

## Gallery Guide

### Service

This exhibition of works by veterans from various wars, generously on loan from the Pritzker Military Museum and the National Veterans' Art Museum in Chicago, features art work in varied media. The exhibition, *Service*, allows us to honor our veterans and their creative expressions made either during their service while in action or upon reflection of their service once back home. Such art works allow us to understand better the profound experience of military service during conflict and war, and its impact upon veterans once they return from service.

The photographs from the Pritzker Military Museum were all taken by Vietnam veterans; they express the extreme difficulty of service during that war, both in terms of its physical and emotional toll on our veterans and on those non-combatants living within the area of intense conflict. Many of the photographs bring us as viewers right into the midst of combat, producing a visceral response to the ugliness of war. Some of these works allow us the intimacy of tender moments between soldier and child, or soldier and pet. All of the works remind us of the human toll of war and conflict. None does more so than the work by Ken Hruby called **War Trophy**.

Works from the National Veterans' Art Museum are varied in their intent and appearance. Some works were created during war, and they bring the immediacy of that experience to us with an attitude of sorrow, terror or even occasionally boredom. Battle itself and its aftermath is subtly reflected in the etching by Louis Janetta titled **Memory of a Conflict** or in Michael Kelley's **Goodbye Dear Friend**. Other works were created after reflection on the whole military experience, or within the parameters of the plague of PTSD. Once such work, by Randolph Harmes, called **Ritual Suicide Mask**, shocks us with its power to illicit emotion.

All of these works remind us of the sacrifice paid by our warriors, and also show us the power of art to reflect, illuminate and ultimately, to heal.

**Victoria Bryers**

U.S. Coast Guard Reserves (Retired)  
Chief Operations Specialist,  
Retired with 30yrs, (17 Active)

**From the Artist:**

*My military background includes 30 years with the U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserves. I joined the Coast Guard the first year women were accepted on active duty in 1974 and was among the first military women assigned to a combat ship in 1977. I was recalled to active duty in 2001 following the tragedy of 9/11 and remained on active duty for 3 years. A few years later I found that I had qualified for the new GI Bill; this allowed me to complete my undergraduate degree in Fine Arts (BFA) from the University of New Mexico and begin my masters in Art Education. In November 2011, I received first place in printmaking at the New Mexico Veterans Art show held in Albuquerque.*

*My experience from 1974 until 2004 was varied and extensive. I was with the first group of women assigned to a combat ship, the USCGC Gallatin in 1977 and the first woman in the Coast Guard to attend Radioman C7 school and the first enlisted woman assigned to the Coast Guard Radio station in Guam in 1975. I served in both deployable, support and headquarter commands.*

*As an artist I have explored many techniques and mediums including numerous drawing techniques, oil painting, ceramics, and printmaking. As a veteran I have begun incorporating issues that are personal not only to myself but to the world at large. My current work is about my own sense of loss both physical and emotional as well as the forces in life that pull not only myself but also many women, forcing us to do what society expects of us-- not necessarily what we want to do, accomplish in life or even follow a dream, especially if those dreams interfere with what the men in our lives expect or allow us to pursue. Even after 40 years since civil rights and women's liberation, women are still not fully accepted as equal. We are relegated to the back of the room. We work twice as hard as our male counterparts and are still only considered half as good. Inequality and fractured and lost identity resonates within me and the illustration of these things are not only raw and exposing, but also healing, allowing me to give hope to all women struggling to achieve equality and find themselves once again.*

**Michael Duffy**

Born: Chicago, Illinois, 1945  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
7th Battalion, 9th Artillery  
Firebase Bear Cat, Binh Son Rubber Plantation  
Xuan Loc, and Nha Be  
Artillery Battery Executive Officer, 105mm howitzers, 1968

**From the Artist:**

*"Welcome to the Republic of Vietnam," the captain said, greeting me. I saluted and handed him my orders. He quickly looked them over, then he told me there was a change. I would not be heading to Pleiku as my orders stated; instead I had a new assignment to a unit near Saigon.*

*"Why the change?" I asked.*

*"They need men down south. There's a lot of enemy activity in and around the Saigon area. The brass think the VC are up to something. You will be leaving in thirty minutes, on that plane."*

*He pointed to a C-130<sup>3</sup> aircraft out his window, its four engines running. He looked me over, then asked me why I was still in my khaki-colored shirt and pants? I told him my lost luggage story. He said to get some green jungle fatigues as soon as possible.*

*"Here are your new orders, get over to the plane now."*

*"Wait, before you go, here is a booklet on Vietnam. Read it."*

*The book was a small, thin paperback. It had phrases and useful words to help with directions or making a purchase. The book discussed the monetary system in Vietnam; it said the U. S. military needed to keep our "greenback" dollar out of the Vietnamese currency system. It also gave a brief history of the Vietnamese people and their culture. The Vietnamese culture dated back thousands of years, and it said that we, as visitors to this country, should respect this culture. The booklet was well written and informative. I stuffed it into my attaché and ran to the waiting plane.*

*The pilots were peering out their windows, and they looked worried. The flight crew was unfriendly. I quickly boarded the plane. We were headed to Saigon.*

*Thirty men, including me, were crowded into a small rear-passenger cabin along with boxes of military equipment. We sat facing one another on nylon-covered metal benches. The plane taxied and then took off like a rocket, banking to the left over the South China Sea, then back over land. The flight was wrenching. **The plane** pitched to the left and right, and soon I was*

*dizzy and lightheaded. The pilots set a course for Saigon's airport, Tan Son Nhut. It took all my effort to keep from vomiting. I glanced over at the other men on the plane, and I thought to myself, They all look so young. At the age of twenty-two, I was probably the oldest on the flight.*

*All the men on this flight had one thing in common—they looked frightened and worried.*

*Soon the pilot's voice welcomed us aboard. "If there is any trouble, there are plenty of places to land along the way," he said. "Don't worry." I wondered what he meant by trouble?*

*I turned my head to look out a small oval window. I watched as we flew over rice paddies, palm trees, and rubber plantations. The countryside was stunning; my eyes were filled with bright yellow-green foliage and dark shadowy blue greens, occasionally I saw a red tile roof. The flight was short and soon I felt the plane's engines throttle down.*

*As we began our descent into Saigon, I glanced out the window and noticed thick black smoke rising from different quarters of the city. Soon the plane plummeted downward, spinning my stomach. The plane's right wheels hit the ground with a slam, then the left wheels banged down rattling the cabin and the men inside. The back door began to open as the plane taxied to a sudden stop. Brilliant sunlight streamed into the cabin, and I saw a young soldier running toward the now open back door. He was waving and yelling frantically. "Run, run, get off the plane! Over there! Over there! Have your orders out, move, move! I ran off the plane to a mass of confusion.*

*The young private was pointing to another soldier with a clipboard. The soldier with the clipboard was glancing at our orders and then pointing at different locations on the tarmac. There was no reception area. This place was a madhouse. We were on the tarmac with planes, helicopters, jeeps, and trucks everywhere. They all had their engines racing. A fine red dust began filling my eyes. Almost immediately my eyes began to burn. I could hear the sound of small-arms fire, but I couldn't see where it was coming from. There were explosions somewhere, but I was too confused to figure out where they were coming from. I instinctively ducked; smoke was rising out over a long earthen wall. After three nights without sleep and the jarring plane ride, I was bewildered and dazed.*

*The private with the clipboard grabbed the orders from my hand. He quickly looked them over, then using his finger, he pointed to a waiting helicopter. You could not hear voices clearly.*

*Messages were given with a point of a finger, a shout, or a wave. I looked back at our C-130 aircraft as its four engines roared and launched it back into the sky. As it left it pushed a cloud of red dust into our faces. Again I was told, but this time with a scream and a pointing finger waving back and forth in my face. "Run. Move, lieutenant! The base is under attack and you need to get the hell out of here."*

*I turned from the private and began a sprint to the helicopter only to catch my foot on a block of wood. I fell to the tarmac. My hands were stretched out to break the fall. My attaché went airborne, and my knee caught a corner of the wood block, ripping my khaki pants. The palms of my hands tore and now were bloody and filthy. I got up and collected my attaché and myself; I ran to the waiting Huey helicopter.*

*The helicopter pilot was at his controls, the blades pulsing. He watched as a few others and I ran to his craft. A second anxious private standing at the helicopter door glanced at our orders as we boarded the ship. He grabbed mine, then yelled to me, "Get off in Bien Hoa. It's the first stop." He looked me over and then asked if I had a weapon. I yelled back at him, "No." With pity in his voice he said, "Well, sir, you better get one, and, sir, I would get out of those khakis. You look like a target." He turned and sprinted off.*

*I jumped on the helicopter and quickly took a seat. The pilot rushed the engine. Our helicopter tilted forward, then it began a slow rise over the earthen berm separating the airport from the buildings of Saigon.*

*As we gained altitude I could hear more explosions, but I couldn't judge where they were coming from. I listened to the sound of outgoing artillery. The few hours since leaving Cam Ranh Bay seemed a mass of confusion. Gaining elevation, we passed a thick cloud of black smoke rising from a burning vehicle. The young private's words back on the tarmac resonated in my head. He said I looked like a target.*

*It was January 31, 1968, the first day of the Tet Offensive<sup>4</sup> in South Vietnam.*

*The army had taken the doors off the helicopters to lighten the load. I was sitting on the end of a long nylon bench with a perfect view of Saigon under attack. I saw men, armored personnel carriers, tanks, and clouds of smoke fade into tiny dots as our helicopter gained altitude. It seemed peaceful up here, almost safe. I began to relax a little. I glanced at the palms of my hands—they were a mixture of dirt and blood and now sweat. I wiped them against my torn pants. The two other men on the ship were also going to Bien Hoa, only they had Army-issue green fatigues. They also carried M-16 rifles in their hands.*

*They both glanced at me with worried faces and quickly turned away. Soon we were descending, this time not to a tarmac but to a road just outside the front gate of the Bien Hoa Army Base. The Bien Hoa Airfield was under attack and could not be used.*

*All three of us jumped from the helicopter. Bags were tossed out the door by the crew chief, and the Huey was off. As we stood there bewildered, we heard a voice from the base shouting, "Get your ass down!"*

*I fell to my knees, then to the ground in a prostrate position. I crawled through the front gate on my stomach while gunmen shot at us from a group of tin shanties across the street. I saw little puffs of dust pop around me as bullets hit the dry dirt. Now I was scared, but it was the voice from the bunker that struck fear in me. As we neared the front gate, we jumped up and ran to the sandbagged bunker manned by two sentinels. We began pummeling questions at the two soldiers posted there. They both looked terrible, tired, and dirty. One man never took his eye off the road or the tin shanties. He was hunched over an M-60 machine gun atop a tripod. "What's going on?" I asked.*

<sup>3</sup> A C-130 is a four-engine turboprop military aircraft.

<sup>4</sup> The Tet Offensive was a massive attack by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army against the United States and South Vietnamese forces on the eve of the Vietnamese lunar New Year, called Tet, January 31, 1968.

## **Dave Tinman Edgar**

Served in the Army from 1983 to 1986 in the 2nd Ranger Battalion

*Dave Tinman Edgar was born in Salem, Oregon in 1964. His family moved south several times, finally settling in Scottsdale, Arizona. In 1983, he entered the U.S. Army. Service in the 2nd Ranger Battalion (Fort Lewis, Washington) took him all over the world to countries such as Honduras, Panama, Somalia, and Egypt. Upon completing his service in 1986. Mr. Edgar attended the University of Oregon where he graduated in three years, Summa Cum Laude in Sociology. He spent one year in Central America as a civilian, working on material projects in Nicaragua. Returning stateside, Mr. Edgar settled in Seattle, Washington, where he received his BFA with honors at Cornish College of the Arts in 2004. Mr. Edgar returned to Oregon and now resides in Portland. He has an active art practice in a studio near downtown Portland and is currently working on an ongoing series of paintings and drawings. Edgar says, "art making is not the end of the road for me, it is a starting point to discovering more about who I am and what I have to offer." While continuing to paint, he also practices zen meditation, works with sound objects and is currently exploring butoh inspired dance.*

## Randolph Harnes

Born: Omaha, Nebraska, 1944  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
Pleiku Subarea Command (PSCA)  
Cook, 1967-68

### From the Artist:

*From two letters, 1981 and 1996:*

*I couldn't even read novels or other books about Vietnam until well into the 1980s. I feel no connection, empathy, or (until recently) sympathy for my fellow veterans. I don't like hanging out with them or thinking of myself as one. My story is not at all exciting; the only weapon the army issued me was a mess-kit knife; I didn't kill any babies or lose any body parts. Nevertheless, I still was (and to some degree am) overwhelmed by guilt at my participation, however detached and by my lack of courage to stand by my convictions.*

*My interest in masks stems from an ongoing admiration for the woodcarving of the North Pacific Coast Indians. I have occasionally used Northwestern Indian motifs for their exotic or anecdotal value. My masks mark a change in my interest from the appearance of Indian art to the purposes for which it was used. They show little physical resemblance to Indian masks, but they represent, to a degree, the assimilation of Indian liturgical mask-making traditions. They deal more with feelings than with specific experiences. Dulce Bellum Inexpertis translates as "war is sweet to those who have not experienced it." This was a popular theme during the reign of Elizabeth I; the title is taken directly from a sixteenth-century poem by George Gascoigne, a veteran of the wars of Holland. It compares the realities of war with the myths of war. (I also think of Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decoru, Est" —Owen died in World War I.) It is concerned with anger and rage: anger at being used, lied to, and manipulated for the benefit of Litton Industries, Honeywell, and Bankamerica. The Ritual Suicide Mask deals more with guilt: guilt over surviving, guilt over having participated, in any manner, in the war. Making the masks was a way for me to put some of this behind me —kind of primal screams whose purpose is to expose, examine, and then expunge or exorcize these old ghosts. A focus these works share with traditional masks is transformation: transformation of the maker/wearer, transformation of the mundane to the mystical and vice versa —magic.*

*...Yes, I am giving up some of the guilt. For years I considered myself personally responsible for every aspect of that war —from racism within the service to My Lai to defoliation (in spite of the fact that the army neglected even to issue me a gun, and I never felt compelled to point out this*

*oversight). Ritual Suicide Mask was made as a means of figuratively beating myself up for all these things I took no initiative to stop, and because I felt guilty about not ending up like the mask (that is, surviving).*

*Since Vietnam, I've been preoccupied with the Holocaust: how do we normal, walking-down-the-street kind of people end up doing these incredibly horrible things to each other? And what about those to whom they're done?*

**David Helbert**

Born: Garrett, Indiana, 1944  
Served in Vietnam, 1966-67  
U.S. Army

From the artist:

*I was drafted into the Army in July 1965 and turned loose in May, 1967. In July, 1966, I was in Vietnam. I served in the 1st Logistical Command in Qui-Nhon. I was assigned to a supply company in the valley on HWY 19, 25 miles outside Qui-Nhon, as the courier-mailman. This required me to drive from Qui-Nhon twice a day to pick up mail and take care of all correspondence from our company to Battalion Headquarters.*

*When I became "short, I became the Company Draftsman. My drafting abilities helped me secure this position. Drawing yard plans and revising was the norm during that period. Through the years, talking with many Vets, we remembered times when American beer was scarce. The French imported "33" Biere. The Vietnamese copied the beer, as they did Coca-Cola, but the stuff was terrible, causing bad headaches and unspeakable hangovers the next day. We drank it anyway and paid the price.*

*In 1985, I drew this lampoon of the fabled brew. The art style is crosshatch. The F-4s are on a run, the forest is alive with explosions and the colors are in sync with the Vietnam service bar we wore on our uniforms. The Vietnamese called the beer "Ba Moui Ba." I dubbed the piece "Flowing Thunder" after the operation "Rolling Thunder" which is quite well-known today.*

*The GIs in Vietnam in the earlier years didn't understand the scope of the war. We did our jobs and counted the months, then the days 'til we would DEROS (Date of Estimated Return from Overseas). I came to wonder...why are we here? When I shipped out to Vietnam, I was alone.*

*When I came home, I came home alone, at 4 a.m. The only time anyone said to me "Welcome home" was another vet. My folks, my friends, nobody ever asked me about RVN ever again.*

**Ken Hruby**

Born: Fort Meade, South Dakota, 1938  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
3d Battalion, 44th Infantry Regiment  
23d Infantry Division, and 23d Ranger Battalion, Advisory Team 44  
Ban Me Thuot, Tuy Hoa, Quang Ngai  
Central Highlands, and coast, II and III Corps  
Senior Battalion Advisor, 1963-64

**From the artist:**

*In civilized cultures there has always been an ambivalent relationship between soldiers and the society they serve. A British verse sums it up:*

*God and the soldier, we adore  
In time of danger, not before.  
The danger's past and all things righted,  
God's forgotten and the soldier slighted.*

*I suppose that "slighted" understates the case for the Vietnam veteran. Our reception by American society upon our return from Southeast Asia was less than hospitable and often openly hostile. Suppression became our natural coping mechanism; we never spoke of the war, we only spoke around it, if indeed we spoke at all. But the experience of going to war begs for release in some form and the suppressed emotions will surface in one way or another. In my case, sculptural images are sparked by the war experience; they arc across the minefield of memory like tracers. They hold me hostage, controlling my waking and sleeping hours, until I am compelled to deal with them. Sometimes the art flows effortlessly, like whistling. Usually not.*

*Some images never do coalesce. I work and rework them and still they remain ephemeral visions, like those from my other life as a soldier...those moments when we assembled before the beginning of morning nautical twilight, trying to find our way into the known. Now, years later, images form and reform out of the mist of what was reality, steeped in a quarter-century of impure memory. They tease and nag. They ebb and flow. What triggers them and what solid*

*states they will ultimately take, if any, remain a mystery even to me. When a sculpture emerges, I am as astonished as anyone. If nothing lasting develops, the journey through the minefield transforms me nonetheless. At times we need to tell the story simply for the sake of the telling.*

**Louis Janetta**

Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
Radio Telephone Operator, Forward Observer  
1966-68

**From the Artist:**

*From a newspaper article (The Call, Feb. 24, 1995):*

*Janetta holds a B.S. in art education from Rhode Island College, a master's of education from Providence College and a master's of art education from Rhode Island School of Design, where he teaches part-time. He is a full-time art teacher in the Providence school system.*

*Janetta noted that the road to his career was often fraught with bumps and potholes along the way, including stints after high school where he worked doing everything from making nameplates at Emblem and Badge to dressing mannequins at Sears, Roebuck & Company.*

*"I could go to college or go to work," he continued. "The Vietnam war was going on. My father had been in World War II. This thing was going on in the back of my mind. It was a tough decision."*

*After some thought, however, Janetta enlisted in the Army and found himself in the middle of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam from 1966-68.*

*"People were shooting at me," he recalled. "It wasn't all that great."*

*But that experience, he added, gave his life a different perspective. It also gave him experiences from which he has drawn, in his etchings and various other creations, moments in time. In some cases, his creations simply depict scenes of soldiers with arms draped over machine guns or enjoying a moment of camaraderie. Other times, they are faces of agony.*

*"I like working with things that are real," he said. "Art should excite you."*

## **Laszlo Kondor**

Born: Fugyivasarhely, Hungary, 1940  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
DASPO (Department of the Army Special Photographic Office)  
Americal Division, Chu Lai,  
Combat photographer, 1969-71

### **From the Artist:**

*I was with the line company in an area called the Barrier Islands, a coastal plain with sand dunes wedged between the sea and the rice paddies. I was attached to an infantry squad with a machine gunner named Pineapple. Pineapple had earned his nickname because of the scars of childhood acne. He was short, squat, and bowlegged, and he was the pigman. The grunts called the M-60 machine gun the pig and the man who carried it was the pigman. Pineapple was a good pigman. He carried the pig slung on his shoulder, from which position he could fire standing up.*

*The squad was walking along the sand dunes, checking abandoned enemy bunkers, when we began to receive fire from one. It was a lone North Vietnamese. For a while the grunts had fun with him: from behind the dunes they held targets up on sticks for him to shoot at. After a bit, in the heat, we had had enough of that and began to flank his position. Pineapple covered us from twenty-five yards away. The company commander sent up the Kit Carson Scout to get the NVA to surrender. After a short exchange, first some ammunition, then an AK-47 rifle flew out of the bunker. Then the soldier emerged wearing only a belt and a loincloth.*

*Everyone started hollering, "Hey, we got ourselves a real live dink!" I was excited. This was my first enemy face to face. So close! I had raised my camera when from behind me Pineapple opened up with the M-60. Rounds flew by us, hitting the prisoner in the face and chest, picking him up, so that he shook and wiggled obscenely, and dropping him. Just as suddenly the gun stopped.*

*After a stunned moment we started screaming, "What the f\*\*\*, Pineapple! Are you crazy? He was surrendering. He was unarmed. Why the hell did you kill him?" Pineapple walked toward us with a weird grin, saying, "This dink was not right. There was something not right about him." He kicked the almost naked body over. Two hand grenades were jammed in the soldier's belt, with wires running from the pins to his wrists. By raising his arms to surrender he would have killed us all, and died himself. What kind of enemy was this? I was scared. That day I stopped calling them dinks. They were The Enemy or Mr. Charles.*

*Pineapple was nineteen and had been in Nam for a year. He could sense from twenty-five yards  
what I could not see from ten feet.*

**William Madden**

Born: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1946  
Served in Vietnam  
Marksman, 1965

**James McNeely**

Born: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1949  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
196th LiB, Americal Division  
Chu Lai  
Squad Leader, 1969-70

**From the Artist:**

*So much of the art of Vietnam veterans, created just after they came home, is full of pain and  
ghosts. I made my first sculpture twelve years after leaving Vietnam. The gesture of the soldier,  
who has just found an enemy cache, is one of victory or celebration; for me, it is the gesture of  
being one step closer to home.*

**James Davis Nelson**

Born: Beloit, Kansas, 1943  
Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army  
2d Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment Mechanized  
25th Infantry Division, Camp Ranier  
Dau Tieng, 18th Military Historical Detachment  
25th Infantry Division, Cu Chi  
Rifleman, 1967-68

## From the Artist:

*I arrived in Vietnam in August 1967, about five months after the battle of Fire Support Base Gold, at Suoi Tre in Tay Ninh Province. A sense of urgency and tension was still in the air as Captain Bill Allison took over command.*

*Supply seemed limited. I was issued a dented helmet, a rifle that did not function because it had been damaged in a previous ambush, no cleaning rod, and a flak jacket obtained from a pile of used and discarded equipment. As we used to joke, an all-expenses-paid vacation to Southeast Asia.*

*Jim Frost, an eighteen-year-old buck sergeant, was my squad leader. He had already aged and looked older than me at twenty-three. Sergeant Kay, a Korean War veteran, was platoon sergeant. A thing that I noted about Kay, Frost, and a number of others in the company was their faces: they looked as though they had not slept much and had a haunted and glassy stare; I had seen that look in a painting by Howard Pyle of a World War I soldier at the end of a trench, staring into the night.*

*Company C was equipped with tracks, armored personnel carriers with 50-caliber machine guns in their turrets. In the battle, it had been the leading rescue unit that saved its sister battalion.*

*In the jungle, I saw endless ambushes, firefights, land-mine explosions, and night patrols; we dug twilight foxholes that filled with water immediately in the constant rain. As I worked with them, I realized that the men I was serving with had witnessed hell itself: Suoi Tre, March 21, 1967.*

*This painting is a memorial to those I served with and to the American soldiers of the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, who, some dying, some surviving, took part in that engagement. After the war, veterans sent me their photographs and descriptions. I remembered what had been described to me by members of my company. My purpose was to create a chronicle of the battle.*

*The battle took place in an oval clearing. Transported to Fire Support Base Gold by helicopter the day before were three batteries of 105mm howitzers and the 450 infantrymen of the 3d Brigade, almost all young draftees. The assault lasted four hours.*

*In the painting waves of North Vietnamese soldiers are overrunning the perimeter of the American firebase. There was a lot of hand-to-hand fighting. M-16 rifles jammed; at right a soldier is swinging one of these. Company B is in the foreground. A quad-fifty machine gun is being turned around by the enemy to be fired on the U.S. batteries. Lieutenant Colonel John Vessey's howitzers are being leveled to fire at the oncoming enemy.*

*At least 2,500 seasoned North Vietnamese troops of the 271st NVA Regiment carried out the attack. Some of these are shown in the lower foreground, unleashing an unrelenting bayonet, grenade, and hand-to-hand assault, flooding even into the howitzer emplacement. Toward the end of the battle, American units were down to their very last rounds of ammunition.*

*I tried to capture the fantastically fierce defense by the inexperienced American troops, and have included at least fourteen portraits of actual members of Company B. The last-minute appearance of a come-to-the-rescue column of tracks and tanks is shown at the left.*

*If the battle had been lost, the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong could have claimed a latter-day battle of Little Big Horn. A Communist victory, so desperately needed, would certainly have further dispirited an already divided and embattled American populace. It might have demanded that its army be withdrawn from South Vietnam, leaving North Vietnam and its Communist allies in control of the South without shedding any more blood. But the opposite took place. I have painted it in an alla prima style.*

*The numerically weak, inexperienced 3d Brigade defeated a much larger, more seasoned force. I try to honor and show what they had not taken into account: the still-surviving spirit, inventiveness, and valor of an American youth that, sometimes foolishly, but always bravely, took up the call to arms. Four hundred and fifty U.S. soldiers beat back twenty-five hundred Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, with thirty-one Americans killed in action and eight hundred enemy killed.*

**John Plunkett**

Born: Oceanside, New York, 1948

Served in Vietnam, U.S. Army

4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division

Cu Chi, Tay Ninh Province

Mud, Rifleman, 1969-70

**From the Artist:**

From a letter, ca. 1983:

*Our home base sat at the foot of the only mountain range for about a hundred miles. It consisted of two mountains: Nui Ba Den and Nui Ba Ra.*

*These paintings are from a diary that was written in my brain and in the brains of thousands of others, on a daily basis, in Vietnam. Some of the situations did happen to me; others were bad*

*dreams, fear of what might happen, hallucinations; images that seemed to appear out of nowhere,  
for no reason.*

*It is through painting that Vietnam is now giving me and many others a new life. It is through  
art that we fight back, and it is through the eyes and hands of veterans that the truth is told.*