

# GEORGE BURCHETT: Democracy

Born in Hanoi, Australian artist George Burchett was delivered in exile. 15 years later he was granted his rightful citizenship. By this time he had lived in Vietnam, Russia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, and France. After relocating to Australia, despite his best efforts, Burchett just never felt at home. A 2006 visit to Hanoi confirmed his decision to return and live there.

This SLOT work has its genesis in an appreciation for 1925-1945 historical drawings, from the era of French colonization, combined with Burchett's own research into his Father's journalistic photographs, spanning 1954-1966, and including a close association with the independence leader Ho Chi Minh.

The figure in conical hat is in fact interpreted directly from a photo of his Father wearing a conical hat. It is repeated across the page in vermin-like fashion, as if some disposable, faceless stereotype. Burchett reclaims the symbol in an ironic play on propaganda countering propaganda, a statement of stubborn persistence and resistance. Suspended in space like apparitions across the page these figures seem determined to be recognized, to form a statement of belonging all of their own. An inked finger, violent, impertinent, dirty, punctuates the top left hand area of the work, titled *Democracy* (mis/spelt in Greek).

This work is quite simply a Memoriam to the life of Burchett's Father, this year posthumously awarded for his journalistic achievements. Wilfred Burchett was an Australian (minus 17 years of barred citizenship) with an interest in presenting news stories from more than one perspective – an endeavour which necessitated interviewing the “enemy” and finding their humanity, as well as the “democratic” forces in conflict.

Whatever the case or situation, the impact upon Burchett, as an individual and as artist, would be inevitable. I have a sense that *Democracy* is only the tip of the iceberg, the beginning of a very personal journey to reclaim, deconstruct, reconstruct, the multiple forces that have pained, scarred and enriched his life, and a testimony to the intergenerational effects of war.

*Mai Nguyen-Long (visual artist)*

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