



STOP THE WAR: CHICAGOANS PROTEST THE VIETNAM WAR WITH ART

Vietnam is a small country in Southeast Asia that was the center of the Vietnam War. Starting in 1955 and continuing through the 1960s and 1970s, North Vietnam and South Vietnam fought each other for control of the whole country. The United States supported South Vietnam, which had a democratic form of government, over North Vietnam, which had a **communist** government. At that time, the United States was worried that more countries might become communist, and it wanted to help democratic governments grow around the world.

The United States had troops in Vietnam from 1964 to 1973. The US sent more than 3 million Americans to Vietnam. Most of them were **drafted** into the military. More than 58,000 US troops died. Estimates vary, but over one million Vietnamese people were killed during the war. The war became very unpopular because of how long it lasted and how many people were dying. By the mid-to-late 1960s, many people in the United States began protesting the Vietnam War.

ANTI-VIETNAM WAR PROTEST ART

Protests happened all over the country, especially in big cities like Chicago. People protested in different ways, including through art. They made murals, buttons, posters, and magazines to show their feelings about the war. Their art was a way for people to express their views in a unique way.

In Chicago, protest art came from various places, like art schools and immigrant communities. One artist was Mario Castillo, who was born in Mexico in 1945. When he was 10, his family moved to Chicago. While at art school in Chicago, Castillo started working on a

large outdoor **mural** called *Peace* in Pilsen, a neighborhood on the Lower West Side of Chicago. The mural shows respect for his Mexican background and his protest of the Vietnam War. On the left side of the mural, there is an “exploding eye” to represent a bomb going off. During the war, US planes dropped many bombs on Vietnam. The middle of the mural shows a red peace symbol over a blue Earth, which shows Castillo’s hope for world peace.

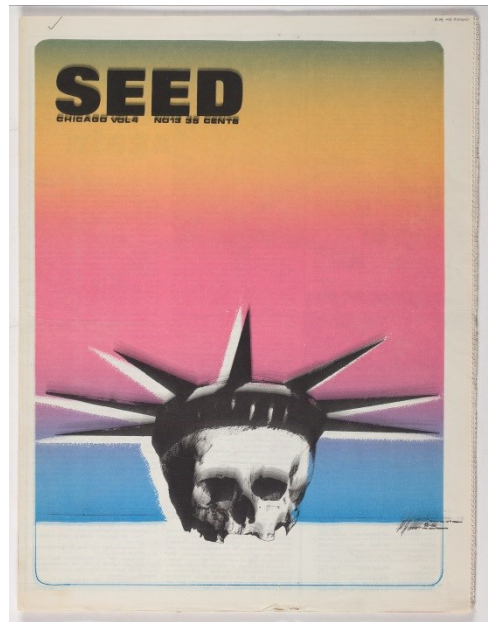


Peace Mural, (c) Mario E. Castillo, photograph by Harold Allen, 1968, Courtesy of Mario Castillo

YIP, SDS, AND THE CHICAGO SEED

Other groups also created protest art. Two such examples were the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Youth International Party (YIP). The SDS used striking images in posters and newsletters with their slogan, “Bring the War Home,” to show their beliefs. Some members thought change could only come through a violent **revolution**. They organized rallies against the war that sometimes resulted in damage to buildings and property.

The YIP was less extreme but still wanted the war to end. In 1967, a YIP member named Abe Peck created an [underground newspaper](#) called the *Chicago Seed*. The covers of this newspaper criticized US involvement in Vietnam. They used colorful and shocking images to catch people's attention. One cover showed the Statue of Liberty as a skull to represent death, since so many people were dying in Vietnam. The *Chicago Seed's* covers were seen by people all over the country and helped change people's opinions about the war.



Chicago Seed cover art by Karl-Heinz Meschbach, February 1, 1970, CHM, ICHI-183000

WOMEN FOR PEACE

Women were involved in protesting the war too. An organization called Women for Peace was very active in Chicago. This group organized peaceful rallies and wrote letters to



Women for Peace Poster, artist unknown, c. 1967, CHM, ICHI-183504

politicians asking to end the war. They also made art about the war. Many of their artworks showed symbols of peace, like flowers and doves. Other imagery showed a mother holding her child, and was meant to encourage all women including mothers to become peace activists.

By 1972, the United States started to pull troops out of Vietnam, and by 1975, North Vietnam had won the war. Art from Chicago and other forms of protest helped change many Americans' views on the Vietnam War. The rallies and protest art played a big role

in the US decision to leave the war.



VOCABULARY IN “STOP THE WAR: CHICAGOANS PROTESTS THE VIETNAM WAR WITH ART”

Communist - A system in which the government owns all property, and citizens must share the wealth that they create. In the 20th century, communism spread across the world with the support of the Soviet Union, the largest communist state in the world.

Draft - A system in which young people are required to join the military of a country for a period of service.

Mural - A piece of art, typically a painting, that is painted directly onto a wall.

Underground Newspaper - News sources published independently of big news companies.

