

Michael D. Cousino Sr. Vietnam War Dioramas Collection
MSS 183

Biographical

Michael D. Cousino, a resident of Gouverneur, New York, served in the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam and was injured in battle in 1969. After his discharge from the service and stints in physical rehabilitation, Cousino lived in the southern U.S. for several years before returning to Northern New York in 1983. As a boy, Cousino dabbled in model-making and other semi-artistic pursuits and in the mid 1980's he began making realistic three dimensional depictions of various experiences he and others had in Vietnam using "found" materials and painstakingly making items from scratch. The work proved therapeutic, as Cousino struggled over the years to cope with his personal Vietnam experience. Gradually, Cousino began sharing his dioramas both with fellow Vietnam vets and later with the public. His artworks, now numbering over 200, were the subject of several museum exhibits, arts festivals, library displays and other public outlets, including the book *Vietnam Remembered: The Folk Art of Marine Combat Veteran Michael D. Cousino Sr.* by local folklorist Varick Chittenden.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of six dioramas using various materials, depicting scenes of torture, small scale battles, platoon patrols, soldiers at rest and the downing of a U.S. helicopter. Each diorama is enclosed in a custom-built wood and plastic box. Five of the six works are untitled. They represent some of the earlier works made by Mr. Cousino.

Provenance

The collection was given as a gift of the artist in 1987.

Descriptions of the dioramas

1. "Vietnam War: The Patrol"—30 x 22 cm.; depicts members of a U.S. (Marine) patrol flushing out a Vietcong soldier and a medic tending to a wounded comrade.
2. "Untitled"—32 x 38 cm.; depicts 10 soldiers relaxing in the vicinity of a minefield around and on a jeep, an ambulance, a water tank and a lookout tower.
3. "Untitled"—20 x 8 cm.: depicts two Vietcong soldiers torturing two U.S. POWs
4. "Untitled"—51 x 22 cm. ; depicts a downed U.S. helicopter, two wounded soldiers, the killing of a Vietcong fighter and another VC fighter running away.
5. "Untitled"—65 x 19 cm. ; Depicts the gruesome killing by the Vietnamese of a U.S. soldier by a so-called "Malaysian gate".
6. "Untitled"—45 x 34 cm. ; depicts a patrol of U.S. servicemen discovering a Vietcong "Punji pit", a type of booby trap. A VC soldier is shown hiding behind a crude bunker.