

APPENDIX D

National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum Testimonials from Art Critics, Academics, and Other Supporters

Its impact is spiritual, religious. The exhibit "Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections" offers inspiring proof of art's revelatory, even redemptive power.

Perhaps the most accomplished artist is Richard Yohnka, creator of big, skillfully rendered pastel drawings portraying single figures in agony. (His) commanding drawings, in which a single, simplified figure symbolizes universal suffering, bring to mind the haunting graphic art of Kaethe Kollwitz. By contrast, certain artists summon up horrors by working with minimal means, at a diminutive scale. Joseph Fornelli's miniature watercolor "Dare to Enter" is a forest scene actually executed in Vietnam with diluted C-ration coffee on paper... The exhibit pools repugnant truths that might otherwise have been ignored or lost. It's the most honest picture we have of the Vietnam War and a celebration of the resiliency of the human spirit.

Roger Green, The Grand Rapids Press

War art once celebrated glory, vanity and the divine right of princes. It was not until the long, terrible war of attrition on the Iberian peninsula in the course of the Napoleonic campaigns that an artist appeared whose work corresponds to a much more modern perception of war: Francisco de Goya. Echoes of those dark, dense canvases in the Prado Museum now reverberate in Chicago in the art of Vietnam veterans. Like Goya, these contemporary American artists painted what they actually experienced as witness of war.

John David Morley, The New York Times

Because most of the men who fought in Vietnam were quite young, some of the artworks dating from that time show the absence of formal art training. Thus some bear a resemblance to what in the U.S. is termed "outsider art"-- a difficult term. But to relate this collection to European art made after World War I makes an interesting comparison. The blunt horrors depicted by Kirchner, Grosz, and Dix, and the astonishing worlds created by veteran Max Ernst, share with the Vietnam veteran works a despotic world-view. And as the war cripple was an obsessional image for German Dada, so the Vietnam-era artists are driven to portray life and death on the killing fields of Southeast Asia.

The authenticity of these works brings to mind the victim of another war. Walter Benjamin published spoken "journals" and held seminars in the Nazi prison camps where he was detained. The price of these journals and seminars would be a button, a nail, or a matchstick. Benjamin spoke of the aura which attached to an object due to its uniqueness in time and space. Certainly the works in the Vietnam Veterans Art Museum retain that aura, that uniqueness. They cannot be duplicated, nor intimidated. Even photographs taken by veterans during the conflict achieve an aura, due to their material existence; it is that print, and no other, which recorded the moment, and has survived into our own times.

Monica Bauer, F Newsmagazine

I cannot begin to express our appreciation for the commitment, sincerity, talent and emotional challenges that [the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum] requires on the part of the founders and artists. It, in turn, challenges your viewers to respond with similar intensity. In my museum-going experience, only the Holocaust Museum requires so much from the visitor. Your museum, however, does so without the Disney-like manipulation of the other, relying instead on the straight-forward power of the images. I like its honesty.

Marcia Rickard

Chair, Department of Art

Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Ind.)

It was profoundly moving to see the impact that the Vietnam experience had on our troops and the way in which many of them were able to distill those long days and nights into moments of creative energy that compelled them to produce works of art. The intensity of the conflict has not been blurred or blunted in these works but there is an important spiritual regeneration which is the true essence of the exhibition. Clearly, it is a message which needs and demands the widest possible distribution.

Francis A. Ruzicka

Chair, Department of Art

The University of Georgia

My father was in the Vietnam War. I went to the museum under the guise of doing research for my sociology project on Vietnam Veterans. In truth, I wanted to go for myself. In fact that was the reason I picked the social group of Vietnam Veterans. Through it I hoped to gain a better understanding of who my father was or of who he could have been. I feel that I am part of that group for my life was touched very much by the war. I want to understand what happened in my family, by comparing it to how other people reacted to the same situation. Maybe then I can begin to reconcile it and perhaps help my father do the same.

Name withheld

Sociology student at DePaul University

On October 11, 1995, my English 11 class and I visited your exhibit on Vietnam Veteran's art. We found this exhibit most educational and profoundly moving. Each student, in doing a brief analysis of at least one art work, mentioned to me that they welcomed the opportunity to be informed on a personal and artistic level about the suffering of that war.

Ralph J. Amelio

Humanities/English Instructor

Willowbrook High School

The impact of (the VVAG exhibit) upon individuals and the community went far beyond the tangible materials being sent here. The comments that I have received from so many people indicate that the qualities of compassion and understanding towards the Veteran experience were significantly raised.

John R. Caputo

*Gallery Director, Assistant Professor of Art
University of South Carolina at Spartanburg*

When I received a letter from the mayor asking my help in creating this museum, I cringed. I'd spent the larger part of my life keeping my memories of Vietnam in little boxes in a closed closet. The mayor asked me to go see the exhibit, and I went with great reluctance. Then that evening I went to a meeting about forming a museum and I did what I didn't think I would ever do. I volunteered. Why? I don't think anyone who has ever seen this collection of art will ever shrink into the shadows again. It is that powerful.

Paul Beitler

Miglin and Beitler

I wasn't in Vietnam, but my brother was. He didn't get wounded over there, I mean in his body. But all of them came home wounded right here, in their heart.

Rafael Zepeda

A union painter explaining to a reporter why he donated services for the building's renovation.