

An-My Lê

Vietnamese, born 1960

Clockwise, from top left:

Explosion

Rescue

Lesson

Sniper II

Four photographs from the series *Small Wars*,
1999–2002

Gelatin silver prints

Courtesy of the artist

In order to make her series *Small Wars*, An-My Lê became part of a community of Vietnam War reenactors based in Virginia. She was curious to learn their reasons for revisiting the war. As she gained their trust, she became both a participant and also photographed their events. An-My Lê played several roles in the reenactments: Viet Cong guerrilla, North Vietnamese army soldier, captured prisoner, lone survivor of a village ready to ambush a platoon, and sniper girl. The latter was her favorite, she said, because “It felt perversely empowering to control” actions in the war. Many of the men “had complicated personal issues they were trying to resolve,” she added. “But then I was also trying to resolve mine. In a way, we were all artists trying to make sense of our own personal baggage.”

An-My Lê

Vietnamese, born 1960

Top row, left to right:

Untitled, Mekong Delta, 1995

Untitled, Sapa, 1995

Untitled, But Thap, 1996

Bottom row, left to right:

Untitled, Mekong Delta, 1994

Untitled, Hanoi, 1996

Untitled, Hồ Chí Minh City, 1998

Six photographs from the series *Việt Nam*
Gelatin silver prints

Courtesy of the artist

An-My Lê and her family left Vietnam for the United States in April 1975 after Communist forces took Saigon. When she returned for the first time in 1994, she made a series of photographs that, in her words, “use the real to ground the imaginary.” In her explorations of a place changed after the war, she looked to the landscape—rather than contemporary cities—and the way people interacted with it. Revisiting a country she left in crisis as a teenager was “an opportunity to reconnect with the real thing, and to be confronted with contemporary Vietnam.” This process took time. At first she found herself “not ready to deal with the war. Being able to go back to Vietnam was a way to reconnect with a homeland, or with the idea of what a homeland is and with the idea of going home. When you live in exile, things like smells and memories and stories from childhood all take on such importance.”

Cy Thao

American (born Laos), 1972

Hmong Migration, 1993–2001

Sixteen panels from the 50-panel series

Oil on canvas

Minneapolis Institute of Art 2010.55.1-50

As a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, Cy Thao started what would become a series of 50 paintings tracing a 5,000-year history of the Hmong people from an origin story to their immigration to Minnesota. This was as much Thao's personal story as it was an attempt to assert his cultural history. He and his family fled Laos in 1975 and stayed in a refugee camp in neighboring Thailand until 1980, when they moved to St. Paul. After seeing other Hmong refugees making "story cloth" tapestries in the camp, Thao realized the power of pictures to tell stories without words. His series honors the complex history of the Hmong and does not shy away from the difficulties faced by his family in the migration process. "I want the series to educate the younger generation, to have some closure with the generation that went through the war," he said, "and hopefully become a historical document for generations to come."

Dinh Q. Lê

Vietnamese, born 1968

Light and Belief: Voices and Sketches of Life from the Vietnamese War, 2012–13

70 drawings; pencil, watercolor, ink and oil on paper and single channel video; color, sound; 36 minutes; artist's proof

Commissioned by Documenta 13, Gene and Brian Sherman. In collaboration with Dao Duc, Lê Duy Ứng, Lê Lam, Quách Phong, Huỳnh Phương Đông, Nguyễn Thọ, Huỳnh Biếc, Dương Ánh, Vũ Giáng Hương, Nguyễn Toàn Thi, Trương Hiếu, Phan Oánh, Kim Tiến, Minh Phương, Quang Thọ, H. Sung, Nguyễn Thanh Châu, The Dinh, Van Da, and Võ Xưởng

The artist, P.P.O.W. Gallery, and Shoshana Wayne Gallery

Dinh Q. Lê considers his series *Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War* to be an artist collaboration. He has collected the works and stories of North Vietnamese men and women who volunteered as artist-soldiers during the American War. His installation comprises 100 of these wartime artworks, along with a film that includes interviews with the artists and animations of their work. This collective reflection on firsthand experience provides an unusual and personal perspective on the American War. Lê folds his own history into the collective narrative as he recounts his escape as a child when his family fled Vietnam for the United States.

Hương Ngô

Hong Kong, born 1979

Hồng-Ân Trương

American, born 1976

The opposite of looking is not invisibility. The opposite of yellow is not gold., 2016

Framed archival pigment prints, lasercut prints

Courtesy of the artists

In this collaborative artwork, Hương Ngô and Hồng-Ân Trương explore their shared histories as Vietnamese American women who grew up in the United States and the role played by Asian immigrant bodies and labor in the U.S. economy. The piece presents alternating snapshot prints from their own family albums (on yellow backgrounds) and typed excerpts from congressional hearings about the Vietnamese refugee influx in the 1970s. The artists note that they “created this work in the midst of the [2016] Syrian refugee crisis, and we wanted our images to point to the way in which nations frame humanitarian causes in interrelated racial, cultural, and economic terms—a project cast into stark relief against the virulent anti-immigrant policies and anti-refugee sentiment intensifying in the Trump era. In moments such as this, the larger identity of the nation is always at stake, and its precarious logic of inclusion and belonging is contested.”

Pao Houa Her

American (born Laos), 1982

Left to right:

Hmong Veteran, 2013

Hmong Veteran, 2012

Hmong Veteran, 2013

Hmong Veteran, 2014

Inkjet print, hand-painted archival glaze

Courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery

In 1961, four years before the U.S. sent troops to Vietnam, the CIA funded a “secret war” in Laos against Communist forces. The Hmong served as the CIA’s surrogate army, essentially fighting a covert American war. The conflict had devastating effects on the Hmong, with tens of thousands killed during the war or dying while attempting to flee postwar. Despite their service to the U.S. government, the soldiers who fought in what is now called the Secret War are not recognized as U.S. veterans, and they receive no associated benefits.

Pao Her’s series of photographs honors these veterans and their service with dignity and empathy—correcting, she said, “the lack of recognition from the American government.” That denial “drives these men to buy their own uniform, medals, and ribbons to insert themselves in the U.S. military and its history. The uniforms they wear serve as a reminder of their service and their desire to be recognized by the United States military. For these veterans, the war and their services are reminders of a life they gave up in Laos for their American allies.” Pao Her chose to photograph these Secret War veterans standing tall and proud, wearing uniforms that make their experience visible in the manner of traditional U.S. military portraits.

Pipo Nguyen-duy

Vietnamese, born 1962

Clockwise from upper left:

Icarus

Father and Son

My Brother

Bubbles

Four photographs from the series

East of Eden: Vietnam, 2005–11

Digital inkjet prints

Courtesy of the artist and ClampArt, NYC

Ohio-based photographer Pipo Nguyen-duy spent six years creating a three-part series in which he photographed people and sites in Vietnam. The selections here focus on, in his words, “people who were physically maimed by the war that officially ended over thirty years ago. *East of Eden: Vietnam* was partly inspired by my experience growing up in Vietnam with my brother, an amputee, who lost his right arm while serving as a South Vietnamese soldier in Cambodia. It was my intention to use the camera to create visual documentations that will serve as a reminder of the horrors of war and also as a proof of the survivors’ strength, courage, and acceptance. *East of Eden: Vietnam* was an attempt to come to terms with my past and to offer those of whom that are violently marked by the war the opportunity to tell their stories.”

Teo Nguyen

Vietnamese, born 1977

Left to right:

Người Đến Với Tôi Một Chiều Rồi Người đi / An Afternoon With You, Gone, 2017

Vài lời tâm sự / I only wished to sit with you for a moment to say a word or two, 2017

Con đường giải thoát tìm đâu / The day I get rid of my heart, 2017

Phó thác / Here are my hands (with bowed head, I give them to you), 2017

Acrylic on vellum

Courtesy the Artist and Burnet Fine Art & Advisory, Wayzata

Teo Nguyen's silver-toned landscapes are full of light but empty of people. That emphatic absence results from his transformation of source images. He selected photographs (reproduced below) shot during the American War by photojournalists and meticulously repainted them, removing traces of violence. The resulting views remain full and expressive, as though the emotional content has seeped into the organic growth that remains. The artist's titles are tender, emphasizing his hope that the images and his process speak to the "heartbreak, optimism, resistance, and reconciliation that are interwoven into the Vietnamese cultural nuances and spirituality." He hopes to reveal Vietnam's "diverse, natural beauty. This act of reclamation shines a light on a Vietnam beyond the war, a place with rich culture and picturesque topography often forgotten or invisible."



Left: Rick Merron for Associated Press. U.S. troops carry the body of a fellow soldier across a rice paddy for helicopter evacuation near Bong Son in early February 1966. The soldier, a member of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, was killed during Operation Masher on South Vietnam's central coast.

Right: Horst Faas (German, 1933–2012) for Associated Press. South Vietnamese troops and their U.S. advisers resting in the jungle near the town of Binh Gia, 40 miles east of Saigon, in January 1965. Photograph: Horst Faas/AP



Left: Art Greenspon (American, born 1942), for Associated Press. The first sergeant of A Company, 101st Airborne, guides a medical evacuation helicopter through the jungle to retrieve casualties during a five-day patrol of an area southwest of Hue, South Vietnam, April 1968.

Right: Vietnamese Army troops during operations against the Communist Viet Cong guerillas in 1961. ©Interim Archives/Getty Images

Thi Bui

Vietnamese, born 1975

Drawings made for Bao Phi, *A Different Pond*, 2017

Courtesy of the artist

Thi Bui made these drawings for an autobiographical children's book written by Bao Phi, who grew up in a Vietnamese refugee family in Minneapolis. The tale focuses on Phi's memories of early-morning fishing excursions with his father. As father and son bond over this time spent together, Phi learns bits and pieces of his father's life and the circumstances that led them to resettle in the United States.

Thi Bui

Vietnamese, born 1975

Drawings made for Thi Bui's memoir, *The Best We Could Do*, 2017

Courtesy of the artist

Thi Bui's emotionally complex memoir explores the meaning of family, the larger historical and political forces that individuals often face, and the power of intimate bonds. As a child of war survivors, she had "heard a lot of the stories growing up, and the stories were pretty heavy, and I would often hear them at times when I wasn't ready, so I had this kind of heaviness that I grew up with, and I wanted to make sense of the stories." It was hard to navigate her relationship to stories of trauma and hardship. After she became a mother, she rethought the way she might approach telling her family story. Had she written it before she was a parent, she noted, "I might have been happy to just dwell in my trauma, but with a baby in hand, I was really concerned with not passing on that trauma myself, and so I needed to filter stuff out so I could pass on something cleaner." The result is a rich search for understanding, in her family's story and the wars in Vietnam, and how they intertwine through identity.

Tiffany Chung

Vietnamese, born 1969

Reconstructing an exodus history: flight routes from camps and of ODP cases, 2017

Embroidery on fabric

Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Henry Kinsell Endowment for Art Acquisition
2018.12

Tiffany Chung's personal and family history is deeply connected to the Vietnam conflicts. She came to the United States with her family after 1975 in the exodus of refugees, eventually settling in Houston, Texas. Over many years, and in a wide range of materials, Chung has examined the immigrant experience, the social and political impact of migration, and her father's war experience. The lines stretching across the large hand-embroidered map show the forced migration routes of the South Vietnamese by plane from refugee camps in Asia made through the United Nation's Orderly Departure Program, which oversaw the relocation. An estimated two million refugees fled Vietnam after 1975 and into the 1990s (this count expands when accounting for broader migration from the region). She describes her ongoing *Vietnamese Exodus Project* as a quiet protest against "politically driven historical amnesia."

Tuan Andrew Nguyen

Vietnamese, born 1976

Enemy's Enemy: A Monument to a Monument, 2009

Three carved wooden Louisville Slugger baseball bats (Northern White Ash) with chromed metal base plate

Courtesy of Tuan Andrew Nguyen and James Cohan Gallery

Tuan Andrew Nguyen's starting point for this three-part sculpture remains one of the most horrific images of the long Vietnam conflict. This sequence of sculptures refers to Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức, who set himself on fire and burned to death on June 11, 1963, to bring attention to the repressive and discriminatory policies against Buddhists by the Catholic Diem regime (set up by the U.S. government). He carved this image into a celebrated model of baseball bat—the Louisville Slugger—to emphasize the clash of cultures in Vietnam in the 1960s. Nguyen notes that the U.S. military “has had a habit of leaving baseball, the all-American pastime, in its wake,” as a byproduct of their presence in other countries. By juxtaposing the horrible echo of oppression against Buddhists in the core of the American bat, he aims to highlight how “religion and sport as social phenomenon . . . bring a community together,” but can also force a great divide.



Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation, June 11, 1963.
Photo by Malcolm Browne for the Associated Press.