



In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke

THE OIL WAR MEMORIAL

It took too long for the casualties of the Viet Nam War to be remembered with the Black Wall. Invisible years. Constant forgetfulness. An era of shameful silence.

As of this writing eighteen more Americans are already dead, killed while preparing for war in the Middle East. Eighteen lives extinguished. Eighteen families grieving. Eighteen names on a new list of Invisibles. During the course of writing this I have had to raise that number four times.

We should start the Memorial for this war now. What will this spasm of terror be called in the history books? The Kuwaiti Defensive Engagement? The Persian Gulf Police Action? We could be honest for a change and call it The Oil War, The Next Distraction, The Federal Contractors' Assurance Arrangement, or just Business As Usual. It's time for the twenty year war cycle to turn over anyway. We have a whole new generation of well programmed kids, too young to know that death is for keeps. "Sorry soldier, no re-set button." The youngest veterans are now sufficiently older than the current crop of draftables. Time has soothed war stories to the fairytale macho paradise of Hollywood, or the impassioned incomprehensibilities of guys too serious to hold the attention of today's teleprogrammed teenager. That's why they always take young men, the older ones are too savvy to fall for the propaganda.

BY LOUIS ALVIS

This Memorial should be black. It's a good color for war memorials. Black for the color of crude oil. Black for the hearts of those whose greed demands lives. Black for the filth they have smeared in our skies, bled on our beaches, excreted across our economies.

It should soar above our heads, like the Washington Monument or the Statue of Liberty. Its awesome mass will remind us of how small we puny citizens are next to the privileged few. Those persons in government and industry who decided decades ago (and now) that we should follow the policies of waste and greed. A broad cylinder of featureless black, gently rimmed at a few regular spaces down its length. A vast oil drum. Perhaps a reflecting pool of the turgid liquid at its base. There should be no names on this one. Already its victims number in the billions. Billions whose lives have been adversely affected by the renewed frenzy over energy costs. Where is room for all those names?

It should be located in the middle of a woodland. The parking lot should be one mile from the Monument. We should rely on the power of muscle to get there. Burn no oil in the last mile to the remembrance.

The edifice itself should be in the center of a great circular amphitheater. It should be

able to seat thousands to remind us of how we all watched it unfold on the Flickering Blue Eye. Our government does not need to put things in our houses to watch us, they know where we are every night, and they tell us all what we are to believe.

The floor of the Arena must be covered with sand. It is on that the gladiators have always fought. It is what our people tread on now in the war zone. It is trickling into every crevice, leaking into shoes and clothes, wearing away parts. We should feel what it's like to walk a hundred yards in deep drifting sand.

It will cost us nothing. That special 1% of the population that controls the majority of the entire planet's real wealth can foot the bill.

They know how to get things done. Even their wars are more polite and tidy — When the princes war amongst themselves it's called a hostile takeover. The soldiers are made of paper and electricity, the casualties are those whose livelihood is taken from them. It would be a nice gesture for them to pay for the Monument. They could even put one in every country that loses a citizen to this war. With a U.N./Pan-Arab force shaping up, there could be a franchise in the offing.

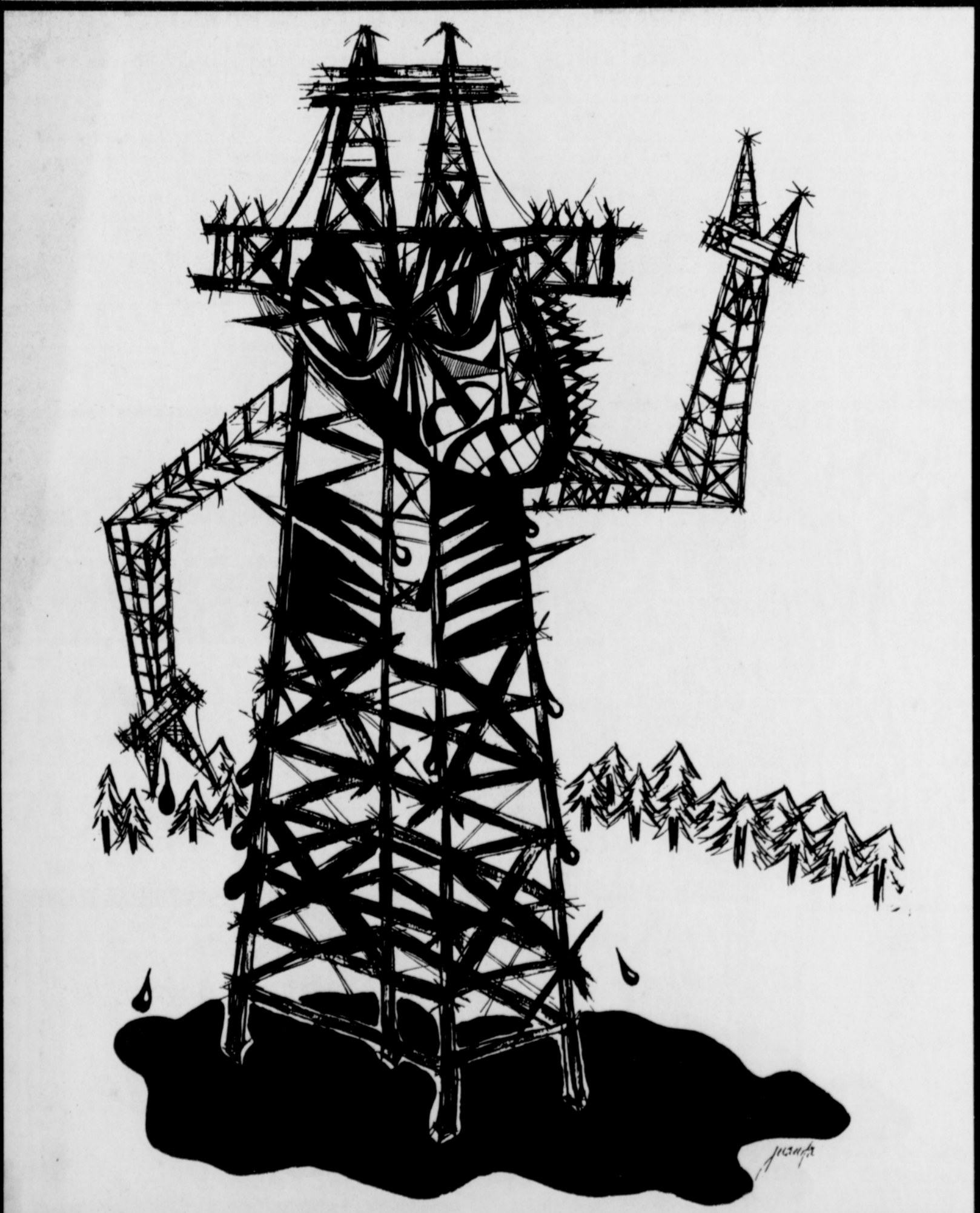
It would be hard to send a replica of this Memorial all around the country as we did with the Viet Nam Memorial. Instead, we could remember this conflict by reeducating ourselves. We could teach each other how to break the addiction to waste. An increase of 2.9 gallons per mile in the average automobile would equal all the oil we import from Kuwait each year.

We could learn to use those ideas lying idle all these years. Propane, compressed natural gas, electricity for transport, solar power, wind power, heat energy, muscle strength. Twenty years from now, when the next generation of young men (and women!) is old enough to fight — and young enough to fool — there will be no strategic oil reserves to fight for. Each home, each town, each region could be relying on its own sustainable energy with enough to spare for a troubled neighbor.

Saddam Hussein is a powerful, ambitious and ruthless man in total control of his country. He has never been or pretended to be otherwise. Our government supplied him with many of the weapons that are now aimed at our soldiers. Our military and civilian intelligence agencies warned our rulers over and over. Yet our State Department continued to release statements that seemed to say that we were not concerned about his actions. If Washington knew about his plans why didn't they act when non-military solutions were available? Perhaps our rulers need a war. Perhaps without an external threat we might turn to our own conditions. Then we would know what has been done to us by the career politicians. They don't want that.

The Kuwaiti deserve their nation back. But so do the Zulu in Africa, the Mohawks in Canada, the Sinhalese, the Hmong, the Kurds, the Armenians, the Latvians and other Baltics, the Hopi, the Tibetans, the Navajo, the Cherokee. A near endless list. The world is full of dispossessed people. If we are to help we should help all equally, without regard to the resources they command. Even if there is no military action in the deserts of the Middle East, the damage done to the world and all its people is no less real. We just removed the Wall in Europe. Now our rulers are trying to build one of sand. But sand trickles through the hourglass, and with time comes knowledge. This time Americans are not going to stand for losing another generation of young men (and now young women). We will not stand for blood staining the sand like the crude that has stained our world. It is time to come home and heal our own nation. To build a Monument, not of stone and steel but of knowledge and self-reliance.

DRAWING BY JUANITA HUEBNER



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