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LIBERATION RADIO
7 November 2025 – 25 January 2026

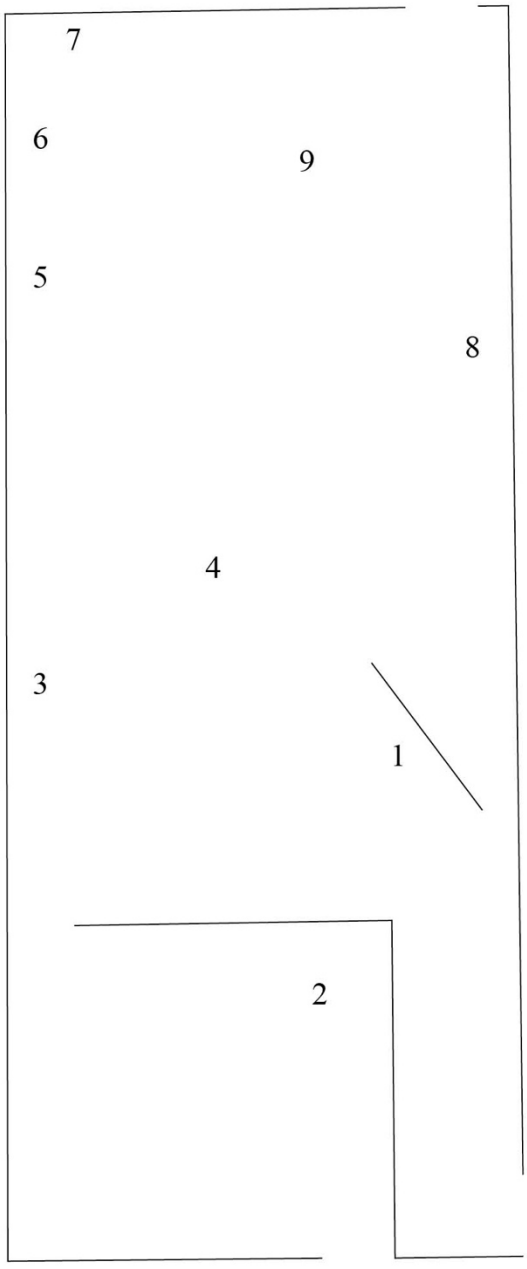
LIBERATION RADIO is an exhibition conceived through the collaboration between sound artist Nhung Nguyen, artist and filmmaker Esther Johnson, and writer and broadcaster Matthew Sweet.

In 1968, a group of American military deserters from the war in Vietnam went to the North Vietnamese consulate in Stockholm with the sole purpose of joining the army they had been drafted to fight against. Instead, they were recruited for the so-called propaganda war and started recording *Second Front Radio*, a radio program where they blended pop music and political rhetoric to persuade other American soldiers to desert. Their recordings were then transported from Sweden to Vietnam by diplomats, and broadcast on the English language radio station Liberation Radio (Đài phát thanh Giải phóng) from transmitters on the rooftops of Hanoi, and other revolutionary bases in the Vietnamese countryside. The exhibition at Index centers around a new video work which revives that circuit of communication, and with contributions from some of the surviving American deserters, Swedish anti-war activists and Vietnamese journalists of the period, the voice of Liberation Radio speaks again.

Through the agency of re-evaluating historical memory, the exhibition creates an incentive to explore the role of artistic methods and distribution of culture in the peacemaking processes and the potential in using and subverting the infrastructures and technologies of the prevailing power for one's own political agenda. The use of FM radio, in the case of *Second Front Radio*, speaks to similar current instances of employing established outlets of communication, such as social media, where reports from zones of conflict can be directly mediated by civilians – testifying to their lived experiences on their own terms.

In conjunction with the video work, archival objects; pictures, publications, posters, newspaper-clippings and other ephemera about the deserters and material from the Swedish anti-war movement during the war in Vietnam are on display. Overlaying the video and the archival material is a sound work consisting of new field recordings by the artists and archival audio, creating a sonic environment which mirrors the deserters' journey and the fragmentary nature of memory and history. To further situate the work presented in the exhibition within a historical context a small library of literature and music concerning the discourse around the war in Vietnam and the rich history of the Swedish anti-war movement is accessible for visitors to engage with.

Combining video, archival material, and sound, LIBERATION RADIO not only highlights an important moment in Swedish history by telling this story from the war in Vietnam but also makes the assumption that this type of collaboration between diplomatic personnel, deserter activists and media-specific distribution is difficult to imagine in our own time.



1. *Đài Phát Thanh Giải Phóng*, 2025
Textile, metal
187x117cm

2. *Liberation Radio*, 2021
Nhung Nguyen, Esther Johnson and Matthew Sweet
4:3 video, color, sound
13m:30s

The video work tells the story of a group of American military deserters, that in 1968 travelled from the war in Vietnam went to the North Vietnamese consulate in Stockholm. During their stay in Stockholm they started recording *Second Front Radio*, a radio program where they blended pop music and political rhetoric to persuade other American soldiers to desert. Their recordings were then transported from Sweden to Vietnam by diplomats, and broadcast on the English language radio station Liberation Radio (Đài phát thanh Giải phóng) from transmitters on the rooftops of Hanoi, and other revolutionary bases in the Vietnamese countryside.

With visuals and editing by Esther Johnson, audio by Nguyễn Nhung, and script by Matthew Sweet, this video work revives that circuit of communication, five decades later.

The artists especially would like to thank the voice performers in the video work: Klara Blomgren, Lisa Bowerman, Maja Sten, Huyền Thanh, and David Warner.

3. *Message board,* 2025
MDF, pins, laser print on paper
116x85cm

A selection of pictures and texts from the American Deserter Committee (ADC). The message board paraphrases the board at ADC headquarters, from where they ran their operations.

4. *Vitrines with archival material*
See list for more information.

5. *Slide projector*
A selection of photographs, magazine- and newspaper-clippings and letters concerning the American deserters. Interleaved with archival material is images of different radios and loudspeakers from the period of the war in Vietnam, photographed by the artists in museum collections in Vietnam and on the streets of Hanoi.

6. *Cảnh Giới*, 2025
Loudspeaker, sound

Samples from declassified US military training films that are used in the video work and field recordings from Vietnam made by the artists.

7. *Freedom Singers 68,* 1968
8 track vinyl 10”, record player
21m:53s

Freedom Singers was, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a collective name for two choirs affiliated with the FNL groups in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Freedom Singers released two LPs named after the year the album was released.

8. *Swedish poster for Deserter USA*, 1969
Poster, wooden frame
70x100cm

In 1969, the American Deserters Committee starred in *Deserter USA*, a movie of their lives – an uneasy mixture of documentary, espionage drama and agitprop film. *Deserter USA* captures these young men as they build new lives after making the decision to seek asylum in Sweden. Directed and written by Lars Lambert and Olle Sjögren.

For more information on the film and other films where the American Deserters played a role, see the text on the office table.

9. *Library*
A selection of books and magazines of literature concerning the discourse around the war in Vietnam and the rich history of the Swedish anti-war movement.

Nhung Nguyen is an artist and sound designer currently based in Hanoi, experimenting across a range of left-field aesthetics and expressions – ambient drone, electro acoustic, noise music, musique concrete, amongst others. Since 2014 Nhung has been making works under the moniker Sound Awakener – and under her real name, for the more cinematic, piano-driven projects. She has worked with international labels such as Time Released Sound (US), Unknown Tones Records (US), Soft (France), Flaming Pines (UK), Fluid Audio (UK), Syrphe (Germany). In addition to her solo work, Nhung has collaborated with artists from various other disciplines, often adding audio elements to visual experiences. Nhung's music and sounds have appeared in exhibitions such as Hồi Sóng (2021/2024), Liberation Radio (2021), Citizen Earth (2020, Hanoi), Phan Thao Nguyen's Poetic Amnesia (HCMC and Hanoi, 2017), the public-art initiatives Into Thin Air (2016) and Into Thin Air 2 (2018) – both in Hanoi, Richard Streimatter-Tran's Departures (Hong Kong, 2017), amongst others. As a composer and sound designer, Nhung has also worked on music composition and sound design for theater, films and video art.

Esther Johnson is an artist and filmmaker whose works sit at the intersection of artist moving image and documentary. She creates poetic portraits that explore alternative social histories of resistance and overlooked or marginalized worlds. Her practice often repositions archival material and oral histories to examine the complex relationship between cultural heritage, memory and storytelling. Her films have been screened at festivals and galleries in over 40 countries and broadcast on BBC and Channel 4 television, with select works streamed on BFI Player. Her sound pieces have aired on ABC Australia, BBC Radio 4, Resonance FM and RTÉ radio. Works include: poetic documentary feature films *DUST & METAL* (2022); and *ASUNDER*; (2016); and short films *Liberation Radio* (2021); a *ROLE to PLAY* (2019); and *Alone Together: the Social Life of Benches* (2010). Selected works are held in the special collections of British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central Saint Martins, London; the UK's Science Museum Group and Yorkshire Film Archive; and Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center, Buffalo, USA. Short works are distributed by ARGOS centre for art and media, Brussels, and vtape, Toronto. A former recipient of the Philip Leverhulme Research Prize in Performing & Visual Arts, Esther is currently Professor of Film and Media Arts at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Johnson holds an MA from Royal College of Art, London.

Matthew Sweet is co-writer, with Mark Gatiss, of the U&Alibi detective drama, *Bookish*. (He also novelised the series.) He presents *Free Thinking* on BBC Radio 4 and *Sound of Cinema* on BBC Radio 3. He is the author of Inventing the *Victorians* (Faber, 2001), *Shepperton Babylon* (Faber, 2005), *The West End Front* (Faber, 2011) and *Operation Chaos* (Picador 2018) and the novel *The New Forest Murders* (2025). His 25 years of television and radio programs include *The Culture Show* (BBC2), *Checking into History* (C4), five series of *The Philosophers Arms* (Radio 4) and 1922: *The Birth of Now*, a ten-part history of modernism (Radio 4). He has been film critic of the Independent on Sunday, photography critic of Newsweek and fashion columnist for 1843/The Economist. In 2017 he and the baker Frances Quinn achieved a chocolate-related Guinness World record that held good until 2022, when it was broken by Ant and Dec. His biography *The Great Dictator: The Life of Barbara Cartland* (Hodder) will appear in 2026.

The artists would like to thank the British Council for supporting the production of the video work.