

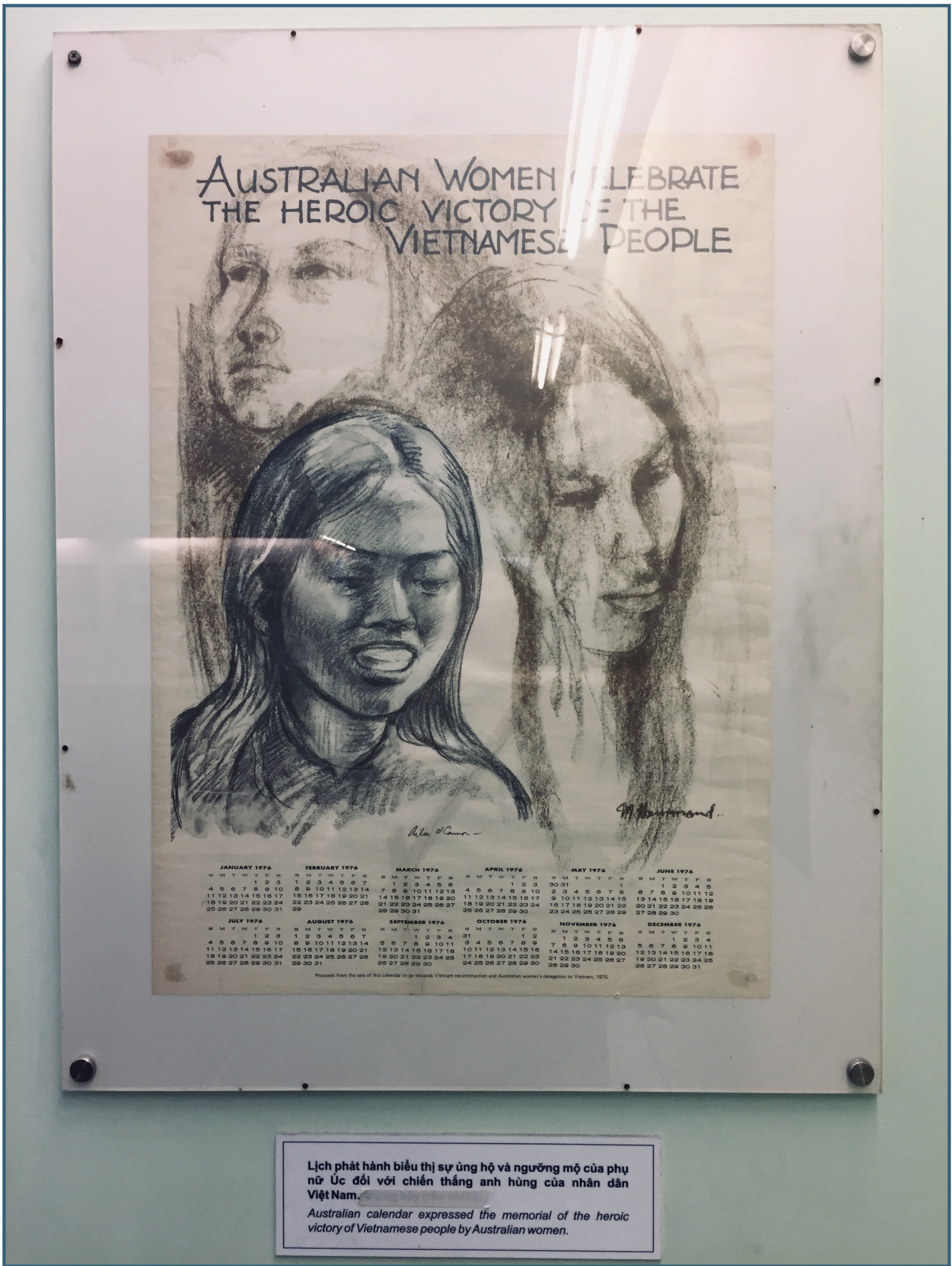
War Remnants

Sheila Ngoc Pham

A 1976 calendar catches my eye: “Australian women celebrate the heroic victory of the Vietnamese people”. The note in small print states that proceeds from the sale of the calendar would go towards Vietnam’s reconstruction and an Australian women’s delegation to Vietnam in 1975. The sketches are by two Australian artists, and the Vietnamese women of their imaginations looking off in the distance.

As I look at the perfectly preserved artefact behind glass, a rush of anger passes through me. What did Australian women actually know of the Vietnamese beyond what they saw on their television screens and through filtered media reports? I had forced myself to visit the museum on 30 April, even though I knew that everything would be framed by ‘the other side’; what I didn’t expect was to be challenged by Australia’s own history.

Exactly forty years since 1976, I read “victory” at the War Remnants Museum and feel bitterness. It’s painful to be confronted with the truth that some of those I lived and worked alongside had once carelessly celebrated our demise. – *Sheila Ngoc Pham*



Sheila Ngoc Pham is a writer, producer and broadcaster based in Sydney, Australia. She’s produced radio documentaries and programs for ABC Radio National including The Lost Cinema of Tan Hiep and Saigon’s Wartime Beat, and her writing has appeared in a wide range of Australian and international publications including The New York Times, Roads and Kingdoms, Womankind and New Philosopher. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Australian Institute of Health Innovation and lectures in public health ethics at Macquarie University. Sheila Ngoc Pham is a contributing editor to diaCRITICS for stories of and from the Vietnamese Australian diaspora.

Confessions of a Vietnamese Refugee

Sheila Ngoc Pham

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The President's Daily Brief

Đỗ Nguyễn Mai

The President's Daily Brief, 17 May 1967
(Sanitized Copy Approved for Release)

For Nhất Chi Mai
Chùa Từ Nghiêm, Chợ Lớn, Sài Gòn
16 May 1967

Beneath the shroud of morning, two mothers watch
their daughter die. One keeps her eyes closed,
the other, her hands clutching prayer,

a kaleidoscope pool collected at their naked feet
as a lotus ruptures upon the gasoline garden.

A hundred kilometres to the north, another body is bursting.

Here, spring's breath evaporates into azure sky,
early hours condensing onto what she left behind:
a poem, a letter, a name fifty thousand mouths carry
because a telegram will not. A torch exhausted,
steeped deep in petrol, waiting
for another match to strike.

Đỗ Nguyễn Mai is a Vietnamese poet and educator from Santa Clarita, California. As a junior scholar in the social sciences, Đỗ's literary work often draws from historical and archival sources. They utilize poetry to explore gaps left within these sources — spaces usually carved out not only by the mere passage of time, but also often by the interests of state authorities. While government has no interest in the preservation of individual human dignity, Đỗ attempts, through poetry, to outline moments and people the state apparatus tries to render indistinct.



DAILY BRIEF
17 MAY 1967

1. North Vietnam

The flight of the eight Soviet transports to Hanoi via Peking has evidently been held up. We have yet no indication whether the change in schedule is temporary--due to operational factors--or permanent.

The President's Daily Brief

2. South Vietnam

The suicide of a Buddhist school teacher on Tuesday--the first day of a week-long celebration leading up to Buddha's birthday--may have been politically motivated. We have had reports that Tri Quang and company intended to seize on the "peace" issue to regain their political momentum. These militants, however, even with an immolation to work with, probably cannot now drum up any serious disturbances.

~~Top Secret~~ 17 May 1967