

Vietnam War Art Recalls Another Time Heart-Wrenching Images Of Conflict

By Michèle De Meglio

Two Brooklyn art galleries are teaming up to reveal the untold story of the Vietnam War.

A free exhibition of drawings and paintings created by Vietnamese artists who witnessed the conflict firsthand will be on display from September 23 – October 23 at Galerie L'Indochine, 86 Sixth Avenue, and Object Image Gallery, 91 Fifth Avenue.

"With the 30th anniversary of the end of hostilities in Vietnam, I, as an art collector, said it may be fun to show and make available some of the art," said Paul Beresford-Hill, director and co-owner of Galerie L'Indochine.

The exhibition, entitled, "A Country in Conflict – Images from Vietnamese Combat Artists," will showcase artists' portraits of soldiers and common citizens, which were completed before the United States pullout in 1975.

The star attraction of the show will be the work of two of the country's most famous artists – Huy Toan and Nguyen Thu.

All of Thu's watercolor paintings were completed during the war, while Toan has recreated images from notebooks he kept during the conflict.

Beresford-Hill and his wife Kathryn, who co-owns Galerie L'Indochine, lived in South East Asia and met the artists.

He said, "I was struck both by the quiet personalities of these two gentlemen...and by the stunning quality of their art. Looking at their sketches, from factories and soldiers camps to their studies of children and families, you cannot but fail to recognize that their art captures real people, not caricatures. The lives and the emotions they reflect force you to reconsider stereotypes and acknowledge that, through art, we can discover the human side of war."

The artists' creations are both beautiful and heart-breaking.

They range from a drawing of a group of Vietnamese women proudly watching their nation's flag being raised to a family weeping at a funeral for a loved one.

In his pieces on display in the exhibit, Thu captures the everyday lives of Vietnamese soldiers and ordinary people who were just trying to make it through the day.

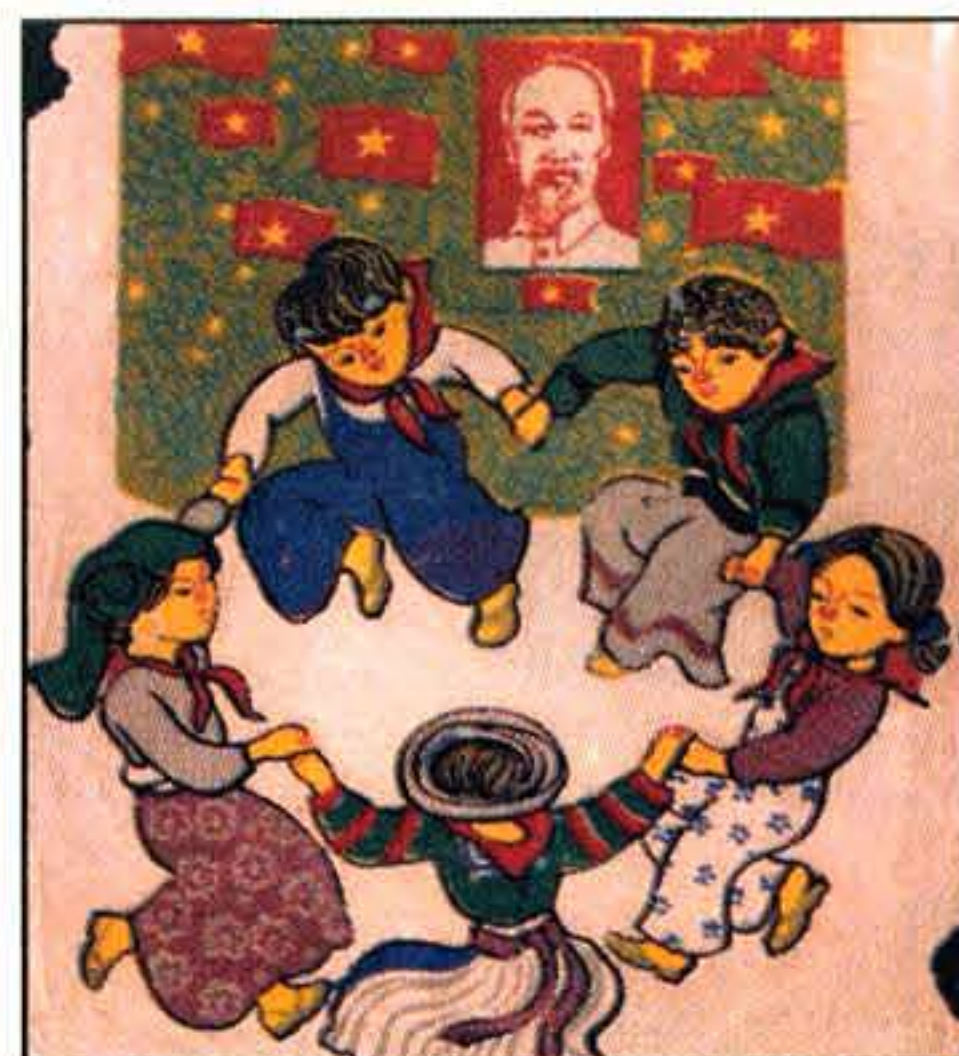
Thu's "Young Girl Putting on Belt" is a watercolor painting of a soldier getting ready for battle. With her hair swept back in a lazy ponytail, the soldier, who appears to be barely out of her teenage years, puts on her army gear while a rifle waits at her side.

The hardships felt by the Vietnamese people during the war is evident in "Old Woman Sewing." Sitting on the floor and fingering some fabric, the elderly woman's face conveys a deep sorrow.

That sadness also appears in "Woman Worker – End of the Day." Clad in blue work clothes and tall black boots, the middle-aged woman seems to have completed a tiring day of hard labor.



"A Country in Conflict – Images from Vietnamese Combat Artists" will showcase drawings and paintings created by artists during the Vietnam War. Clockwise from top left: Pieces will include Huy Toan's "Aviation Unit – The Yellow Star" and "Carrying a Coracle," Nguyen Thu's "Young Girl Putting on Belt," Toan's "Saigon Soldier," and a government-distributed propaganda poster, entitled, "Children with Uncle Ho."



Toan's pieces portray soldiers' lives on and off the battlefield.

"The Trenches" shows Vietnamese soldiers firing rifles in the heat of battle while planes fly overhead.

In "Soldier and Mother," a woman nurses her baby while keeping a rifle in place on her back.

"They are drawing people who have lives just as much as Americans have lives. Some of the drawings are so poignant. There's one drawing of a soldier holding a gun and standing next to him is a soldier playing the flute. That kind of positioning of the soldier near the human should remind us that there is a humanity between us," Beresford-Hill said.

The exhibit will also include posters issued by the Vietnamese government during the war as a form of propaganda.

They include children happily dancing in front of a picture of North Vietnam's then-president Ho Chi Minh in "Children with Uncle Ho" and young Vietnamese men and women heading off to war in "Soldiers Marching."

"I was taken aback by the vibrancy and the strength of many of these pictures. The posters



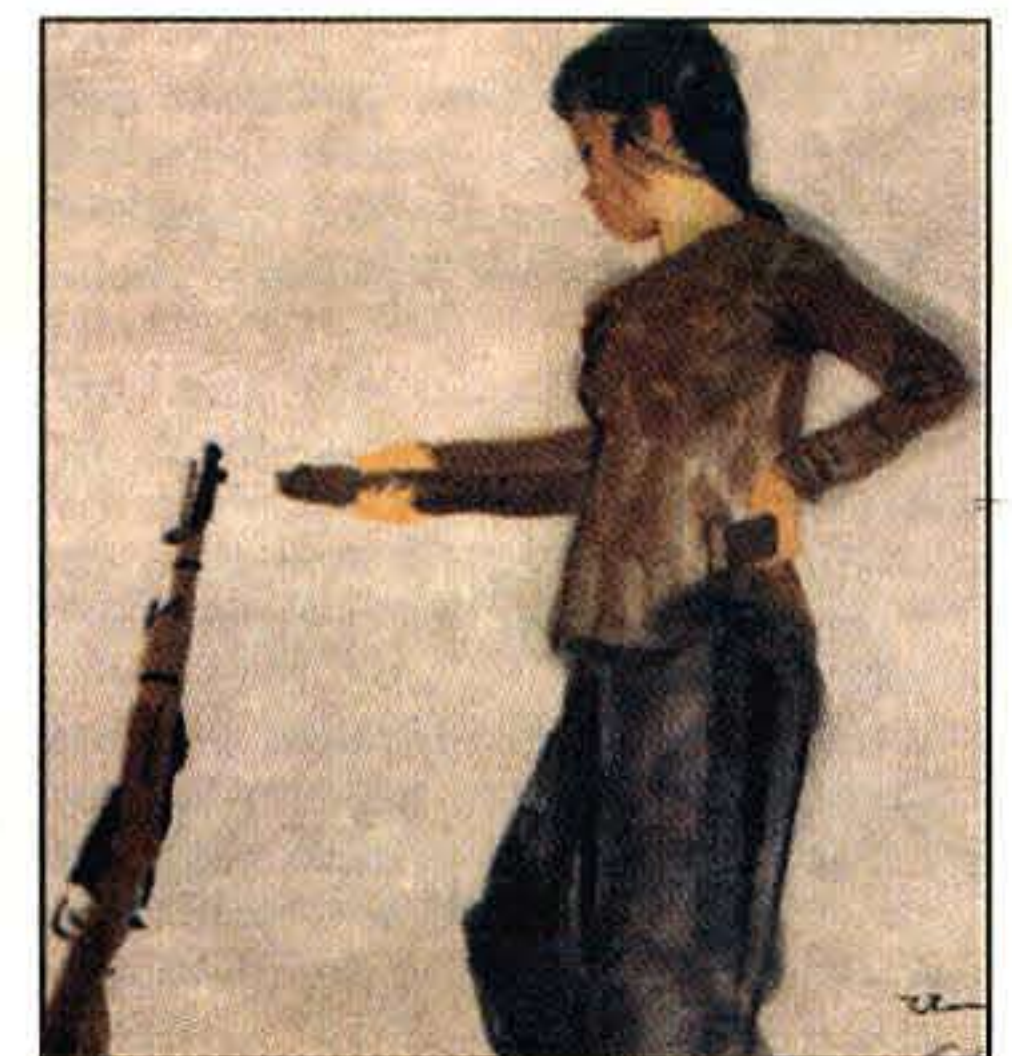
are bold and energizing, even while they carry a political message," said Bob Weiss, owner of Object Image Gallery.

Through the exhibition, the gallery owners hope to promote tolerance by showing Brooklynites that the Vietnamese people cherished the same ideals as Americans – life, love and the pursuit of happiness.

"I'm trying to provide people the opportunity to see the war through the eyes of the Vietnamese and to see that the things they were drawing and the things they were illustrating were the ordinary things of life – people going about their work, people in love, people playing music, people living their lives. People who lived through this period, they courted humanity. It wasn't political. It wasn't propaganda. The drawings were real people," Beresford-Hill said.

"When you look at [the drawings], you say, 'That soldier could be an American. He is Vietnamese but he could be an American,'" Beresford-Hill continued. "War is waged by politicians and ideologies and very often ordinary people get caught up in it. I wanted to draw back to that idea of humanity."

"There is a message for us here," he added.



"Americans – the people who they perceive as the enemy or the other side are the same as us."

The drawings, Weiss said, "reveal a sensitivity to the subject along with a skill that comes from both passion as well as training. Few of my generation have had a chance to view these drawings. I hope that seeing them today will contribute to a sense of closure on this troubled history and remind us all that we share a common destiny in the 21st century."

On September 23 at 5 p.m., an opening night reception for "A Country in Conflict – Images from Vietnamese Combat Artists" will be held at the Object Image Gallery.

The party will move to Galerie L'Indochine at 7 p.m.

Galerie L'Indochine is open Thursday – Friday from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday – Sunday from 12-5 p.m. Private viewings can be arranged by appointment. Contact the gallery at 718-399-1407.

For more information about Object Image Gallery, contact 718-623-2334.

To view additional drawings and paintings which will be featured in the exhibit, log onto www.galerielindochine.com.