

American artist looks beyond war

An American artist is trying to help people forget painful memories of a war that ended 28 years ago.

Rodney Dickson, in his latest exhibit at Mai's Gallery, is showing 13 paintings using bamboo and lacquer to highlight his message that "war is over, right here, right now".

"I've met many American and Vietnamese who have been touched by the devastation and suffering of war. For these people, war will be fresh in their minds forever," said Dickson, who has visited Vietnam many times in the last decade.

"I want viewers to try to enjoy a world of love and peace."

Working with Vietnamese friend artist Tran Luong, Dickson uses water and fish in his works to evoke his ideas.

"These materials aren't often found in performance and installation works, but I chose them because they are images of life," he said. "Like water, life goes on and people, too."

Dickson is inspired by Viet Nam and its people and has many friends in Hanoi.

He has asked close friends like writer Bao Ninh and singer Hong Nhung to write about their memories of war.

He attaches their writings to his paintings. "Through these works, I hope my viewers will have many new insights about the war," he said.

Dickson said Bao Ninh's wellknown novel *Noi Buon Chien Tranh* (The Sorrow of War) reminds people that "war is not a game and is not to be played with."

Born in Northern Ireland but now an American citizen, Dickson has traveled all over the world, and has seen what violence can do.

For him, the best art brings people together, helping them to forget the past and live for the present.

Working with many young Vietnamese artists in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Dickson said he likes the way youth are involved in art.

"They are learning new things and are creating works with their soul and heart."

Co-operating with Cave Gallery, a non-profit organisation in New York City, Dickson has developed a scholarship programme for Vietnamese sponsored by the US-based Ford Foundation.

Cave's professional staff selects four Vietnamese artists to work at the gallery for three months and allows them to showcase their work.

Application for the programme can be sent to Mai's Gallery, 16 Nguyen Hue Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City. For more information, visit the website <http://www.cavegallery.com/>.

Dickson's exhibit opens today and runs through January 28.

Theo Vietnam News