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Artist's sketches etch memories of General Giap

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draw sketches," Thanh recalled. "I had to use my time and a unique chance to capture his most distinctive features. Among the sketches and five oil-on-canvas paintings, there were ten drawn as a series, at a space of 15 minutes, one after another."

Thanh said while she was drawing, Gen Giap's narrated his memories to her and his wife Dang Bich Ha and their son Giap Bien. From his childhood in the central province of Quang Nam, then from his youthful years working as a teacher at Quoc Trung (Hue National Secondary School) and Chu Van An Secondary School in Ha Noi. He also recalled his memories of President Ho Chi Minh and leaders of other countries.

"I was nervous while making my first sketches as I was afraid I would not be able to catch his appearance and emotions," Thanh said.

But Gen Giap seemed to understand Thanh's apprehension. He laughed out loudly, appreciated her paintings and signed his name on four sketches. Thanh then kept all the four pen brushes Gen Giap used to sign his name behind each sketch's frame.

Gen Giap then played an excerpt from Beethoven's 9th Symphony. He also drew three sketches of Thanh next to the painting shelf.

"I was extremely surprised as I only knew earlier that he was a great military commander," Thanh said, "My admiration for him doubled since then."

The painter then moved all the collection to her home in Hanoi.

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Sketched: A portrait of General Giap by Van Duong Thanh in 1999.

"I think this is an artful collection," commented Bui Phuong Viet An, director of EAS Vietnam Company, which involves training human resources and trade promotion. I knew Thanh through various activities of Vietnamese overseas.

"The sketches are delicate and reflect the great General in daily life. This is the first time I saw such a collection, catching daily life moments of the General. I think it's a treasure for next generations of both, Vietnamese people and others internationally

said.

ThaF8nh splits her time between VieE4t Nam and Sweden where she teaches the art of painting at various schools, including Medborgaskollan, Vuxenskollan schools in Stockholm and universities in HaF8 NoE4i and HCM City.

ThaF8nh's works were added by the VieE4t Nam National Museum of Fine Arts to its collection for the first time when she was 60. Since then, many of her artworks have been on permanent display in national art museums and galleries in other countries including Thailand, Singapore, Spain and Sweden.

Being distinctive for her subtle combination of Asian^{4/5} and European heritage in which Western techniques are used to depict traditional

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been making it. The platform of the sculpture will be a carved painting, depicting the historic Dien Bien Phu battle.

"It will be the biggest sculpture that I have designed but I can't say anything more about it," she said, adding, "Let's see later."

In her house in Ha Noi, besides dozens of paintings and sketches of famous people of Viet Nam, she also keeps a 300-page book and hundreds of articles written in various languages including Vietnamese, English, Swedish and Danish on General Giap, marking his death in October 2013. She had collected these newspapers all over the world.

"I was extremely moved when I heard that he had died," Thanh said. "Since that moment, I have spent a lot of time reading newspapers and online news for three months to see what foreigners wrote about him. All of them showed great respect for this historic person and devoted a lot of space in their print and online publications to cover his death."

"I brought out the book as a way of paying a tribute to General Giap, marking a commemorating ceremony 49 days after his death," she said, adding, "I hope he understood my admiration for him."

Thanh plans to exhibit the book, along with her painting collection in May. — VNS