treasure?**

**DP:** Yes, he was a national treasure.



Pham Thanh Tam, *Pathet Lao Female Soldier, Khay Khay* (Laos), 1962  
Pen and watercolour on paper, 27.3 x 20cm

**CYS: But propaganda posters for them, at the time...**

**DP:** Nobody cared then! Eventually I went to buy some too, the printed posters at the printing house. They just chucked it all there.

**CYS: This was their old stock?**

**DP:** Yup. Those that they sold, was all just rubbish to them, or they would give it to you. So it was like that. For their ‘national treasure’ they weren’t so careless. They also were very concerned about the artefacts, like the Dong Son drums, and things like that.

**CYS: When you were collecting these artworks, what was the quality of the lives of the artists? Were they forgotten by people?**

**DP:** No, I think the Vietnamese government, because of the socialist system, or the communist system,

they took care of their people. All these people who worked and all that, they would give them quarters, you know. I went to see Nguyen Tu Nghiem: he was living in a house that was reserved for all the artists. They had rations during the war, they had ration cards and everything, for cloth, for materials, and all other stuff. They were quite looked after by the government, you know.

**CYS: So the war-time artists had some kind of state pension?**

**DP:** Yeah, yeah! They were given state houses, they must have been given some state money, you know. And they were okay! They were not, they were not in real poverty. They had a reasonable quality of life. And many of them had been abroad, because during the war they were studying languages or technical expertise, or all the Eastern-European countries in Africa, like Mozambique, all the communist countries. So they had this affinity with the communist world. And so some of them went overseas and came back.

**CYS: When you were there, what was the Hanoi art school doing? Because I remember in colonial times, that was the École des Beaux Arts, fine arts, where they had French professors coming, and that was where some of the Vietnamese masters were trained before they went to France.**

**DP:** When I was there in the 1990s, nobody in Vietnam had even heard of the name “Le Pho” before.

Le Pho was a nostalgic painter who went to France and began to think of Vietnam, you know? Le Pho, therefore, was an unheard-of name.

I didn’t spend much time going to the Hanoi College of Fine Arts. I was only interested in the war artists who trained there; and who were teaching there. For example, I have a woodcut drawing, from around 1946, that’s from a professor in the Hanoi College of Fine Arts. So when I knew that this guy was a lecturer/ professor, I used to visit him, talk to him ...So, it was ordinary,

there were no great names. The great names came from before, from [Victor] Tardieu onwards, [Joseph] Inguimberty, were from the French period. In that time it was like a fine arts college; prestigious, if you were trained there. There were also industrial arts colleges which were different.

**CYS: After you’d left Vietnam, did you continue to collect, or go back there and collect beyond your official term as Ambassador to Vietnam?**

**DP:** Yes, I went back a couple of times after my term. And that’s where I got some of the printed posters from companies that produced these posters. Even that alone was quite difficult. I would go back to visit some of my old friends, if there was something interesting, I would collect (them).

In my time, people would collect lacquer, not war drawings.... Then came the foreigners like Americans during the nineties. At this time the relations were not normalized yet, but they were slowly opening up in trade ties, and there were a few more tourists from Europe, and they would look for these war posters. By then the Vietnamese had become so ‘clever’, they were producing fakes. So later they were doing reprints and reproductions.

**CYS: So in the later stage, when the Americans and Europeans become interested in this, and wanted to buy, did you find out where would they buy from? Because I can’t imagine that they would have spent enough time to learn the language as much as you had.**

**DP:** Oh, by that time towards the late 1990s, galleries were already beginning to open...

By 1993, slowly, the Vietnamese began to open shops and galleries. Trang Tien Street had many galleries. In Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Khoi street had many galleries. And they began to sell at American prices, in thousands of dollars. They began to quote for everything in American dollars! And I laughed! ...

<sup>2</sup> Doi Moi refers to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 with the goal of creating a “socialist-oriented market economy”, gradually introducing market liberalisation to the Vietnamese economy.



Huynh Van Thuan, Peace, Unity, Independence in Congo (1961)  
Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 78 x 53cm

... Contemporary art was commanding prices in the thousands. When the galleries began to open, as I left Hanoi, they were not selling wartime posters or anything. I didn't see any war drawings or posters in galleries.

There were galleries slowly coming up, there began multiplications of galleries. And the prices were atrocious. Because everything was quoted in US dollars. And then came the contemporary art scene. They were selling the Gang of Ten, for example, at price tags of US\$5000, I remember. Even Ngyuen Thanh Minh, that guy was also famous, all within that region.

But the contemporary movement happened earlier in Saigon than in Hanoi. Even during the old days before the war there were already had people who were doing contemporary art in Saigon. But in Hanoi, the young guys were only beginning to emerge.

Vietnamese art then began to be exported. The main outlets were Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand. And the guys who did the first big shows were Plum Blossoms, who had a show called "Uncorked Soul". And then, slowly, there were connections with the Viet Kieu, the overseas Vietnamese, who began to take them to Los Angeles, California or Florida... wherever they lived. And then the Viet Kieu were being welcomed back, because they a source of investment for the local government. Oh, they were suspicious of the Viet Kieu, but at the same time, they wanted their money. Thailand was a very important source, too. But the former Plum Blossoms here in Raffles City, which has now closed already, and the Plum Blossoms in Hong Kong, especially, were early in exhibiting Vietnamese contemporary art.

**CYS: Why, to you, are these materials important as a collection?**

**DP:** As a collection? Because it gives you the history. It's a continuum. Because this collection begins with Dien Bien Phu. In fact, through this collection, I've taken you into antiquity all the way to Thanh Giong, through Nguyen Tu Nghiem's works. If you want to talk about the Vietnamese spirit, it begins from legend.

It goes from legends to real figures like Ba Trieu and all that who fought the Chinese. So they've been fighting these foreign invaders for centuries. So you can have a historical perspective of what the Vietnamese spirit was, from ancient days.

... I have interspersed this collection with what life was during the war; how the countryside looked like, how the women looked like, how life in the community was going on. War was not all fight, fight, fight! But there are periods where you could see how it looked like.



Pham Duc Cuong, Wharf, Nghi An Province (1969)  
Watercolour on paper, 14.5 x 32.7cm

There are very interesting scenes of Hanoi, with air raid shelters, which during my time, I could no longer see remnants of. But they were on streets that I was so familiar with, walking on every day.

... There's a lot of sadness. There's a lot of sadness about the war, which we don't know. In every cemetery, there was a hidden cemetery, which was separate from the normal cemetery. When you drive past it in the countryside, every village has this special cemetery commemorating those who fell in the war. Every village, every family, has lost somebody in the war. Everybody.

So the feelings about the war are very, very intense. There are many things that we, as outsiders, may not realize what the Vietnamese went through. But when you know what they went through, you say "hey, they too, suffered". ♦

APPENDICES:  
RELATED TEXTUAL SOURCES REFERENCED IN THE EXHIBITIONS

Vietnam 1954 - 1975

**1. Malcolm Browne:** I had been in Vietnam at that point for a couple of years when things began to look ugly in central Vietnam. I took a much greater interest in the Buddhists of Vietnam than I had before, because it seemed to me they were likely to be movers and shakers in whatever turned up next. I came to be on friendly terms with quite a lot of the monks who were leaders of this movement that was taking shape. ...

... Along about springtime (1963), the monks began to hint that they were going to pull off something spectacular by way of protest—and that would most likely be a disembowelment of one of the monks or an immolation. And either way, it was something we had to pay attention to.

At that point the monks were telephoning the foreign correspondents in Saigon to warn them that something big was going to happen. Most of the correspondents were kind of bored with that threat after a while and tended to ignore it. I felt that they were certainly going to do something, that they were not just bluffing, so it came to be that I was really the only Western correspondent that covered the fatal day. ...

... As soon as he seated himself, they poured the liquid all over him. He got out a matchbook, lighted it, and dropped it in his lap and was immediately engulfed in flames. Everybody that witnessed this was horrified. It was every bit as bad as I could have expected.

I don’t know exactly when he died because you couldn’t tell from his features or voice or anything. He never yelled out in pain. His face seemed to remain fairly calm until it was so blackened by the flames that you couldn’t make it out anymore. Finally the monks decided he was dead and they brought up a coffin, an improvised wooden coffin...

... The overwhelming smell of joss sticks. They do make a very strong smell, not a particularly nice smell, but it’s meant to appease the ancestors and all of that. That was the overwhelming smell except for the smell of burning gasoline and diesel and the smell of burning flesh, I must say. The main sound was the wailing and misery of the monks, who had known this guy for many years before and were feeling for him. Then there was shouting over loudspeakers between the fire department people, trying to figure out a way to put him out, put out the flames around him without actually killing him or something. So it was a jumble of confusion.

Patrick Witty, “Malcolm Browne: The Man Behind the Burning Monk”, *Lightbox: The Backstory* (28 August, 2012), Time.com (http://time.com/3791176/malcolm-browne-the-story-behind-the-burning-monk/)

**2.** During Tet 1968, (Vietnamese New Year) the communists conducted a surprise attack in South Vietnam’s major provinces and capitals. Arnauld de Borchgrave, at the time Newsweek’s chief foreign correspondent and in charge of the Tet Offensive coverage

reported that it was an unmitigated disaster for Hanoi. They lost some 50,000 and at least as many wounded. The South Vietnamese side had some 6,000 casualties.

Yet the Western media only showed carnage of American bodies to a war weary home audience. They also showed, ad nauseum, the picture of a South Vietnamese soldier shooting a Vietcong, in civilian clothing, point blank. The message was loud and clear – this is the kind of atrocities that the South Vietnamese army did to its own people, with the backing of America.

Quynh Dao , “Two Sides to Every Story: Perspectives on the Vietnam War and the Iraq War.”

Talk given at Perspectives on World History and Current Events in conjunction with the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Committee and the Vietnamese Professionals Society (Victorian Chapter), 26th May 2004

**3. Pham Van Dong:** ... I want to remind you that the Vietnamese want peace. Our nature, the nature of the Vietnamese people, is to want peace and to have solidarity with all nations and all peoples in the world. Racism and xenophobia are very alien to us Vietnamese. You can look at our history and our activities, the political activities of the Vietnamese People, and you can see that we do not have these undesirable characteristics.

And we need peace in order to rebuild our country. We need peace in order to develop our culture and our economy. We need peace in order to improve the living conditions of the population. More than anyone else, we know the value of peace. More than anyone else, we need peace in order to do the things I have just mentioned. As to that question of whether we had missed any opportunities, I must say that, on our part, we did everything we could possibly do in order to have peace, the sooner the better. Concerning the French, President Ho Chi Minh and I tried our best to accommodate them. There was nothing more we could do.

But as I have said, the French only wanted to restore colonialism in our country. As far as the United States is concerned, it must be said that the United States supported the French throughout the Resistance War, throughout the French colonial war in Vietnam. And the United States did not want to have the Geneva conference and refused to sign the Geneva Agreements. On the contrary, the United States replaced the French in the South in order to continue with the war of aggression through Ngo Dinh Diem and other puppets.

And then the United States participated in force directly in the war. Even so, we tried our best to get the United States to negotiate with us and, finally, got the United States to talk with us at the Paris negotiating table. But it was not until after Nixon failed completely with his B-52 bombings of Hanoi and other places that the Paris Agreement was finally signed in 1973. I have said all these to show you, friends how much we wanted peace.

I must also add here that after our Spring Victory, we had a new war. It should also be stressed here how much we wanted peace in this case. The Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, a puppet regime of Peking, invaded our southwestern border areas and committed unforgivable crimes on our own territories. Even so, we patiently asked them to negotiate in order to have normal relations between the two countries. ...

Therefore, we are trying our best to contribute to peace in this whole region. And this is the objective, the direction, of our diplomatic activities at the present time and also in the past as I am sure you all know very well. In short the Vietnamese people at this period have the greatest determination to do their utmost to protect freedom and independence and to build socialism and, at the same time, to do their best to contribute to peace, national independence, democracy and social developments in this region and elsewhere in the world. Thank you, friends. (Laughter) I’m glad that it’s all over!

“Interview with Pham Van Dong, 1981.” 02/19/1981. WGBH Media Library & Archives.

Who Wants to Remember a War

**1.** Here take them all; for twenty years, they have been coming to buy my drawings. They even buy drawings with blood on them. If you had been here twenty years ago, you could have bought the blood-soaked drawing. The woman rowing the boat I was in was shot. It was her blood on that drawing, said Thai Ha. Who are they? I asked.

Buy, buy, buy, they come all the way from the US, they buy everything. They come here, and only want to buy drawings with guns.

Thai Ha showed us his logbook of “collectors”. They were American Vietnam War Veterans.

...

At the time (c.1995) , North Vietnamese war art was thought to be propaganda poster art on Soviet and Chinese social realism models. Apart from a couple of drawings exhibited in the pioneering 1990 exhibition As Seen by Both Sides, the extent and story of Viet Cong guerrilla art was unknown. Hidden to the outside world were the thousands of drawings and sketches Nam and I were about to discover, iconic and fragile proofs of humanity in war, that artist created under fire, with charcoal, ink pens, ballpoint pens, magic markers and tiny watercolor paint sets.

Sitting in the cab bumping its way back on a pot-holed dirt track to Ho Chi Minh City, my mind was racing. These drawings were a visual collective memory from the ‘other’ side of this conflict. If people could see these graceful images by the ‘savage Viet Cong, I thought, they would understand that war is a psychotic episode,

‘madness,’ in Lyndon B. Johnson’s words, not a policy choice to solve Conflicts.  
– Sherry Buchanan, Mekong Diaries, 2008

**3.** More recently, over the past two decades, Vietnam has achieved enormous progress, and today the world can see the strides that you have made. With economic reforms and trade agreements, including with the United States, you have entered the global economy, selling your goods around the world. More foreign investment is coming in. And with one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, Vietnam has moved up to become a middle-income nation. We see Vietnam’s progress in the skyscrapers and high-rises of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and new shopping malls and urban centers. We see it in the satellites Vietnam puts into space and a new generation that is online, launching startups and running new ventures. We see it in the tens of millions of Vietnamese connected on Facebook and Instagram. And you’re not just posting selfies -- although I hear you do that a lot -- (laughter) -- and so far, there have been a number of people who have already asked me for selfies. You’re also raising your voices for causes that you care about, like saving the old trees of Hanoi. So all this dynamism has delivered real progress in people’s lives. Here in Vietnam, you’ve dramatically reduced extreme poverty, you’ve boosted family incomes and lifted millions into a fast-growing middle class. Hunger, disease, child and maternal mortality are all down. The number of people with clean drinking water and electricity, the number of boys and girls in school, and your literacy rate -- these are all up. This is extraordinary progress. This is what you have been able to achieve in a very short time.

– May 24, 2016  
Remarks by President Obama in Address to the People of Vietnam National Convention Center  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Lines

1 It is certainly regrettable to see that despite our passion for the most artistic and delicate people of the world, it is to the time of our arrival in the colony that we can begin to date the evident decay in its artistic production.

The reason is simply explained: Indochina has a remarkable art history, Art that attaches itself directly, as mentioned above, to Chinese art, for the land of Annam, with some variation, as we may also see throughout the other lands from province to province. Since our arrival, this influence is erased day by day. The Annamites adopt with alacrity our tastes, our methods, our thoughts, in all domains. As they fashion their mentality after ours, with greater or lesser degree of endeavour, they have come necessarily to imitating Western decorative forms. Deprived of an artistic education, of direction, having lost their faith in their old masters, they believe themselves to have done well to despise their ancestral traditions, either

by deliberately throwing it all overboard, thereby launching themselves into disastrous pastiches; or, through the clumsy accommodation of Western examples, by the invention of a sort of composite style of which deplorable samples may be seen nearly everywhere: showcases with shelves in the shape of a pagoda; a Henri II sideboard decorated with dragons, incredible Louis-Philippe round tables etc. Must we not ourselves put a stop to these pitiable caprices of a race so excellently gifted, and are we not to some extent responsible? ...

Therefore one is brought to the point of envisaging the creation of a College of Fine Arts; or, if the title seems excessive, a Central School of Drawing; central because it will conduct its teaching on all the applications of drawing in general, and it will be in some sense a school of Arts of a third degree in Indochina. Never can a decorator make a suitable work if he does not draw perfectly. One either does or does not know how to draw, there is no half-measure; neither are there two ways of teaching drawing, one superior method for that which we out of custom call Art and the other inferior that we reserve for industrial applications. One single and the same instruction, in principle, must be given to all students without distinction. Each one will then follow to the degree distinguished by his own aptitudes or the exigencies of the art he would have chosen...

It appears all indications lead us to situate this College at Hanoi, near to the new Indochinese university and the intellectual resources that Hanoi already offers; because, if drawing must be the essential base of the College's teaching, we must strive to elevate the intellectual level of our future artists. We must institute an entire series of oral courses and conferences; technical courses in anatomy and perspective, as well as conferences on aesthetic, art history, archaeology, over which different professors from the university and the French School of the Far East will be in charge. These are courses necessary to elevate intelligence, awaken ideas, excite the enthusiasm. It will even be desirable that the public may be admitted, because there is no reason to not give them instruction at the same time as to the artists.

– Victor Tardieu, “Report on the subject of the College of Fine Arts in Indochina, 20 August 1927: On the teaching of the fine arts in and the creation of a central School of Drawing in Hanoi”

Dear artists,

Being informed of your exhibition, I regret that owing to pressure of work, I cannot visit it: I herewith convey you my fraternal greetings. I take this opportunity of sending for your consideration some view points regarding the fine arts.

Literature and arts belong on the same front, on which you are fighters.

Like other fighters, you, in the artistic field, have your own responsibilities – to serve the resistance, the Fatherland and the people, first and foremost the workers, peasants and soldiers.

To fulfill your tasks, you must have a firm class stand and a sound ideology; in short you must place the interests of the Resistance, of the Fatherland and of the people above all.

With regard to your creative work, it is necessary that you understand, get in touch with and go deeply into, the people's life. Only by so doing, will you be able to convey the heroism and determination of our soldiers and people as a whole and to contribute to the development and improvement of these qualities. Our resistance has made great progress; our soldiers and people have made big strides forward, so will you, in the artistic field, by means of criticism and self-criticism.

Some of you may think: President Ho tries to turn the fine arts into a political matter.

Nothing is more true. Literature and arts, like all other activities, cannot be taken apart from the economic and political fields, but they must be included in them.

Our people's future is most glorious, and the future of our fine arts is very bright. I wish you good health, progress and success in your work.

*Greetings of friendship and determination to win  
December 10, 1951*

– Ho Chi Minh, Message sent to the artists on the occasion of the 1951 Paintings Exhibition

## FOR FURTHER VIEWING

### “VIETNAM: A TELEVISION HISTORY; THE END OF THE TUNNEL (1973 - 1975);

Thieu Interview,” 01/31/1975, WGBH Media Library & Archives.

Source: <http://openvault.wgbh.org>

### “DINH Q LE AT RICE GALLERY: CROSSING THE FARTHER SHORE”, WALLEY FILMS (2014)

<https://vimeo.com/95724016>

### THE BETEL TREE (CÂY CAU), JAKEB ANH VU (DIRECTOR) (2009),

<https://youtu.be/ra0l2n8XK4E>



Le Tri Dung,  
*Mother Cuc Digging Tunnel,*  
*Tung Luat, Vinh Linh (1969)*  
Watercolour and pencil on paper,  
27.7 x 19.5cm

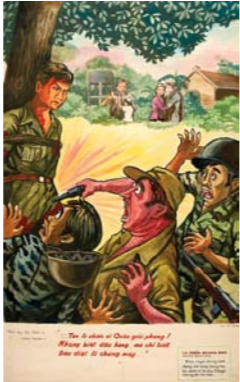
INDEX  
WHO  
WANTS TO  
REMEMBER  
A WAR



Tran Mai,  
Doi Moi (Reconstruction) /  
Going Forward (1991)  
Printed poster on paper,  
78 x 54.5cm



Huy Toan,  
Exhibition 1955:  
Developing the People's  
Military of Vietnam (1955)  
Printed poster on paper,  
67.5 x 52.5 cm



Vo Xuong,  
"I Am the Liberation Soldier.  
I Do Not Know How to  
Surrender: I Only Know  
How to Kill All of You."  
(1968) Mixed media hand-  
painted poster on paper,  
99 x 64cm



Duy Chu,  
The City Rises (1969)  
Mixed media hand-painted  
poster on paper,  
55 x 36.5cm



Lam Min, A Lot of  
Explosives Already Made,  
Chanh Phu Hoa Village  
(1968), Watercolour  
and pen on paper,  
17.4 x 25.2cm



Nguyen Cuong,  
Soldiers Helping Farmers in  
Harvesting, Ha Tinh (1971)  
Pencil on paper,  
27.5 x 39.8cm



Nguyen Cuong,  
The Soldiers of Hong Chau  
Division QZF, Quang Tri,  
Pounding Rice Flour to  
Make Rice Cake (1972)  
Mixed media on paper,  
28.7 x 36cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Untitled (Battlefield  
Cannon Unit) (1965)  
Pen on paper,  
39.4 x 27.3cm



Nguyen Hieu, Two Soldiers  
Digging a Tunnel,  
Thanh Hoa Province (1967),  
Watercolour on paper,  
32.6 x 49.5cm



Minh Tuyen, Hand Over the Government to the People!  
(1969) Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper,  
35.8 x 48.7 cm



Huy Toan,  
Promoting the Anti-American  
Resistance Movement,  
Competing in Studies,  
Building a Powerful  
People's Military (1955)  
Printed poster on paper,  
50 x 63cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Peace, Unity,  
Independence in Congo  
(1961) Mixed media  
hand-painted poster  
on paper, 78 x 53cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Cuba for the Cubans  
(1961) Mixed media  
hand-painted poster on paper,  
77.3 x 52cm



Quach Phong, Fighting  
in the Tunnel in Phuoc Long  
(Northwest Saigon) (1969)  
Watercolour on paper,  
24.8 x 32.5cm



Quach Phong, Team Spirit:  
Carrying the Wounded,  
(Phan Rang) (1966)  
Watercolour on paper,  
32.4 x 25cm



Huynh Phuong Dong,  
Female Comrade Nguyen  
Ngoc Hue, Cook for the  
Guerrillas, Crossed the  
River to Save Five of  
Her Comrades (1969).  
Watercolour on paper,  
30.5 x 29.5cm



Hoang Dinh Tai, Captured Pilot Hnat (Quang Nam)  
(1970), Watercolour on paper, 52 x 38cm



Tran Ngoc,  
North and South Must be  
United (probably 1955-56)  
Mixed media hand-painted  
poster on paper  
32.5 x 39.3 cm



Hoang Trung,  
Saigon Resists! (Undated),  
Gouache on paper,  
52x33.6 cm



Tran Van Cam,  
Vietnam-Indonesia  
Friendship (1965)  
Woodcut on special paper,  
42 x 27.1cm



Nguyen Chi Hieu, For Independence,  
For Freedom, Defeat The Americans Into Withdrawal,  
Defeat The "Puppets" Into Collapse, Continuously Attack,  
Continuously Resist, Determined To Achieve Full Victory!  
(1969) Printed poster on paper, 42 x 60.3cm



Nguyen Trong Kiem,  
Vietnamese Soldier  
Inspecting a French  
(Senegalese) Prisoner-of-  
War at the Prisoner-of-War  
Camp, Tuyen Quang (1953)  
Pen on Paper,  
15.7 x 20.4 cm



Pham Thanh Tam, American  
Prisoner-of-War John A.  
Young Captured in the Battle  
at Vay Village (1968).  
Pen and wash on paper,  
27 x 36.3cm



Huy Toan, A True  
Story in Quang Binh  
(Artist's Reminiscence  
of A Vietnamese Medic  
Attending to an American  
Pilot) (1990).  
Watercolour on paper,  
36 x 48.2cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Women Ploughing (1954)  
Watercolour and pen  
on paper,  
22 x 29cm



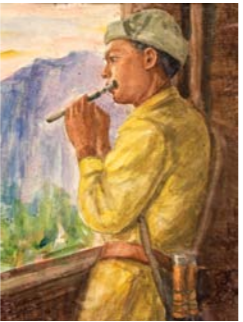
Pham Duc Cuong,  
Untitled (A Village Scene  
during the War;  
Quang Binh) (Undated)  
Watercolour on paper,  
21 x 29.5cm



Pham Viet,  
Comrade Try, C11,  
Playing a Musical  
Instrument Made from  
a U.S. Flare, Truong Son  
(Ho Chi Minh Trail) (1966)  
Watercolour on paper,  
23.5 x 31.5cm



Fam Luc (Pham Luc),  
Discovering a Mass Grave,  
Siem Reap (Cambodia)  
(1983) Gouache and  
watercolour on paper,  
39.4 x 63.1 cm



Van Giao,  
The Sound of the Flute of  
the Soldier, Tay Bac (1962)  
Watercolour on paper,  
32.8 x 24cm



Van Giao,  
Untitled (Civilian Guard ),  
Tinh Tuc (1963)  
Watercolour on paper,  
33.6 x 24.3cm



Pham Duc Cuong,  
A Small Hamlet, Vinh Thuy,  
Quang Binh (1969)  
Watercolour on paper  
21.1 x 29.5 cm



Pham Viet,  
Comrade Try, C11,  
Playing a Musical  
Instrument Made from  
a U.S. Flare, Truong Son  
(Ho Chi Minh Trail) (1966)  
Watercolour on paper,  
23.5 x 31.5cm



Nguyen Tu Nghiem,  
Thanh Giong (1975),  
Crayon on paper,  
32 x 27.8cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Pathet Lao Female Soldier,  
Khay Khay (Laos), 1962  
Pen and watercolour  
on paper,  
27.3 x 20cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Miss OT, Youth Pioneer Girl  
Cook of Unit 3,  
Vinh Linh, (1968)  
Pencil on paper,  
27.4 x 19 cm



Le Tri Dung,  
Mother Cuc Digging Tunnel,  
Tung Luat, Vinh Linh (1969)  
Watercolour and pencil  
on paper,  
27.7 x 19.5cm



Ng Binh Thiem,  
A Group of Female  
Guerrillas, Eastern Region  
of Gia Lai Province (1972)  
Watercolour on Paper,  
23.5 x 32.6cm



Le Tien Phuong,  
B52, Ngoc Ha Village,  
Outside Hanoi (1985),  
Watercolour on Silk  
39.4 x 58.5 cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Vigilant / F111 /  
Ready to Fight (1973)  
Gouache on paper,  
59.7 x 32.5cm



Huynh Van Thuan, Our Heroic Women (1973)  
Watercolour on paper, 44.7 x 61.8cm

## INDEX LINES



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Unit C2 Studying the  
Principles of the cleaning  
of Cannon, Preparing  
to Attack Dien Bien Phu  
(1953) Pen on paper,  
15.7x 21.5cm



Van Da,  
Untitled (Study for  
"Producing and Fighting:  
Ba Dinh Printing Enterprise,  
Awarded First Class Flag  
of Thanh Hoa Town) (1965)  
Pencil on paper,  
27x 39 cm



Nguyen Phu Hau,  
On the Way to the Battlefield,  
Phuoc Long (Song Be)  
(1974), Pencil on paper,  
20.5 x 29.8cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Typing, Flowers,  
Dien Bien Phu (1953)  
Pencil on paper,  
22.6 x 18.4 cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Xuan Woa Church,  
Bach Dang Village,  
Thai Binh, Bombed by  
French Cannons (1953)  
Pencil on paper,  
19.6 x 15 cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
American Tank on the A1  
Hill, Dien Bien Phu (1954),  
Pencil on paper,  
29.2 x 38.2cm



Quach Phong,  
Prisoners of War Camp,  
Lam Dong Province:  
American;  
South Vietnamese;  
Thuong (Highlander)  
Prisoners-of-War (1967)  
Pencil on paper,  
25 x 32.5 cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Battle on Top of Houses,  
Hang Buom Street (Hanoi)  
(1965) Pencil on paper,  
15.2 x 10cm



Ngo Binh Thiem,  
The Battle Attacking  
Daksieng, Big DKZ  
Cannon, Tay Nguyen  
(Central Highlands) (1967)  
Watercolour on paper  
mounted on cardboard,  
21.8 x 21cm



Nguyen Phu Hau,  
12.8mm Anti-Aircraft Gon,  
Song Be (1974)  
Pencil on paper,  
18.7 x 25.4cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Automobile Factory,  
Nam Kinh, Trung Quoc  
(China) (1972)  
Pencil on paper,  
27.7 x 39cm



Van Da,  
Untitled (Clinic in the Tunnel,  
Quang Binh) (1968)  
Ink on paper,  
16 x 19.7cm



Ta (Ta Thu),  
Triptych of Anti-American Caricatures (Study) (1962)  
Pen on tracing paper, 16 x 31.5cm



Pham Ngoc Doanh,  
Tiger Cage, Con Dao  
– Where the Enemy  
Imprisoned the Soldiers  
of the REvolutionion (1975)  
Charcoal on paper,  
33 x 43.5cm



Huynh Biec  
(Pham Thanh Tam),  
Military Nurses in the  
Jungle Where the Army  
Stops, Truong Son  
(Ho Chi Minh Trail) (1968)  
Pencil on paper,  
14.5 x 21cm



Fam Luc (Pham Luc),  
Self Portrait, Cambodia (1992) Pastel on paper, 61.4 x 89.8cm



Huynh Biec  
(Pham Thanh Tam);  
In the Jungle, Truong Son  
(Ho Chi Minh Trail) (1968)  
Pencil on paper,  
14 x 21.1 cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Indian Official of the  
International Control  
Commission in  
Cang Dong Chum  
(Plain of Jars, Laos) (1963)  
Ink on paper,  
15 x 10cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Untitled (In the Bunker,  
Phuc Xa, Hanoi) (1966)  
Pencil on paper,  
9.8 cmx 15.3 cm



Vu Tan Ba,  
Comrade Juan A... P...,  
Lawyer/Director of the  
Academy of Science, Cuba  
/ Chief of Delegation that  
Visited Vinh Linh (1971)  
Charcoal on paper,  
36.5 x 27cm



Van Da,  
The Day I Visited Si Tot  
(Portrait of Si Tot) (1989)  
Pen on cardboard,  
23 x 14.5cm



Pham Luc,  
Waiting for the Order,  
Quang Tri (1972)  
Colour pencil on paper,  
21 x 29.3 cm



Vu Tan Ba,  
Checking Cannon,  
Preparing to Continue with  
the Campaign  
(Stung Treng) (1973)  
Pencil on paper,  
32.5 x 44.5



Huynh Van Thuan,  
The Last Days in Dien Son,  
Vietnamese People Printing  
Litho, Quang Tay,  
Trung Quoc (Guangxi,  
China) (1950)  
Pencil on paper,  
20 x 26.5cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Very Green Algae, Rice  
Output Over 5 Tons  
(Study No. 1) (1967)  
Mixed media on paper,  
27.6 x 18.3cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Very Green Algae,  
Rice Output Over 5 Tons  
(Study No.2) (1967)  
Mixed media on paper,  
26.8 x 17.8cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Very Green Algae, Rice  
Output Over 5 Tons (1967)  
Gouache hand-painted  
poster on paper,  
113 x 76 cm



Le Dung,  
Self Portrait (1968)  
Lithograph,  
41 x 26.8cm



Huynh Van Thuan,  
Self Portrait (1950)  
Pencil on paper,  
25.5 x 18.4 cm



Pham Duc Cuong, Wharf, Nghi An Province (1969)  
Watercolour on paper, 14.5 x 32.7cm



Pham Luc,  
Carrying an Injured Soldier,  
Quang Tri (1975)  
Colour Pencil on Paper,  
29.5 x 21.2 cm



Le Tri Dung,  
Tunnel Used During  
the Evacuation Period,  
Ha Bac Province (1965)  
Coloured pencil on paper,  
27.3 x 26.5cm



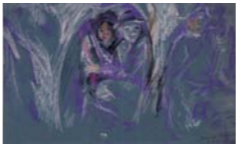
Pham Thanh Tam,  
Untitled (Mother with child  
in an underground tunnel in  
a village destroyed) (1968)  
Pencil on paper,  
19.4 x 25.4cm



Nguyen Bang Lam,  
"Puppet" (South Vietnam Government) Prisoners-of-war  
of the First Regiment of the First Division Captured in  
Ban Dong (Quang Tri) (1971), Pen on paper,  
18 x 25.5 cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
An Evening Listening to  
the Radio (in the Tunnel,  
Vinh Linh) (1968)  
Pencil on paper,  
20 x 30cm



Quach Phong,  
In the Cu Chi Tunnel (1969)  
Pastel on paper,  
32.5 x 55.8cm



Huynh Biec (Pham Thanh  
Tam), Tunnels in Quang Tri  
(1968) Pencil on paper,  
29.5 x 20cm



Thanh Chau,  
A Guerrilla in the Rain,  
An Giang Province (1971)  
Watercolour on paper,  
27.5 x 19cm



Huynh Phuong Dong,  
Portrait of Pham Thanh  
Tam (1977)  
Pencil on paper,  
29.5 x 21cm



Quach Phong,  
Comrade Dau,  
Head of a Team of  
Commandos (1969),  
Watercolour on paper,  
25.5 x 32.7 cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
Pilots on Combat Duty in  
Noi Bai Airport (Hanoi) –  
A couple of hours after the  
sketch, the artist learnt that  
Pilot Long (middle) died in  
a fight with an American  
Aircraft (1965),Ink on paper,  
23.2 x 30.3cm



Vu Tan Ba,  
American Prisoner-of-war  
Sergeant Jon Cavaiani,  
caught in Dong Tri,  
North Quang Tri (1971)  
Pencil on paper,  
31.5 x 22.4cm



Song Van, Hanoi Girl (1967)  
Pencil on paper, 23 x 17.5cm



Ngo Binh Thiem,  
Self-Portrait (1967)  
Charcoal on paper,  
26.4 x 18.1 cm



Trong Kiem,  
Civil Guards,  
Viet Bac (1950)  
Pencil on paper,  
32.7 x 25.3 cm



Le Nhuong,  
Uncle (Ho Chi Minh)  
Said Win, So We Have To  
Win (Undated)  
Printed poster on paper,  
88 x 58cm



Vu Tan Ba,  
Ta Le Pou (Phoulenhik /  
Phu La Nik, Laos)  
Truong Son (Ho Chi Minh  
Trail) (1972), Stone and  
mineral colours on paper,  
31 x 43 cm



Van Da,  
Mortar Practice,  
Ha Tay (1964)  
Pencil on paper,  
27.3 x 39.2 cm



Luu Cong Nhan,  
Portrait of Artist Trong Kiem  
Pencil on paper,  
38.1 x 27.4cm



Pham Thanh Tam,  
On Top of the House,  
Hang Buom Street, Hanoi  
(1967) Pencil on paper,  
21.7 x 28.6cm



Photographer unknown,  
Soldiers on a Roof Top  
Protecting the Capital,  
Hanoi (Undated)  
Black and White  
Photograph,  
18.5 x 23.6 cm



Photographer unknown,  
Crossing the Red River,  
Hanoi, on a Pontoon  
Bridge After American  
Bombings (Undated)  
Black and White  
Photograph,  
18.5 x 23.8cm



Vu Tan Ba,  
Pontoon Bridge, Dong Ha,  
Quang Tri Province (1973)  
Watercolour on paper,  
32.3 x 44cm



**BÁC BẢO THẮNG LÀ THẮNG**