“Vietnam Pieta” statues to memorialize civilian victims killed by ROK in Vietnam War

Kim Woon-seong and Kim Seo-gyeong, creators of the statue of the young girl representing the comfort women across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul, recently made the statue “Vietnam Pieta” (left) as a gesture of apology for civilian massacres committed by ROK troops during the Vietnam War. Copies of the statue, 1.5m high and made of bronze, are planned to be erected in both South Korea and Vietnam this year. (by Kang Jae-hoon, staff photographer)

The artworks, by the couple who created Seoul’s comfort woman statue, will be installed in both South Korea and Vietnam

Memorials are being erected in Vietnam and South Korea as a way of apologizing for the massacre of civilians by ROK soldiers during the Vietnam War and to provide solace to the victims.

The memorials will be cast from a statue called “Vietnam Pieta” (the Vietnamese title means “The Last Lullaby”), a name echoing an artistic genre that shows the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of Jesus. The statue was created by the married couple Kim Seo-gyeong, 51, and Kim Woon-seong, 52, the same artists who did the statue of the young girl symbolizing the comfort women that was set up in 2011 across from the Japanese embassy, in Seoul’s Jongno District.

After peace education is provided and funds are raised from the public, copies of “Vietnam Pieta” are to be erected both in South Korea and in a region of Vietnam where civilian massacres took place.
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This year, memorial services are being held on the 50th anniversary of massacres in several villages in central Vietnam,” a spokesperson for the Committee for the Establishment of a Korean-Vietnamese Peace Foundation said on Jan. 15. “We are in contact with the Vietnamese government and each village in an attempt to send them ‘Vietnam Pieta’ to coincide with these services as a gesture of apology and consolation.”

The committee is working to raise awareness of South Korea’s historical responsibility in the Vietnam War.


“On our visit to Vietnam, we saw countless images of forgotten babies who were massacred, and they became thorns that pierced our eyes,” the two artists said. “We wanted to record and to console the children who were killed without even knowing why and to convey our remorse and regret.”

“Vietnam Pieta,” which will be cast in bronze, is 70cm wide and 150cm high and weighs 150kg. The statue will rest on a granite base weighing 450kg.

“The South Korean government must demand and it must receive an exact apology from the Japanese government about the issue of the comfort women. Likewise, it must make an exact apology for the massacre of civilians during the Vietnam War. The government isn’t fulfilling its role on either of these things right now,” the couple said in an interview with the Hankyoreh on Jan. 12.

Last year, Kim Seo-gyeong traveled to Vietnam and researched cases of rape and other kinds of sexual violence perpetrated against Vietnamese women by South Korean soldiers as part of the “butterfly fund,” which was established based on a proposal by the former comfort women, who were forced to serve as sex slaves for the Imperial Japanese Army.

The Committee for the Establishment of a Korean-Vietnamese Peace Foundation and the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Jeongdaehyeop) are researching the issue of massacres of Vietnamese civilians with funds provided by the former comfort women.
Kim Woon-seong (left) and Kim Seo-gyeong (right) pose with six different versions of their comfort women statues in their studio in Goyang, Gyeonggi Province, Jan. 12. (by Kang Jae-hoon, staff photographer)

By Nam Jong-young, staff reporter

Please direct questions or comments to [english@hani.co.kr]

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