



May 20, 2005

Contact: Jane Irish, 215-923-0245, jirishart@aol.com

**Visual Artists pay homage to the Vietnam Veterans Against the War's 1970
march called "Operation Rapid American Withdrawal"
at ICE BOX Project Space September 2005**

America was bleeding to death in the rice fields and jungles of Vietnam, and now the blood flowed in our streets. I did not want my country to die. I had to do something. It was time to stop the war.

*- 1970 right after Kent State, poet and Marine
Corps Vietnam War Veteran, W.D. Ehrhart*

I am more interested in confronting the recent atrocities against the country and people of Iraq and in producing a work in direct protest against what the Bush administration has done. But that would be the focus of my interior dialogue and would ideally result in a universal statement against war that would add a voice to the others you are assembling. As you guessed already, I would opt for an abstract, metaphorical approach, which is the challenge for me, to make the passion of political conviction felt. But I am enthused about trying if you can accept all of the above.

- Participant Operation RAW exhibition 2005

The members of VVAW wanted to show the American public that it was the very conditions of fighting that guerrilla war that resulted in the de facto genocide of the Vietnamese people. I felt that Operation RAW was the only way for the veterans who were against the war to really show what was happening.

- Participant Operation RAW 1970

Visual artists have power, and with this exhibition we will use this power as another democratic check and balance.

- Jane Irish, artist and exhibition organizer

In September 1970, a small but rapidly growing VVAW arranged its own homecoming parade. The event, called Operation RAW (Rapid American Withdrawal), dispatched 84 battle-clad veterans on a four-day march through the towns and countryside of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It was a wonderful example of true guerilla theatre / performance art. At designated points along the march these antiwar veterans reenacted actions that they had performed in Vietnam against civilians including harassment and interrogation. Operation RAW happened here in the Philadelphia/NJ region and nowhere else in the USA. On Labor Day, 1970, the veterans arrived in Valley Forge Military Park, over 200 strong where they performed a final sweep mission culminating in a peace rally where they "broke arms" with 2000 supporters looking on. Speeches were offered by soldiers, sympathizers, politicians, and celebrities - including John Kerry, Jane Fonda, and Donald Sutherland.

In September of 2005 (scheduled for September 2 - 25, 2005 at the Ice Box Project Space and also part of the Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe) visual artists will mark the 35th anniversary of Operation RAW. Curator and artist Jane Irish has conceived of and is organizing the commemorative show to celebrate the antiwar veteran as a metaphor of heroic resistance and to teach the real history of the creativity of the antiwar veteran.

OPERATION
RAPID
AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL
1970-2005
Exhibition

Ice Box Project Space
Crane Arts
September 2-25, 2005

Advisors:

Deborah Block
Theatre Director/Dramaturg
Program Director
Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and
Philly Fringe

John Baky
Curator of Imaginative
Representations of the
Viet Nam War
LaSalle University

Jan Barry
Poet and Co Founder of Vietnam
Veterans Against the War

Teresa Jaynes
Sculptor and
Director of Philadelphia Print
Collaborative

Ingrid Schaffner
Senior Curator of Exhibitions,
Institute of Contemporary Art,
Philadelphia



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Eighty-four artists have been invited to participate by creating a new art work in response to the 1970 Operation RAW march. As of mid-May 52 have responded yes. Among those artists that will participate are 18 -22 year olds (soldier-aged artists), veterans of the Vietnam War who are visual artists, Philadelphia based artists, and artists based outside of Philadelphia. The work will range from small drawings and large-scale paintings to sound and media art. All kinds of strategies will be used that will reflect upon the original Operation Rapid American Withdrawal; techniques of resistance, movement through landscape, symbolic props, camaraderie and bigotry, introspection and community conversation, remembrance of the dead and soap box speechmaking, celebrity and nostalgia. The show will draw its power from contemporary artists' personal re-imagination of the past. The documentary film made of the March entitled *Different Sons: Vietnam Remembered* (Jack Ofield: Producer-Director) will be shown as a projection loop. Ofield will also be a participant.

Participants to date: Ron Abram, Amy Adams, Terry Adkins, Sam Belkowitz, Shannon Bowser, Brian Brotman, Mark Campbell, Steve Donegan, Jessica Doyle, Joy Feasley, Susan Fenton, Will Gabaldon, Sarah Gamble, Arthur Gonzales, Patrick Grugan, Susan Hagen, Carolyn Healy, Mary Henderson, Melissa Ho, Diane Hricko, Richard Hricko, Alex Hughes, Cathleen Hughes, Jane Irish, Susana Jacobson, Christianne Kapps, Nick Kripal, Tristin Lowe, Gabriel Martinez, Sarah McEneaney, Kate Midgett, Susan Moore, Thomas Morrissey, Joshua Mosley, Jack Ofield, Sharyn O'Mara, Michael O'Rielly, Peter Parker, John Philips, Tom Porett, Andrew Prayzner, Janet Richard, James Rosenthal, Mark Shetabi, Larry Spaid, Paul Swenbeck, Ira Upin, Jeremy Vaughn, Tony Velez, Natalie Weitzers, Sarah Zwerling.

Please see attached biography of curator and artist Jane Irish and description of film by Jack Ofield . Images available upon request. For more information please contact Jane Irish at 215-923-0245 or jirishart@aol.com and for more information on the show, the artists, and the history: www.operationraw.com.

Event listing:

Date: September 2 – 25, 2005

Time: hours: Thursday – Sunday 11 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Special Hours: Labor Day: September 5, 2005. 11 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Place: Ice Box Project Space, Crane Arts Building, 1400 American Street, Philadelphia, PA

Entrance: Admission is free. For more information call 215-923-0245, email jirishart@aol.com or check the web at www.operationraw.com

For more information about the Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe events: www.livearts-fringe.org, The Ice Box Project Space has changed the dynamic of the arts in Philadelphia. The 5000+ square foot space located in the Crane Arts Building, a Victorian factory newly renovated as artists studios.

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Jane Irish

Irish has been making work on the theme of Operation RAW since 2002. For this exhibition, she is building on her interest in using art to explore the concepts of social class and political art.

Irish has lived in Philadelphia since 1981. In 2002, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts presented a one-person museum exhibition of her work, titled "History Lesson."

Irish received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art (1977) and her MFA from Queens College, City Univeristy of New York (1980). She has been featured in numerous group exhibitions at venues such as the Abington Art Center, Jenkintown, PA the Paul Robeson Gallery, Rutgers University, Newark; the Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery; the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, The Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Irish was a recognized painter during the East Village art scene era, showing regularly at Sharpe Gallery, NY from 1981-89. She has also worked as the Artistic Director of Chester Springs Studio, Chester Springs Pa, where she curated several projects featuring both Philadelphia-based and nationally recognized artists, receiving major funding from the Pew Exhibitions Initiative their inaugural year for the exhibition "Reenactment/Rapprochement."

Jack Ofield

DIFFERENT SONS, VIETNAM REMEMBERED, 1970. On the road with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Producer-Director: Jack Ofield, Producer: Robert J. Sann

The original 56-minute documentary reissued in a new half-hour version, January, 2004.

Log Line:

Vietnam combat veterans report the war as they experienced it.

Content:

On the Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 4, 1970, a large group of combat veterans of the Vietnam War began a four-day, 100-mile march from Morristown, New Jersey, to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to protest U.S. war policies in Southeast Asia. They wore their battle attire and carried plastic M-16s.

In towns along the march, the soldiers re-enacted their own brutal treatment of Vietnamese civilians through frightening simulations of harassment and interrogation. With some veterans walking on crutches and braces, they encountered FBI agents, outspoken spectators and some counter-demonstrators who spat on them, accused them of treason and of "losing the war." The VVAW talked of their war experiences and how they had become transformed from staunch pro-war patriots into "different sons" and anti-war patriots.

On the fourth day of the march, they gathered with amputees from the Valley Forge Army Hospital and many other sympathizers and, in a stirring ceremony, broke their guns and cried out, "Peace Now! Peace Now! Peace Now!"

Production:

The film was made by the Emmy Award-winning producer Jack Ofield with the assistance of other professionals in New York Film Industry For Peace. The film debuted at New York's Museum of Modern Art and was televised on parts of the PBS network, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., as well as in France, Germany, and Scandinavia. The film received many festival awards and was seen throughout the U.S. at anti-war veterans groups and the Peace Action Coalition. It was shot on 16mm and transferred to Beta SP for television.