

VIETNAM 1954-1975

War Drawings and Posters
From The Ambassador
Dato' N. Parameswaran
Collection



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.



11.

1. [Minh Hai](#), *Silence the American Cannons!* (1969), Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 39.5 x 57.3cm
2. Artist unknown, *The South Vietnam Nationale Front for Liberation- 1968: "For Whom, For What Are you Dying?"* (1968), Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 58.3cm x 39.5cm
3. [Le Lam](#), *Continually Attack and Resist Government should Belong to the People!* (undated), Printed poster, 39.8 x 58cm
4. [Trong Kiem](#), *Viet Bac Soldier* (1951) Pencil on paper, 24.8 x 22cm
5. [Hoang Dinh Tai](#), *All for the South, Flesh and Blood!* (1973), Woodcut poster on paper, Edition 1/10, 36.5 x 51cm
6. [Huy Toan](#), *Victory of Dien Bien Phu* (1960), Woodcut print on paper, 31 x 44.7cm
7. [Phan Ke An \(Kich\)](#), *Uncle Ho (Chi Minh) Arriving at the Border Boundary Stone 108 at the Vietnam-China Border in 1941, Collecting the First Lump of Earth of the Nation.* (1969), Chinese ink on Chinese rice paper, 41.8 x 32.85cm
8. [Huynh Van Thuan \(Tu Ahn\)](#), *Deep in sleep after drinking too much* (1950) Mixed media on paper, 17.6 x 23.2cm
9. [Le Tri Dung](#), *Studying Political Lessons Beside the Trench of Anti-Aircraft Guns, Ham Rong Bridge, Thanh Hoa Province* (1966), Blue pen on paper, 27.3cm x 38.8cm
10. [Hoang Dinh Tai](#), *Medical Facility in Asau (A Chau Valley), Hue* (1970), Mixed media on paper, 30 x 41.5cm
11. [Nguyen Cuong](#), *The Class in the Hamlet after Liberation, Quang Tri* (1972), Watercolour on paper, 30 x 39.5cm



INTRODUCTION	2
Chang Yueh Siang	

FROM THE FRONTLINES:	10
Collecting Posters and Drawings from the Vietnam War	

Conversation with Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran,
Collector and Charmian Chelvam (BA Hons., NUS), Collections Manager
Edited by Chang Yueh Siang

INDEX OF SELECTED ARTWORKS

Drawings and Sketches	26
<i>Indochinese War, War Landscapes and Battles, "At Ease", Prisoners of War and Portraits</i>	
Propaganda Art	32

Inner Cover: [Huy Toan](#), *Welcome the Liberation Army of Ho Chi Minh City*, 1975
Gouache and lacquer on thick paper, 32 x 53cm
Extract from Notes of the Artist on the verso of this work: "I participated on the day 1.5.75 in liberated Saigon...
I have drawn many pictures of the Saigon people with the army. I did this painting."

Chang Yueh Siang
Curator, NUS Museum

Vietnam 1954-1975 presents one of the largest known singular collection of drawings and posters from the Vietnam War. Assembled by Dato' N. Parameswaran during his appointment to Hanoi as Ambassador of Malaysia, then subsequently documented systematically and catalogued by Ms Charmian Chelvam over the years, the collection comprises artworks in different media: hand-drawn or printed propaganda posters, sketches and line drawings, watercolours and paintings. This exhibition presents a small selection from the range of media on loan to the NUS Museum for a period of three years, to prospect research and to facilitate teaching. The materials in the exhibition are organized in a chronological order, guided by a timeline of the Vietnam War, supplemented by contemporary accounts and quotes from literary sources to provide other perspectives to the events in the background of the depicted scenes. This essay introduces the background against which the works in the collection are produced, and also to indicate the presence of a diversity of materials beyond works from the North. These alternative materials give an indication to an ideological conflict that probably to some degree reflected the intensity of the military fighting. They are also a vehicle to lead us to consider the diversity of Vietnamese society in this long period of political and military fragmentation that we call “the Vietnam War.”

The conflict that we know of as the Vietnam War had its antecedents in post-war anti-colonialism, beginning in 1945 when the Ho Chi Minh-led North Vietnamese army launched an attack to drive the French out of Vietnam. The decision at the Geneva Conference to divide Vietnam at the 17th Parallel 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 was 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.¹

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 West 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 in developed nations, the Cold War period coincided with capitalistic and hyperconsumerist transformation². 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 by strength of military technology. At the end of the Second World War the USA was supporting the rebuilding of allied European nations through the Marshall Plan,³ 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 reminder 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 in this collection give valuable insight into 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 1965.⁴ The series of posters dating to around 1968-69 reflect the ferocity of the Vietnamese led Tet Offensive; and when the Vietnamese have gained good ground by the early 1970s, the messages are directed to maintenance and self-protectionⁱⁱⁱ... By and large, the communications 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. 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.⁵



i. [Nguyen Chi Hieu](#), *For Independence, For Freedom, Defeat the Americans into Withdrawal, Defeat the “Puppets” into Collapse, Continually Attack, Continually Resist, Determined to Achieve Full Victory!* (1969)
Printed poster on paper 42 x 60.3cm



ii. [Quang Son](#), *Comrade Do Van Nhu Army Engineer (Sapper) at a Lao Village Collecting “Bom-bi” Bombs* (1964)
Charcoal on paper 27.8cm x 39.5cm

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.⁶ 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. 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 on loan have been 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 presents one united Vietnam against the enemy. This was 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.”⁷

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.⁸ Nguyen Toan Thi, former director of the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Fine Art, was also from the South and 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 till severe bombing drove the classes underground.⁹

“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 to that event.”¹⁰ This was written about artists in the French phase of the Indochinese War, and more details may be found in Pham Thanh Tan’s wartime diary, published as “Drawing Under Fire: War Diary of a Young Vietnamese Artist”¹¹; 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 French¹¹, and as art supplies were generally scarce^{iv}, 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...”¹² 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.”¹³

Unlike civilian artists, frontline artists were also armed guerilla fighters. “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.”¹⁴ Very little of this violence is seen in the collection: the main reason was of course 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.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶

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 this exhibition includes textual references to its existence, as a device to challenge the image of “One Vietnam” that the visual materials propose, to signal the complexities and ruptures that made building a unified Vietnam so difficult. These historical and literary voices remain important to our understanding of the history of the Vietnam War, and in understanding the events that unfolded after unification was achieved in May 1975.

The Australian War Museum has a collection of counter-propaganda leaflets that provide another perspective to the Vietnamese conflict. (Interestingly, these posters were produced by the First Psychological Unit of the Australian army.) 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.”¹⁷

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

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.¹⁸

The divide was not as simple as North versus South, and as the diaries of Dr Dang Thuy Tram¹⁹ show, the unity projected by propaganda images were at times tenuous. Born in an intellectual family in Hue and obtaining a medical degree from Hanoi, Tram 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 plaguing 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?

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.²⁰ 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

War (Remembering K)
 by "Us", 23 November
 1971, Danang²¹

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

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

"Yao He", *Impressions of Saigon* (April 1975), August 1975, Saigon²²

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 death²³

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.²⁴

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.

1.	From the episode "De nos envoyés spéciaux au Nord-Vietnam" for the series <i>Cinq Colonnes à la Une</i> , produced by The Office of French Radiodiffusion and Television. Broadcast on 6 Jun 1964. Collection of l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Paris.	6.	Ibid., pp.26-27.
2.	This transformation is presented by the exhibition "Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970", presented by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, 2008.	7.	Nora Taylor, <i>Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art</i> , University of Hawaii Press (2009), p.61
3.	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.	8.	Quach Phong, oral history recording by Sherry Buchanan, <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , University of Chicago Press, 2008, p.141.
4.	Operation Rolling Thunder was the name given to a sustained aerial campaign conducted against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese forces between 1965 and 1968.	9.	Nguyen Toan Thi, quoted in <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p. 39
5.	Cu Huy Can, <i>Culture et la politique culturelle en republique socialiste du Vietnam</i> , Paris: UNESCO (1985), p.21	10.	Nora Taylor, <i>Painters in Hanoi</i> , p. 50.
		11.	Edited by Sherry Buchanan, London: Asia Ink Books, 2005.
		12.	Quach Phong's reminiscences, in <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p.141
		13.	Nguyen Thoan Thi, <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p. 39.
		14.	<i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p.136



iii. [Hoang Dinh Tai](#), *Guarantee Health, Accomplish Mission* (1973) Woodcut poster on paper, Edition 1 / 10, 35 x 53.5cm

Conversation with Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran, Collector and Charmian Chelvam (BA Hons., NUS), Collections Manager

Edited by Chang Yueh Siang

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.



iv. [Van Da](#), *American Prisoner-of-War Joe Delong*, B3 (1967), Marker pen on paper, 21 x 32.5cm

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

April 1975). Meanwhile, Malaysia had also formally established diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) on 30 March 1973, following the signing of the Paris Accords on 27 January 1973 (which led to US withdrawal from Vietnam). With the unification of Vietnam in 1975, Malaysia established an embassy in Hanoi in 1976. So it's been a long time already. Malaysia was very non-aligned from the beginning. I was stationed in New York between 1973-75. On the way to New York, I stopped in Saigon. I stayed with my friend who was the head of the Malaysian Embassy. In Saigon, at night, I saw the MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam.) You saw sand bags, you saw everything at night, bombing and all that. That time was January 1973, the Americans were pulling out already. I remember landing in Tan Son Nhat, there were a lot of military aircraft. But I stayed a few days in Saigon.

Dato' Parameswaran (DP): 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 1991, in Ho Chi Minh City (renamed from Saigon, South Vietnam, in 1976), 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: And how long had Malaysia established diplomatic relations with Vietnam at this point? We know that Singapore's foreign policy was very conservative with regards to Vietnam, because of the Domino Theory, what was Malaysia's foreign policy towards Vietnam's independence from 1975?

Singapore had its own policies. Singapore, I think, was a bit more concerned about communism. They were more fearful of communism, because your internal experiences were very bad. With the student riots, the bus riots, and all that.

DP: Malaysia had already had diplomatic relations with the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in 1959. It had an Embassy in Saigon. That Embassy closed and all its staff were evacuated out of Saigon on 28 April 1975, two days before the fall of Saigon (30

CYS: But wouldn't you think that Malaysia, with memories of the Emergency¹, might have felt cautious about Communism?

- | | |
|---|--|
| 15. Nguyen Thoan Thi, <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , pg. 39 | 20. Dang Thuy Tram, <i>Last Night I Dreamt of Peace</i> . New York: Harmony Books, 2007 |
| 16. Nguyen Van Truc, <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p. 135 | 21. Fong Ming, <i>The History of Chinese Modern Poetry in Vietnam: Also on War Poems by Vietnamese Chinese</i> (1960 - 1975) Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Tam Kang University, 2011 , p.85 |
| 17. Quach Phong, <i>Mekong Diaries</i> , p. 147 | 22. <i>Ibid.</i> , p.82; translated by curator. |
| 18. 1st Psychological Operations Unit of Republic of Vietnam, Hand-disseminated leaflet: "Question Beliefs"; produced in Phuoc Tuy Province, Nui Dat, 2 October 1970. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02857/ Last retrieved on 16 June 2015. | 23. <i>Ibid.</i> , p.125; translated by curator |
| 19. 1st Psychological Operations Unit of Republic of Vietnam, Hand-disseminated leaflet: "Death Notice"; produced in Phuoc Tuy Province, Nui Dat, 26 February 1971. https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RC02905/ Last retrieved on 16 June 2015. | 24. Bao Ninh, <i>The Sorrow of War</i> , London: Secker & Warburg, 1993, p.99 |

DP: That was already over! We had already made peace, although we continued to be always vigilant about communism. The Emergency was between 1948-1960. By 1960, the Emergency was over.

All our friends had left the country, the New-Zealanders, the Australians, the Brits...everybody. And then we became much more non-aligned, we just went our middle way. But for Singapore it was too early because for a small country, you all had so many bad experiences, subversion in the universities and all that. So I think Singapore took a bit of a longer time to accept Vietnam. But it did not stop Singapore from dealing with Vietnam.

But I think there's nothing too strange about this, because normally before you can have political relations, you have economic relations. You know, trade brings you together. And then step by step, you develop a relationship. In the period I was there, Vietnam had not yet joined ASEAN, but things were beginning to change, and Singapore also began to warm up to Vietnam.

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 along Trang Tien Street that was very near the Pullman Hotel. They had a lot of exhibitions. That's where I saw people reading newspapers in glass cases on the wall. You could meet the artists there; you could buy paintings along Trang Tien Street. Art activities tend to revolve directly 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.

As I got to know Bac Lam better, and when I brought a group of 19 Malaysian artists visiting, he took us upstairs to see his works. So there were lots of interactions at that time also.²

Once you got to know about an artist, you ask people where the guy lives, then go and see him, and find out more about him. One could buy art direct from the artists (if you pursued them and if they were interested to sell). I also went to the Hanoi School of Fine Arts where there are professors whom others had recommended. Some may not want to sell, some do sell.

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, built, I was told, 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 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 1990s. 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 Don¹ 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, through my Hanoi friends, they would tell me to meet this person and that. I had a very able interpreter (Madam Pham Thi Mai Huong), 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, Tran Phuong Ky; 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 artist Nguyen Van Phoi who trained at Rome³. The works that I bought, which were made out of earth materials, were from another artist from Hue.

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

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: Do you remember who the first artist was that you came across, that made you think, "this is interesting stuff"?

DP: When I saw this exhibition in Trang Tien Street, I liked this guy, Huynh Van Thuanⁱⁱ, you'll see, who made very accurate drawings of the churches and Buddhist temples bombed. This was during the French period.

He drew pencil sketches, then he did posters.



i. [Pham Van Don](#), *Destroying the Plan of Helicopter Transportation*, 1965, Woodcut on paper, 26.4 x 19.2cm

I thought, "Wow, who is Huynh Van Thuan?" He lived outside town. So I asked my interpreter, "you go find out who he is, and anything else that you can find out". And I liked his watercolours; the street scenes, the market scenes were so beautiful. So that was one of the earliest ones, Huynh Van Thuan.

Then the other guy was Huy Toanⁱⁱⁱ. Huy Toan was a major in the Armed Forces those days, retired now. And I knew he drew; I used to go to his house. He's the one who went under his bed and take out posters to give to me. And he drew a lot of Dien Bien Phu. I was surprised to find that these materials dated back to the 1950s. You will see, one of the oldest works we have of Huynh Van Thuan was made in 1948. We've got drawings, as well as woodcuts from this period, which depicted the war.

1. The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) was an armed guerrilla conflict led by the communist-aligned Malayan National Liberation Army against British-led Commonwealth forces to overthrow British colonial rule of Malaya.

2. Cafe Lam is one of Hanoi's oldest cafes, established in 1956, and situated in the Old Quarter. "Uncle Lam", or "Bac Lam" was Nguyen Van Lam, and the cafe is known for its walls adorned by works by artists who paid in kind for their drinks, as described by Dato' Parameswaran. Some of the best known names in the collection include Nguyen Sang, Van Cao, Bui Xuan Phai, some of the last students of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de l'Indochine.

Then I met Pham Luc. Every day I go to the Thang Loi Hotel. Everybody goes there, it's a social place, you have meals. There weren't many hotels then. Pham Luc's house was on the way, and I would stop and chat with him. He was married to a French woman whom I never saw (laughs). She was abroad, and he was there in Vietnam. He would drink, and every day he would do something, like lacquer, so I bought quite a lot from him! And later on, I would find out he produced works during the war, which looked like rubbish at first, they were in such terrible condition! It's only because they were partly restored that they look nice today. I also got to know Phan Ke An, another top painter too.

So one would go to museums, and one saw what work an artist had done and went to find out about him; and you find him.

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?



ii. [Huynh Van Thuan](#), *Duyen Lao Church, Tiem Minh Village, Thai Binh* (1953), Pencil on paper, 20 x 29.7cm

DP: No, there was no interest, except at the Hanoi College of Fine Arts. There were some works in lacquers, very beautiful lacquers you see, which were depicting the war. These were considered important artistically. 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. There is one name that escapes me, but he collects a lot of these "masters", let's call them that.



iii. [Huy Toan](#), *On the way to Dien Bien (Phu)*, 6/57, Printed poster on paper, 34 x 43.8cm. Printed at Tien Bo Printing House, published by Art and Music Publishing House, 1958. Signed by artist on 08.11.1990

And as the years went by, there was a young collector in Ho Chi Minh City (whose name I can no longer remember) who began to collect widely, and he wrote art books. He began collecting Bui Xuan Phai's works. Bui Xuan Phai also did wartime art. There are two Bui Xuan Phais in my collection celebrating the victory of Saigon; the fall of Saigon. They are dated 1st of May, or 3rd of May 1975. Saigon fell on 30th April. So I'm lending you two Bui Xuan Phai, where he draws his famous musician friend Van Cao, fully drunk, with pink cheeks and all. Bui Xuan Phai did more than that. I've seen him do other war pictures.

CYS: So would you say that at this period in time, one reason the war-time artists were not collected was that attention was mainly on the great masters of fine arts?

DP: Few wartime artists were collected. Very few names! You can count them easily .

CYS: 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 1988⁴, (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: So who was the first artist that you visited? Can you remember? The first person you sat down to have a drink with? Or like, you got to know them very well already. Or if not the first, the most... memorable one.

DP: During that early period, there were people like Huy Toan. Hoang Dinh Tai, Phan Ke An, Pham Luc. When I went to Saigon, I went to see Huynh Phuong Dong and Thanh Chau^{iv}, both of whom painted very beautiful watercolours. And in between there were lots of other people I had met, some of them I don't even remember now. Like Quach Phong, Phan Thanh Tam...

CYS: When you went to see them, 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. The Vietnamese drink a lot. When Parliament was in session in Hanoi, all the Danang people came. They all came to the Malaysian Residence for dinner, including the Vice-President, who was herself from Danang. They have this very strong feeling about their Province. The Vice-Minister of Interior and other top Hanoi officials would come for dinner as a full Parliamentary delegation from Quangnam- Danang Province.

They love to drink. If you cannot break the barrier of drinking, (by choosing to) drink tea, or drinking at the beginning, or getting a representative to drink... You don't break into them. I was a social drinker, but I could hold my drink and I drank with them too. So on one occasion when I accompanied a Malaysian visitor to

see the Minister for Commerce, he said "Ah, no need (for formalities)! He is one of us ", referring to me. We got to know each other very well.



iv. [Thanh Chau](#), *The Viet Cong Cultural Group Performing for the Soldiers in the Front Line, Tien Giang* (1969), Watercolour on paper, 28.1 x 22.7cm. The female singer in the centre is the wife of the artist.

Then I had very good relations with the then Prime Minister (Vo Van Kiet). 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, which I later took photographs of in his house. At first they said, "no, you cannot see him, foreigners were not allowed to meet him". Then they checked with the foreign ministry's branch office in Saigon who came back and said "the Malaysian ambassador, the Indian one, is allowed" They let me go! (laughs) Afterwards I could go and see Nguyen Gia Tri anytime! So I saw Nguyen Gia Tri so many times, while many people in Hanoi had not even seen his face! In the fifties he quit the North and went to the South. He's the master of lacquer. I've got some woodcuts also, which were

3. 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.

4. 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.

from him. 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.

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 artifacts. Like the Dong Son drums, and things like that.

CYS: When you met with these artists and when you spoke with them, did they give you their reminiscences of war?

DP: Actually, strange to say, I didn't ask. Not like Sherry [Buchanan]⁵ did. I didn't ask.

My attraction to Vietnamese war drawings and posters was a natural evolution from my interest in art (since late 1985) and History (I graduated in History from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Prof Wang Gung Wu was one of my History lecturers then). When I arrived in Vietnam, I saw depictions of the long-drawn wars that Vietnam had undergone in its history, all over the place - in posters, photographs, exhibitions, special heroes graves in the villages etc. Memories of the wars were everywhere, all over the country. This drew me into collecting Vietnamese war drawings, posters and other memorabilia about the wars.

All I cared about was the image (laughs). I know where this one and that one was from, Cat Ba island; This is Phu Quoc, and all that. But I didn't bother to find out what they were about. Except for the late Le Tri Dung, he was a tank driver, because all his drawings were of tanks: "At night we would park here; we'll sleep

underneath here..." All of his drawings were very good. It shows you what the life of a tank driver was like, up till the end at Tan Son Nhat airport. There was a whole series of it. Then I knew, that Huy Toan was a soldier; [Nguyen] Bang Lam^v was a sailor. But we didn't talk about the war or what they did. Now I look back, I think I should have asked!

CYS: Were they surprised by your interest? Because as we said earlier, the Vietnamese were not particularly interested in these things, then suddenly this foreigner shows up and he wants to buy "these tattered pieces of paper that have been hiding under my bed..." Were they surprised?

DP: They probably thought I was foolish, this stuff was nothing! Huy Toan went under his bed and took things out for me. He'd say "this one, take, take, take", and he would give me. That's why on many of the paintings I have a date of acquisition. Some would inscribe "I warmly present to him... I present to Dato' Param..." All "presented"! (laughs) They were good guys, very good guys, very simple. But nobody was interested to collect these materials.

CYS: So at the beginning, many of the artists presented the works to you: so at which point did the artists decide that "okay, we can't give this guy presents all the time, we need to charge him".

DP: No, no. I had paid them for their works before, otherwise they wouldn't have continued talking to me. But you see, with the Vietnamese you have to be patient. You cannot do it fast as you Singaporeans are accustomed to — "what's your name, where you come from, where you going"? No. With the Vietnamese, even when you sit there and they pour the tea, it's a patient process. It takes a long time, the tea ceremony itself. Maybe half-an-hour before they begin to speak. The teacups come in, then put hot water, clean off, take away, throw, then they take the tea, first round; thin, second round; thick. Then you don't know why they are gazing at you all the time... Because they read you. They read your eyes.

They don't know you. But when they read your eyes, they will know. And when you talk, afterwards they will give you the tea. You're still not talking any business,

you're making small talk. Listen, talk nicely... And then drink tea, they size you up, listen to you, and then they deal with you.

CYS: So when you bought the works, even though you paid for them, they still said the works were "presented"?



v. [Nguyen Bang Lam, Removing the Rust, Quang Yen, Quang Ninh \(1970\), Watercolour on paper, 18.7 x 25.3cm.](#)

DP: No: Later on, if they liked you, they gave gifts to you. You know, in Vietnamese, they've got an expression, "if there is emotion, if there is sentiment, if there is feeling, everything is possible. If there is no emotion, no sentiment, no feeling, everything is not possible". They are guided by this. They've already assessed you with their eyes, and if they find you okay, you are 'cleared', and they talk to you. If they like you, they offer you, you don't even have to ask. They write and give it to you.

CYS: And they didn't feel particularly nostalgic about the drawings?

DP: Not really. Except Huy Toan. He had many sketch books he didn't want to sell. He wanted to keep them. He didn't want to sell them because it gave him all these memories of the past. But otherwise, there was no interest. The artists were not (nostalgic) about the works.

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. If there had been no foreign expatriates who went to intrude into Vietnam, maybe the system could have continued. But then later, you know, foreigners came and employed people, paid them double the salary and all that, then you know, it affected the system. But the Vietnamese did not discard these people. If you asked me, did I find anybody in a pathetic state? No.

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

DP: Yes. 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, in 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.

Charmian Chelvam (CC): People like Pham Thanh Tam went back to the Hanoi School of Fine Arts to teach.

DP: Yes some of the war-time artists went back to teach, they were not discarded. They were looked after. I must say that everybody I visited was okay. Nobody was in a terrible condition. They were all looked after by the State, that was the policy of the State. There were different pricings for locals and foreigners, just half the price for them and double the price for us.

CYS: So in the early days, most of the talking was through your interpreter?

DP: In those days, the Vietnamese couldn't speak English. That's why I was forced to learn (Vietnamese). Whenever my interpreter interpreted, I began to learn. Then slowly I told her, okay, don't need to interpret, I can speak. So I began to learn like that.

I learnt very fast, because every day I had to go and see ministers and officials, and everyday there had to be translations. Every day when you listened, but I was not shy, I used to carry around a piece of paper,

5. Sherry Buchanan is an art historian of wartime art and artist from the Vietnam War period. She is the author of *Mekong Diaries: Viet Cong Drawings and Stories, 1964-1975* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), and the editor of *Drawing Under Fire: War Diary of a young Vietnamese Artist* by Pham Thanh Tam (Asia Ink Books: 2005)

and I would say “what does this word mean? “*Du Lich*”. In Vietnamese it was written a certain way, but I didn’t care. Then I said “Du Lich, z-o-o l-i-c-k”. I don’t care, as long as I understood how to say it and what it meant! “Du Lich” meant tourism.

So when I don’t know, I asked them. So when I went there sometimes doing this, sometimes the Vietnamese would laugh at you. Then I would ask, in Vietnamese, “*Anh biet noi tieng Anh khong?*” Can you speak English? “*Vo van!*” I say: Rubbish, you cannot speak! The other party would become shy, because you were telling him before other Vietnamese people that the foreigner could speak Vietnamese, and you, the Vietnamese, couldn’t speak English, yet you want to snigger. But as I’ve said, the moment you speak to them in their language, the wavelength changes. The mode becomes that of brother and sister. I went to Vietnam from Geneva. I spent three-and-a-half-years in Geneva. Geneva, too, had beautiful buildings and lovely lakes. Hanoi also had lovely buildings and lovely lakes. But the Swiss people were not the warmest people I’ve met in the world. But the Vietnamese are very different. Once you know them, they become very friendly.

CYS: It is interesting when you mentioned earlier that, that “who wants to remember a war”. These materials, if you look at them, and especially now, they seem to be projecting a very unified response^{vi} against the enemy.

DP: That was a requirement of the government [in North Vietnam during the war].

CYS: So they fought because it was the enemy. But did everybody feel equally victorious, in that sense? And did you get a sense that these were artists that actually did see very fierce battles?

DP: Yes. Because much of it was drawn on the spot. So they were actively involved. The Vietnamese also had a very good media coverage of the war. Media, in the sense through artists, who were compelled to do what the State wanted them to do. They had to do this

out of national service, or they would get sent back to “Changi”⁶; their Changi was Hoa Lo (later dubbed “Hanoi Hilton” by the POWs), Hoa Lo was jail term in Hanoi⁷. Or if they sent you to Phu Quoc, or Cat Ba, that’s the end of it for you.

But the artists did it because it was national service. During the war, you were not supposed to be happy. The pictures created the *spirit*^{vii} for the people to fight. So that was what they were doing.

And they did see very fierce battle.

If you study the pictures very carefully, the dates are also important. You can see that certain artists were on certain battlefields at certain periods. And then even if you didn’t have the signatures, you could say “oh, this one looks like the same scene”. If you want to find, say, August something, and the guy had done 15 paintings, you would know which one was from Ap Bac,⁸ or from Khe Sanh⁹ or Quang Tri¹⁰, all of the famous battles. They were definitely involved in the frontline, and they had specific dates and times. They were war artistes specifically employed by the government. They were employed, and some were also fighters. Of course, I



vi. [Ta Thu, Concentrate the Hatred and Indignation on the Bayonet and the Barrel of the Gun \(1969\), Mixed media hand-painted poster, 39.5 x 57.8cm.](#)

6. Reference is to Changi Prison in Singapore.

7. The Hỏa Lò Prison was a prison used by the French colonists in Vietnam for political prisoners, and later by North Vietnam for prisoners of war during the Vietnam War.

8. The Battle of Ấp Bắc was a major battle fought in South Vietnam on January 2, 1963, which resulted in the first major Viet Cong victory.

mean all were fighters because they were fighting for the country. But they were also asked to draw. The same way that there were people who took films.

There were in fact many of these battle films. When Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir visited, Vo Van Kiet, who was the Vietnamese prime minister, showed him the film archives. It was impressive, you had to be there to film it, when Hanoi was bombed, the Christmas bombings... They had a very active propaganda unit like that. I think if you saw it, you would think it was very spirited. On top of that, they had photographs, and some of the photographs I have are very interesting! All real war scenes, broken down hospitals, and all that. So they had films, photographs, and art. Fine drawings. None of them were drawing out of fantasies; they were not Impressionists. They were activists, they were there. So sometimes if you really want to do a study of it, you look at the artist, you look at the period also. You know that he was at the province in that period, because there were ten pictures. The title won’t give you the answer, because it says “Hanoi”. What does “Hanoi” mean? Nothing. Only the picture will tell you.

In some of the drawings, you will see the whole of the range of canons on top of roofs, so many, stating which street in Hanoi. Just yesterday we found a drawing with an ice-cream parlour, a famous ice-cream parlour called Thuy Ta, next to Hoan Kiem Lake, where people would always go to relax. They local expression was “let’s go and get wind”. In the drawings, we saw, on top of the buildings, there were cannons, things on top of the roofs.

I didn’t believe when I was told before that on top of the roofs or on top of the bridge in Hanoi, they had platforms from which they used to shoot, because the anti-aircraft guns didn’t reach high enough. I didn’t believe until I saw them in the pictures, you know. In Pham Luc’s paintings there were really platforms on top. The Vietnamese were also so grateful to the Russians who provided them with missiles. But the

Vietnamese adapted the technology to make them go higher. You will see that these missiles were fired from raised platforms. I saw that in the drawings, and now I see it in the photographs that I have, real photographs. They shot down more than 2000 planes!



vii. [Minh Tuyen, Fight to the Finish! \(1969\), Mixed media hand-painter poster, 36 x 53cm.](#)

CYS: I had initially thought that they were using artists, because perhaps they were not as rich as the Americans. The Americans would send war journalists who had their cameras —

DP: The Vietnamese had very good photographers!

CYS: —so why did they then still use artists? If they had photographers and film, that is.

DP: They used many channels. These were fighters, they were on the ground. Like Le Tri Dung rode a tank, he was sleeping at night under the tank, and he would draw.

CYS: So you don’t think it was a matter of resources, of wealth, then?

DP: What’s so great about being so wealthy and still losing, anyway? We grew up in an environment where they say everything American was great, and the Viet Cong looked like devils and all that. But then when I

9. The Battle of Khe Sanh took place in the Northwestern part of Quang Tri Province, between 21 January and 9 July 1968. The victory of the Viet Cong forces at Khe Sanh marked the first time in the Vietnam War that the Americans abandoned a major military base due to intense military pressure.

10. Quang Tri was the site of major battles during the Vietnam War; in 1968, Quang Tri City was the site of fierce strategic battle during the Tet Offensive when Northern Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong attacked major cities and towns in South Vietnam in a bid to force the collapse of the Saigon government. Then there was the Easter Offensive of 1972, resulting in North Vietnamese victory.

went to Vietnam, I saw these guys, they were so nice! They helped you readily, and they were all puny guys! Small, small guys. Today they're probably bigger, because times are better, nutrition is better. I remember seeing the members of parliament wearing slippers in parliament. And I said to myself "wow, these are the people that defeated the Americans?"

CC: I think it's the form of propaganda. The Americans failed to convince the world when they showed their footage to the world through television, that's the thing. But the Vietnamese were using these prints and drawings to show their own people.

DP: In their own villages.

CC: Maybe there were not as many televisions [in Vietnam]. So, what they did was, they drew. And through posters and newspapers, this was how they disseminated the propaganda.

DP: But you see, it's not just artwork. You must understand that a lot of their influence came from China. In the early days of the Vietnam War, they were very good friends. So the method and material that you find employed in Chinese posters were transposed to Vietnam, and many of the artists had gone there to study. So you'll find all the woodcuts and influences from China, silkscreens and all, how to do it... They were done on the Ho Chi Minh trail! When I bought items from from Le Tri Dung, he would tell me they were from Trùng Sơn, the Ho Chi Minh trail. So this was the propaganda they used to pass around everywhere, and easy propaganda at that. What they wanted was for the people to be with them.

What the American war journalists wanted, was altogether different. They wanted to show how bad the war was. The schools in the US were saying "come back".¹¹ You know, the girl with the napalm¹² and all that bad news generated so much tension; Agent Orange, and everything else. So I think there was a different purpose. The Vietnamese wanted them to build up their spirit to fight. For the other side, there were many other reasons photography

and film footage were disseminated. I don't think it instilled the Americans to fight harder. At 18, they get conscripted for a year, and count down the days till the end of the war on their helmets. All they were looking forward to was the war finishing and coming back. For the Vietnamese, the main objective was to get them to be with their government and to fight. That is why in this war, you will see children, women, men, all fighting! They fought the Americans to breaking point, when things came to head at My Lai¹³. Did you read "Four Hours in My Lai"?¹⁴ By then, the Americans didn't know who to shoot! How do you fight the war when the Vietnamese on both sides looked the same! They aren't labeled North Vietnam or South Vietnam, they looked and spoke the same! So the enemy was the same! So when they entered My Lai, and the young fellas went there, *anything* that moved they shot. Including animals. So, you have these people, wanting to fight for their country, and a group of other people not knowing what to do and why they're here! They think they should be somewhere else, that's why they carry their ice-cream and fans with them.

CYS: Whereas the Vietnamese felt "this is our home."

DP: Yes. "And you are not the first guy I fought. I have fought so many enemies before", from the time of a thousand over years of Chinese colonisation, up till now! That's why when the Chinese invaded in '79, the Chinese said "I will teach you a lesson"¹⁵, they had all the practice they needed to fend the Chinese off. And the Vietnamese resisted ferociously. They will defend to the death. Look at their tunnels, and you will be shocked at what they can do. I went in halfway into the Cu Chi tunnels, I had to come out. I couldn't breathe, it was claustrophobic. And it runs out into the river. There's a book, "Tunnels of Cu Chi"¹⁶, that describes this.

CYS: In the South, when the Northern campaign was going on, the South also produced posters that discouraged people from joining the North, asking them to come back. When you were went to Saigon, did you see any of that?

DP: I never saw any. I'm sure there was. I mean, posters counteract posters. But Americans also had

11. In 1970, students from Kent State University and Jackson State College in the United States were shot during protests against continued American involvement in Vietnam.

12. The image of nine-year-old Pham Thu Kim Phuc running in pain from a napalm attack has been made popular by the Pulitzer-winning photograph taken by Nick Ut on June 8, 1972.

(those). I have to find a catalogue in my collection somewhere where the Americans had their show. I can't remember where it was held, in the US or Saigon, but it had all these war pictures done by the Americans!

CYS: So how did you become specifically interested in the posters from the North but not so much in the South?

DP: Because I was from the North! Even if I spoke Vietnamese, a Southerner will know that I'm not local. If you were from central Vietnam I won't be able to recognize your accent either, and if you go to another province like Thanh Hoa or Nghe Tinh¹⁷, where Bac Ho came from, it's so guttural, it's very hard to understand!

So of course it was the North that I was interested, it was the North that I knew so well! And then I was not interested in the South, because I didn't come across any posters from the South, neither American posters.

CYS: From Sherry's book, *Mekong Diaries*, I found out that the director of the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Fine Arts, Nguyen Toan Thi was himself a wartime artist. So many of these artists were his friends, and so he collected their works easily. And when he became director of the museum he could then establish the collection there.

DP: I would like to go and see that! This is why I think that this is a significant collection. The British Museum collection is known, and the Ho Chi Minh Museum of Fine Arts collection is known. And now this collection is lent to NUS Museum, people can know that this collection is here and can be seen.

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). But I guess most of them have been collected already. (laughs)

CYS: Collected by you or other people?

-
13. The My Lai Massacre occurred on March 16, 1968. Up to 500 unarmed civilians were killed by soldiers from Company C ("Charlie Company") of the 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 11th Brigade of the 23rd American Infantry Division of the United States Army.
 14. Four Hours in My Lai, by Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, Penguin Books (1993).
 15. In 1979 Jimmy Carter visited China as China-Vietnam and Sino-Soviet relations were deteriorating. When asked about China's response to perceived Vietnamese antagonism, Deng Xiaoping quipped, "The Little Boy is naughty, time for him to be spanked on the bottom".
 16. Tom Mangold, *The Tunnels of Cu Chi*, Presidio Press (2005)
 17. An old name for Nghe Tinh province, which has today been divided into Nghe An and Ha Tinh.

DP: In my time, people would collect lacquer, not war drawings. But there were lacquers about the war period that were not drawn on the spot. And because I was interested in history, and these items had dates—very important, you know—so I used to buy these art works. I also collected books. Some of the US books had detailed maps, all the villages;. CIA handbooks on Vietnam; there is a lot. I also picked up fragments of war planes, the serial number of parts, bits of bombs.

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 how would you know that what you collected were the originals?

DP: I bought them right from the artists, not the shops. When I bought posters from the printing shop, those were originals from the printing shop that produced the prints. I had gone directly to the printers. I asked if they had any more, but there wasn’t very much left. . And the older manually-printed posters, I had gotten them directly from the artists.

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.

CYS: And would this be when Doi Moi had already taken shape?

DP: Doi Moi began before I came to Vietnam. Renovation, they call it, Doi Moi.

In the earlier years when I was there the Vietnamese had certain “likes” that followed Ho Chi Minh’s habits. They love Heineken beer, because Bac Ho¹⁸ drank Heineken beer. They loved 555 cigarettes, Because Bac Ho smoked 555. When I was there, there was no cognac, or Chivas, nothing. Later on, as Vietnam

began to open, then the guys went abroad and came back with a lot of things. So it was different.

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!

CYS: Because you had gone directly to the artists...

DP: Because I would know... I would go to the artists.

CYS: But where would the galleries be getting the artworks from?

DP: From the artists as well.

CYS: So they would also go and visit the artists?

DP: Yes, of course, of course! They’re Vietnamese. They know where to find the artist, they buy it, bring it back and sell it at a multiplied price.

CYS: You mention that galleries were asking for thousands of dollars for works at this time. In the early days early days when you began collecting, what was the average price artists asked for their posters?

DP: To clarify, it was contemporary art that 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 Nguyen Thanh Binh, 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 people who were doing contemporary art in Saigon. But in Hanoi, the young guys were only beginning to emerge. There was a movement called the “Gang of Ten”. 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” in Hong Kong. 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 were 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 Hotel, which has now closed, and the Plum Blossoms in Hong Kong, especially, were early in exhibiting Vietnamese contemporary art.

But these posters you could buy from 20 US dollars onwards, when I began collecting.

CYS: Have you ever found out if the galleries gave the artists a fair price for the posters, when they began to sell them afterwards? I mean the drawings, the art.

DP: It’s a commercial transaction. The artists dealt with the galleries in many ways: They would want a certain price, and it depends how poor he is, or how rich he is.

CC: Sometimes when the artist is dead, the family will sell (his artworks).

CYS: And I guess by then in the 90s, a lot of things had stabilised in Vietnam.

DP: Yes, the war was over and everything. Now, it’s about how to become capitalist. They’re learning English, you know? The French tried to come back and teach them French... And they were more interested in English than French! Because the language of the world was English, you see. And they had reconciled with the Americans..

CYS: So you mentioned earlier that the Japanese came, they wanted to buy Nguyen Gia Tri’s lacquer, and the Vietnamese won’t let them buy. First of all, because he’s a fine art artist and that item is considered “fine art”. But did people come to know of the size of your collection and become concerned?

DP: To be honest, I didn’t know how many I had acquired, I wasn’t keeping track! And if you talk about Vietnamese art, the father of lacquer was Nguyen Gia

Tri, whether you like it or not, and that’s why he was important to them.

In the late 1990s you could see posters everywhere, but these were all new posters. You never saw posters like what I have now. These were rare. These were from the sixties, seventies, eighties. Rare! It even goes up till the fifties! Though the artists all live in Hanoi, there are many different artists, and I am surprised when I see their names. The best posters are not by the most famous artists. Of course I have (posters by) famous artists! In this collection, I can tell you the most famous artist I have there—I’ve got two by Bui Xuan Phai, I’ve got three Nguyen Tu Nghiem—I have a Tran Van Can^{xiii} that is very interesting, because it’s a woodcut, which depicts the friendship between Indonesia and Vietnam. Phan Ke An is famous! Duong Bich Lien, was one of the best portrait painters, and one day I found his portrait of Ho Chi Minh in my collection. But they don’t make the best war drawings, you know. Now, Huynh Van Thuan! I think he was one of the best. The French bombing of the churches, the statue of Mother Mary outside, the bombing of the Buddhist temples^x... Wow, he drew them with such great detail. The Ho Chi Minh trail he drew in pencil. Yes, those were all very important artists!

CYS: So the Vietnamese considered certain things as fine art and they didn’t allow them to be taken away. But they just didn’t think their posters were important?

DP: Yes, nobody cared! Nobody thought about it. To be honest, I had no idea of how many drawings or posters I had collected either. I would buy one, put it away, buy another, and put it away. When I left Vietnam, I just put everything in a container and brought it back home, and only afterwards slowly took a look through them. Only then did I realize that wow, I have that many, over a thousand prints and drawings? For example Pham Thanh Tam’s^x works: I don’t even remember much of my meeting with him! The image of him doesn’t even come to my mind. And yet I’ve got so many of his works in my collection! And he’s even given presents to me. Van Da as well, for example. I didn’t remember everybody, because I met so many. Trong Kiem, Quach Phong... I was not deliberately building a collection, and I did not know I had these numbers. Now, the Vietnamese are interested in the artworks. But at that time in the 1990s, nobody had any interest in these materials.

CYS: What were the challenges of documenting this collection and organising it? How did you get around the problem of language and translation of the messages on the posters and drawings?

CC: One of the first things we did was to photograph the entire collection professionally in high resolution in 2009. We also sent the works to a professional framer in Kuala Lumpur to mount. We began to document and catalogue the artworks after this. These two exercises alone were already a huge investment of time and finances. We also spent a great amount of time reviewing the information in order to manage the loan to NUS Museum.

Param had worked with Tran Phuong Ky, the former director of the Cham Museum whom we mentioned earlier and whom Param was already friends with since his Vietnam posting. Ky had a chance to come to Singapore to attend a course at the



National Library over a period of more than a month, and so we engaged his help with the translation of the war drawings and posters, this included cross-checking the slogans on posters, as well as deciphering and translating personal notes, every single bit of information, made by artists on the front or back of the artworks. Every translation was then rechecked by Param and thankfully his good command of the language helped me tremendously.

The work of documenting this entire collection has given me great satisfaction albeit some frustrating moments: for example, some artists' signatures varied through time and they also used different names during



viii. (Above) [Huynh Van Thuan](#), *Tien Lang Pagoda, Tien Minh Village, Thai Binh Province*, 18.10.1953, Pencil on paper, 15 x 19.7cm.

ix. (Left) [Tran Van Can](#), *Vietnam / Indonesia Friendship (1965)*, Woodcut on paper, 42 x 27.1cm

the war to hide their true identity in case the artworks were discovered and put them in danger - this is referred to in Pham Thanh Tam's diary "Drawing Under Fire" which Sherry Buchanan edited. But it became interesting to discover different artistic styles: after a while I could recognise the style of work of each artist and this helped to identify the unsigned and not easy recognisable signatures.

All in all the entire series has taken almost 3 years to do since late 2012. But with the excellent translations and historical knowledge that Param had it was exciting time doing the documentation and a very



x. [Pham Thanh Tam](#), *Anti-Aircraft 37mm Gun Unit 4 C828 Focusing on Enemy Aircrafts in the Direction of Muong Thanh Field, Dien Bien Phu*, 15.4.1954. Pen on Paper, 18.5 x 26cm.

interesting lesson in history as well.

CYS: Final question. 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 who fought the Chinese. So they've been fighting these foreign invaders for centuries. That's why when I saw Ba Trieu in woodcut, I recalled the legend of Thanh Giong, which I had known for a long time. So you can have a historical perspective of what the Vietnamese spirit was, from ancient days.

But coming back to modern times, you would come back to the French period, and there are enough pictures of the French period.

And then of course the major part of this collection is about the American conflict.

And then after the American war, of course, there is a bit about Cambodia, not many, but there are a few, and there are also a bit about the skirmishes with the Chinese in 1979, two or three months of war. Then it ends off with a little bit about the period of Truong Sa¹⁹. I have got two pictures of Pham Luc drawing Truong Sa, with the crabs and all that there, with the

monument commemorating the Vietnamese takeover of the island. So why do I want to keep the culture intact in this collection? Nobody can give you a complete history of the Vietnam War. Not me, and nobody has a complete collection of anything. Every day things get added on. So as you go by, your knowledge of the subject increases. But I cannot keep it. As an individual, I cannot keep it, and I don't want to keep it. I would like to focus on my other art interests on Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines. So what do I do with this collection of over 1,200 works? It's better off for the world to see, isn't it, instead of being hidden there in my boxes for how many more years.

CC: It is, basically, a historical record.

DP: Yes. Otherwise as a person, there's no point keeping.

CC: And yet this was not drawn just for history. They're not just drawings, they're beautiful artworks.

DP: That's why 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. 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.

CC: But do you know, as Sherry said, they also drew because people were very sad and to lift their spirits, they drew the portraits of the fighters.

DP: So they could send it back to their families.

CC: Yes. So there's a story behind a lot of the drawings.

DP: There's a lot of sadness. There's a lot of sadness about the war, which we don't know. In every village, there was a Heroes' 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. And then when they left the North to go to the South,



xi. [Pham Luc](#), *Commandos Attacking Landing Field, Quang Tri* (1968), Mixed Media on paper, 20.7 x 29.5cm

they had undergone a ceremony as if they were never going to come back, like a funeral ceremony. When they leave Hanoi to go into the trucks to take them down to the Ho Chi Minh trail, they left with their families already accepting the fact that they may not see them again. There was one picture with the guy with a mortar, the barbed wire.

CC: There is a drawing of the guy who was running with the bomb in his hand.

DP: Yes, the bomb in his hand, to use it to break the barbed wire. It was so real! My Vietnamese friends told me that, during the war, when they asked for volunteers, more people volunteered than were needed for the job. Many volunteers who were all ready to go and die, like the kamikaze of the Japanese.

CC: The book, *"Drawing under Fire"* (2005), the diaries by Pham Thanh Tan was also very interesting, to show you the stories behind how the villagers left the village. The women too, and young people. They just wanted to go on the walk to Dien Bien Phu. They never realized that they would go through so much difficulty, and they were

crying, and all that. But they couldn't go back.

DP: We are foreigners, we don't know much about the



xii. [Quang Son](#), *Dance and Song Ensemble from the General Political Bureau Performing for K4 Unit in B3 Battlefield in Tay Nguyen, 26.4.1967*, Mixed media on paper, 24 x 34.7cm

war experience. When the Americans began to bomb the government, the people were evacuated to the countryside! My friends were sent off to this village and that, you cannot say no! In Vietnamese it's called "so tan" ("evacuation"). So there are a lot of pictures here also, where they have been sent off outside Hanoi. Then when they bomb the government institutions, they would bomb everything completely, the depot, inside, outside.

The Americans could not destroy everything. They would bomb the bridge, but after they flew off the Vietnamese would have laid out a pontoon bridge, and they could cross again! At first I didn't believe the drawings: Pham Luc did a drawing of a pontoon bridge; then I saw the photographs that really showed the pontoon bridge; really, that's how they crossed the Red River. The Vietnamese reacted very quickly. The planes go, they come back.

So they 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".



xiii. [Van Da](#), *Long Bien Bridge, Hanoi* (1971), Mixed media on paper, 22cm x 27.3cm.

xiv. [Pham Ngoc Doanh](#), *Tan Son Nhat Airport (Saigon, 1975)*, Pencil on paper, 33x 43.5cm





1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.



11.



12.



13.



14.



15.



16.



17.



18.



19.



20.



21.



22.



23.



24.



25.



26.



27.

Frontline artists had already begun to accompany combat troops since the Indochinese War. Sketching (*le croquis rapide*) was a technique imparted to French-taught artists during the colonial times, and the technique is relied on in these and many subsequent war drawings during the American phase of the Vietnam War. Many drawings and paintings made were records of action and activities. While there were also official propaganda photographers, war artists left behind a larger and more accessible body of records of battle and wartime landscapes. Apart from the urgency of battle and action, many drawings captured episode of leisure and recreation, breaking the tension of war with a moment of peace. Portraits were painted, in order that individuals may be able to send images back home to reassure family, or as a souvenir in case they died. Images of prisoners of war come under the category of portraits: occasionally they were signed by the captured soldier, enabling them to be identified later.

Indochinese War

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
1.	Trong Kiem	Viet Bac Soldier	1951	Pencil on paper 24.8 x 22cm
2.	Huynh Van Thuan (Tu Ahn)	Deep in sleep after drinking too much	1950	Mixed media on paper 17.6 x 23.2cm
3.	Huynh Van Thuan	Duyen Lao Church, Tien Minh Village, Thai Binh Province	1953	Pencil on paper 20 x 29.7cm
4.	Huynh Van Thuan	Tien Lang Pagoda, Tien Minh Village, Thai Binh Province	1953	Pencil on paper 15 x 19.7cm
5.	Pham Thanh Tam	Anti-Aircraft 37mm Gun Unit 4 C828 Focusing on Enemy Aircrafts in the Direction of Muong Thanh Field, Dien Bien Phu	1954	Pen on Paper 18.5 x 26cm

War Landscapes and Battles

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
6.	Vu Tan Ba	Tale Pass (Truong Son Mountain Range, Ho Chi Minh Trail)	—	Colours derived from natural stone, 31 x 43cm
7.	Huu Chat	Cleaning the 12.7mm Anti-Aircraft Gun, Haiphong	1964	Watercolour and ink on paper 30.5 X 42.5cm
8.	Quang Son	Comrade Do Van Nhu Army Engineer (Sapper) at a Lao Village Collecting “Bom-bi” Bombs	1964	Charcoal on paper 27.8 x 39.5cm
9.	Quang Son	Army Engineers (Sapper) Opening “Bom-bi” Bombs at Con Co, Quang Binh Province	1965	Charcoal on paper 27.8cm x 39.5cm
10.	Quang Son	Nui Voi (Elephant Mountain), Kien An, Haiphong	1965	Watercolour on paper 27.3 x 39cm
11.	Le Tri Dung	Studying Political Lessons Beside the Trench of Anti-Aircraft Guns, Ham Rong Bridge, Thanh Hoa Province	1966	Blue pen on paper 27.3 x 38.8cm

War Landscapes and Battles

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
12.	Le Tri Dung	Civil Guard Inside the Tunnel Housing 12.7mm Machine Gun, Vinh Kim, Vinh Linh, Quang Tri Province	—	Charcoal on paper 39.3 x 28.7cm
13.	Van Giao	Capital (Hanoi) Battlefield	1966	Gouache on paper 42 x 54cm
14.	Pham Thanh Tam (Huynh Biec)	Protecting the Sky of Hanoi from the Top of Houses, Hang Bac Street	1966/67	Gouache on paper 24 x 20.2cm
15.	Pham Thanh Tam	Printing Press (“Tien Tuyen [The Front]”, Khe Sanh Battle)	1967	Pen on paper 14.7 x 20.3cm
16.	Le Tri Dung	Hanoi During the Battle Against the (American) War of Destruction, Quan Thanh Street, Hanoi	1967	Mixed media on paper 55.8 x 39.8cm
17.	Trong Kiem	In Dong Anh, Hanoi	1968	Mixed media on paper 39.5 x 54.7cm
18.	Pham Thanh Tam	Kitchen in the Tunnel, Quang Tri, (Signed with the artist’s wartime name “Hyunh Biec”.)	1968	Charcoal on paper 20 x 26.8cm
19.	Pham Luc	Commandos Attacking Landing Field, Quang Tri	1968	Mixed Media on paper 20.7 x 29.5cm
20.	Pham Luc	Special Forces Attacking Cua Viet (an estuary in Quang Tri Province)	1969	Mixed media on paper 39.5 x 54.7cm
21.	Pham Luc	Building a Bomb Shelter to Shelter from Aircrafts, Bo Ho (Hoan Kiem Lake), Hang Khay Street, Hanoi	1970	Pencil on paper 39.5 x 56cm
22.	Le Tri Dung	14.5mm Anti-aircraft Guns Protecting Long Bien Bridge, Pho Duc Chinh Street, Hanoi	1970	Pastel on paper 27 x 39.5cm
23.	Van Da	Long Bien Bridge, Hanoi	1971	Mixed media on paper 22 x 27.3cm
24.	Hoang Dinh Tai	Mortar Group in the Campaign, Kham Duc, (Tay Nguyen)	1972	Pencil on paper 29.8 x 42cm
25.	Pham Ngoc Doanh	Morning in the Airfield, Noi Bai (Hanoi)	1975	Black pencil on paper 29.3 X 44 cm
26.	Pham Ngoc Doanh	Tan Son Nhat (Airport, Saigon)	1975	Black pencil on paper 33 x 43.5cm
27.	Pham Ngoc Doanh	Tan Son Nhat (Airport, Saigon)	1975	Black pencil on paper 29.3 x 44cm



28.



29.



30.



31.



32.



33.



34.



35.



36.



37.



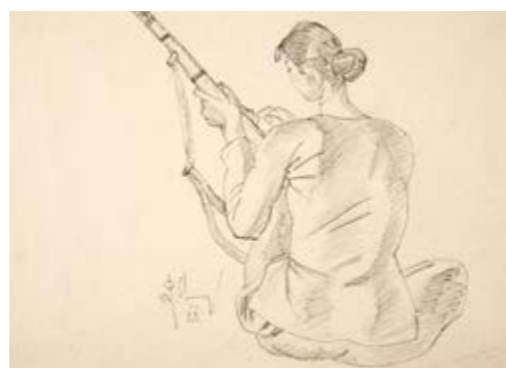
38.



39.



40.



41.

"At Ease"

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
28.	Quang Son	Singer and Musicians(Dance and Song Ensemble) from the General Political Bureau Performing For K4 Military Unit in B3 Battlefield in Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands)	1967	Mixed media on paper 24 x 34.7cm
29.	Thanh Chau	The Viet Cong Cultural Group Performing for the Soldiers in the Front Line, Tien Giang	1969	Watercolour on paper 28.1 x 22.7cm
30.	Nguyen Bang Lam	Removing the Rust, Quang Yen, Quang Ninh	1970	Watercolour on paper 18.7 x 25.3cm
31.	Hoang Dinh Tai	Medical Facility in Asau (A Shau Valley), Hue	1970	Mixed media on paper 30 x 41.5cm
32.	Nguyen Cuong	The Class in the Hamlet after Liberation, Quang Tri	1972	Watercolour on paper 30 x 39.5cm
33.	Pham Luc	Receiving New Military Uniforms in the Tunnel, Truong Son (Central Highlands)	1972	Mixed media on paper 39.5 x 53.4cm

Prisoners of War

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
34.	Huynh Chat	Untitled (Parading a Capturing American Prisoner-of-War)	1966	Mixed media on paper 27.4 x 39.5cm
35.	Quang Son	Interrogation of the Pilot Invader (Loc Khai), Nghe Tinh	1966	Black pen on paper 27.5 x 39.5cm
36.	Quang Son	Interrogation of an American Invader in the Front, B3 Tay Nguyen	1967	Black pen on paper 21 x 32.5cm
37.	Van Da	American Prisoner-of-War Joe Delong, B3	1967	Marker pen on paper 21cm x 32.5cm
38.	Quang Son	American Prisoner-of-War, Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands)	1967	Black pen on paper 31 x 21cm

Portraits

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
39.	Phan Ke An	Uncle Ho (Chi Minh) Arriving at the Border Boundary Stone 108 at the Vietnam-China Border in 1941, Collecting the First Lump of Earth of the Nation.	1969	Chinese ink on Chinese rice paper 41.8 x 32.85cm
40.	Pham Thanh Tam	Woman Civil Guard, Nam Ngam, Ham Rong (Thanh Hoa Province)	1965	Watercolour on paper 32 x 20.5cm
41.	Nguyen Tien Chung	Untitled (Cleaning the Rifle)	1966	Black pen on paper 25 x 33.5cm



42.



43.



44.



45.



57.



58.



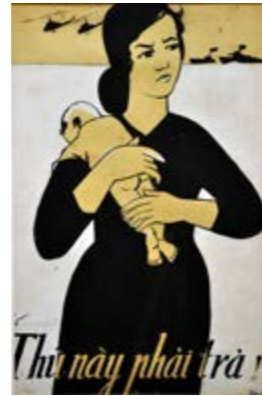
59.



60.



46.



47.



48.



49.



61.



62.



63.



64.



50.



51.



52.



53.



65.



66.



67.



68.



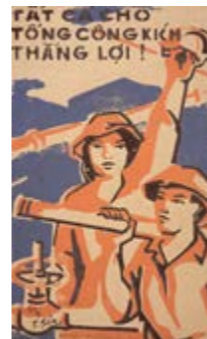
54.



55.



56.



69.



70.



71.



72.

The collection contains a range of propaganda materials that have a different purpose from most war drawings and paintings. While drawings and paintings were mainly records of the war, the propaganda material are distinguished by their clear directives and messages to unify people towards a common goal. The materials collected in this category are made with a range of techniques: woodblocks, hand-painting, screen-printing, press-printing. Unlike drawings, which are unique, propaganda materials were made to be disseminated in larger quantities.

From the design elements of each poster, one can identify the historical events in the backdrop: such as American air operations (for example, Operation Rolling Thunder, 1965; the Tet Offensive, 1968). Alongside symbols of Vietnamese socialism, Vietnamese traditional identities and legendary figures also feature, to provide Vietnamese role models to inspire the local people towards moral and heroic behaviour. Posters and artworks before 1970 tend to direct the viewer to channel their anger towards repelling the enemy, and regaining political control. The posters of 1970s however are less aggressive in message, and rather project the encouragement to preparing for the road ahead and securing victory with vigilance and confidence, reflecting the strategic turn of the Vietnam War as the Americans gradually leave.

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
42.	Phan Ke An (Kich)	The Soldiers of the Capital's Division	1950	Woodcut print on paper 34 x 24.5cm
43.	Huy Toan	Avenge the Bullet (Dien Bien Phu)	1957	Printed poster on paper, 39 x 54cm
44.	Huy Toan	On the Way to Dien Bien Phu 6/57	1958	Printed poster on paper, 34 x 43.8cm
45.	Huy Toan	Victory of Dien Bien Phu 7.5.1954	1960	Woodcut print on paper 31 x 44.7cm
46.	Bui Tan Hung	Campaign under the rain	—	Woodcut print on paper 33.8 x 42.7cm
47.	Kim Lien	The Hatred must be Avenged!	1965	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 52.7 x 35.5cm
48.	Pham Van Don	Destroying the Plan of Helicopter Transportation	1965	Woodcut on paper, 26.4 x 19.2cm
49.	Tran Van Can	Vietnam / Indonesia Friendship	1965	Woodcut on paper, 42 x 27.1cm
50.	Artist unknown	The Attacks of the Liberation Soldiers on the Cities [Deserves] Many Shameful Slaps	1966	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 38 x 52cm
51.	Artist unknown	The South Vietnam Nationale Front for Liberation -1968: "For Whom, For What Are you Dying?"	1968	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 58.3 x 39.5cm
52.	Le Lam	Protecting the Government of the People!	1968	Printed poster on paper 61.8 x 45.5cm
53.	Kim Lien	The One who Perpetrates Cruelty is Principally the American Invaders	1968	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper 39.5 x 48.6 cm
54.	Nguyen Triet	Our People, The Heroic People!	1968-69	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 33.6 x 50.8cm
55.	Vinh Chi	Whenever there are invaders, We Come!	—	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 35.5 x 51cm

No.	Artist	Title	Year	Medium/Size
56.	Minh Hai	Silence the American Cannons!	1969	Mixed media hand-painted poster on paper, 39.5 x 57.3cm
57.	Le Lam	Continually Attack and Resist Government should Belong to the People!	—	Printed poster, 39.8 x 58cm
58.	Pham Sy	Our Army, Limitless Loyalty, Excellent Bravery, Glorious Victory	1969	Mixed media hand painted poster 56.7 x 39.5cm
59.	Pham Quang Bach	American Cruelty, Heaven Does Not Forgive, Earth Does Not Forgive	1969	Mixed media hand-painted poster on 56.5 X 38.8 cm
60.	Ta Thu (Ta)	Concentrate the Hatred and Indignation on the Bayonet and the Barrel of the Gun	1969	Mixed Media Hand-painted poster 39.5 X 57.8 cm
61.	Minh Tuyen	Fight to the Finish!	1969	Mixed-media hand-painted poster 36 x 53cm
62.	Minh Tuyen	Hand over the Government to the People!	1969	Mixed-media hand-painted poster 35.8 x 48.7 cm
63.	Pham Luc	Guiding the Special Forces Proceeding to Saigon	1969	Mixed media on paper, 57 x 40.5cm
64.	Nguyen Chi Hieu	For Independence, For Freedom, Defeat the Americans into Withdrawal, Defeat the "Puppets" into Collapse, Continually Attack, Continually Resist, Determined to Achieve Full Victory!	1969	Printed poster on paper 42 x 60.3cm
65.	Bai Ling	Keeping the Road Ahead Safe	—	Woodcut print on paper Edition 1/10, 51 x 31.5cm
66.	Hoang Dinh Tai	Killing mosquitoes to Fight Fever Guaranteeing the Number of Soldiers	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 52.8 x 34.5cm
67.	Nguyen Thu	Ferry Bridge: Go Ahead One Step	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 35 x 53.5cm
68.	Hoang Dinh Tai	Guarantee Health, Accomplish Mission	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 35 x 53.5cm
69.	Thanh Son	All for the Victorious General Offensive!	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 54.5 x 36cm
70.	Hoang Dinh Tai	Increase the Alert, Protect the Nation!	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 36.5 x 51cm
71.	Hoang Dinh Tai	All for the South, Flesh and Blood!	1973	Woodcut poster on paper Edition 1 / 10, 36.5 x 51cm
72.	Huy Toan	Welcome the Liberation Army of Ho Chi Minh City	1975	Gouache and lacquer on thick paper, 32 x 53cm

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
**Vietnam 1954–1975: War Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador
Dato' N. Parameswaran Collection**

25 June 2015 — April 2016

Organised by

NUS MUSEUM

Published by
NUS MUSEUM

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent
National University of Singapore
Singapore 119279
T: (65) 6516 8817
E: museum@nus.edu.sg
W: www.nus.edu.sg/museum
B: www.nusmuseum.blogspot.com

© 2015 NUS Museum

All rights reserved. No part of these pages, either text or image may be used for any purpose other than personal use. Therefore, reproduction, modification, storage in a retrieval system or retransmission, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, for reasons other than personal use, is strictly prohibited without prior written permission.



HUY TO AN 6-1975

NUS Museum is a comprehensive Museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The Lee Kong Chian Collection consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art, the South and Southeast Asian Collection holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the Ng Eng Teng Collection is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the Straits Chinese Collection, is located at NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

NUS MUSEUM

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent
National University of Singapore
Singapore 119279
T: (65) 6516 8817
E: museum@nus.edu.sg
W: www.nus.edu.sg/museum
B: www.nusmuseum.blogspot.com

Opening hours:
10am – 7.30pm (Tuesdays – Fridays)
10 am – 6pm (Weekends)
Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays
Admission: Free