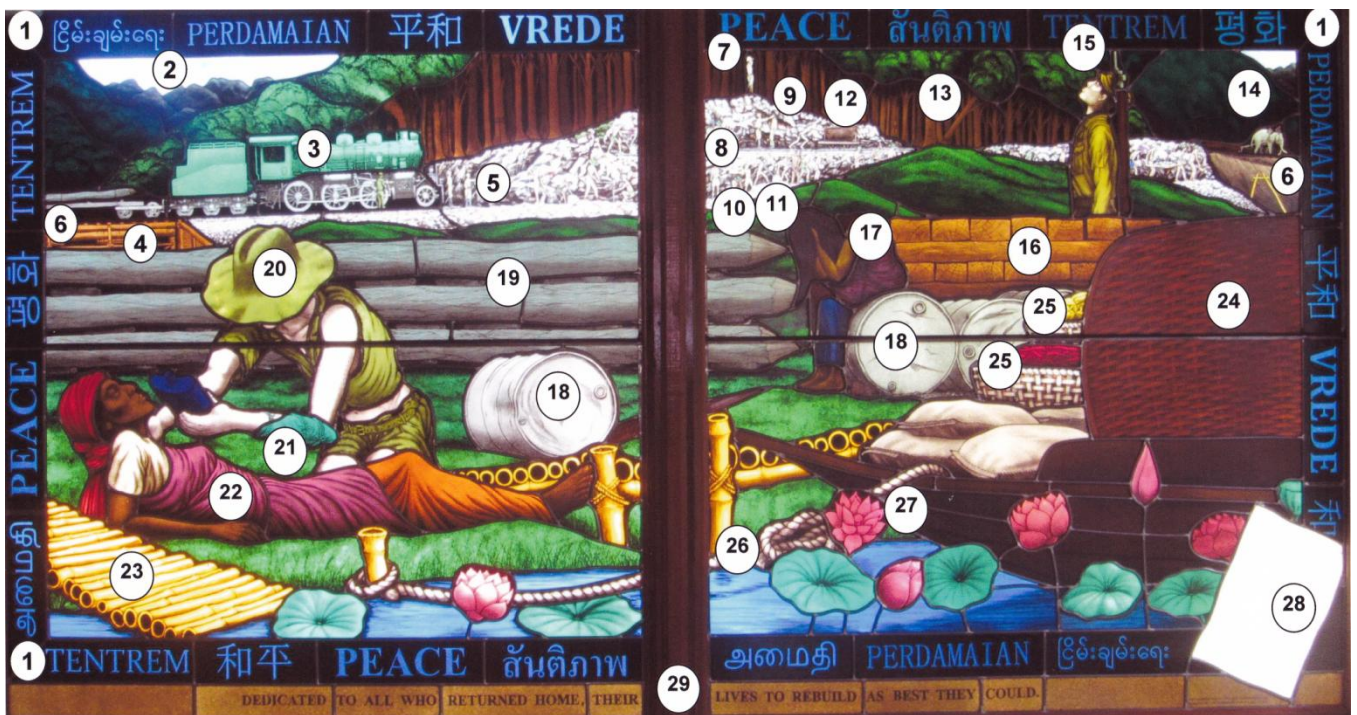


**“THE CUTTING” WINDOW,  
THE “DEATH RAILWAY” MUSEUM, KANCHANABURI, THAILAND**  
1.3 metres high x 2.4 metres wide

Windows imagined, designed, made and donated by Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn  
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“The Cutting” window depicts an aspect of the building of the railway. It is viewed from the river which was vital in supplying materials. The four central figures are seen near the riverbank. The centre of the window is occupied by the stockpile of materials, representing the major forward planning required to build this major engineering project. Behind that is the cutting itself, with the labourers hacking through the unrelenting limestone with the most basic of tools. The background is the formidable jungle and terrain.

1	The “Peace” Border. The word “Peace” is written in the ten languages of the nations most involved with the building of the railway – Burmese, Chinese, Dutch, English, Japanese, Javanese, Korean, Malay, Tamil, and Thai.
2	The cutting is being made on fairly level ground. The hills in the background are those seen from Kanchanaburi. While they are in the background here, they hint that the line will later go through these rugged hills.
3	We wanted a means to express the urgent need of the Japanese to build the railway to supply their army in Burma. Of the 305,000 Japanese troops who served in Burma 180,000 died in combat, or from disease and starvation. To depict this urgency we have the 56 tonnes of panting C56 Japanese built steam engine stopped to within a metre of the end of the laid track. We later found out that this sometimes happened!

4	This bridge is homage to Otto Kreeft, the Dutch POW and artist whose book “Death Railway – A Visual Recollection” is available in the Museum. When we wanted to know in exact detail how a pulley worked or how timbers were nailed to each other, we turned to Otto’s book. It became our visual bible. This bridge is seen on page 42 of his book.
5	Two Japanese officers are standing surveying the progress of the works. In front of them is depicted the systematic way in which the railways was made. The workers are hacking through the limestone with the most minimal of equipment, while others are depositing the rubble to make an embankment.
6	At the right of the window the Japanese surveyors have made a bamboo marker to establish the level and profile for the embankment. The incline from the bridge to the marker is 250 per 1,000, which is the maximum allowed for this type of train. It represents the careful planning and the harsh terrain through which the railway was built.
7	A Japanese officer, who is supervising the works, is shielding his eyes to look into the distance. Perhaps he is asking himself “How far to Burma?” With 414 kilometres of track to be built through jungle and mountainous terrain, completing the railway must have sometimes seemed impossible.
8	The cutting is being made in two levels. It is the correct width where the miner’s skip is working, and all the limestone beneath it still needs to be moved. Our calculation is that this cutting is one sixth complete.
9	Be it Italian Fascism, German Nazism, or Japanese Imperialism, the hallmark of militarism is brutality. A Japanese officer is publicly striking and humiliating a Japanese soldier.
10	In like manner a Japanese soldier is futilely beating a prisoner who has fallen from exhaustion or sickness, while a nearby officer protests in vain.
11	We were surprised to learn that a work force comprised many nationalities “all in together”. Of the 31 prisoners and labourers depicted working in the cutting, there are British, Dutch, Australian and Asians working together. These are most readily identified by their headwear. In a quip we have a Dutchman and a Javanese compelled to work together under Japanese rule.
12	The clearing of the trace for the railway has exposed the trunks of the forest trees. The forest canopy has been disturbed and will be changing the habitat of the local flora and fauna.
13	The tree fellers. They are amateurs! First, instead of cutting a scarp, which directs the way a tree will fall, they have cut it like a sharpened pencil, which means it could fall in any direction. One of the tree fellers has heard the resounding crack of a tree about to fall. The second has not, and is breaking the cardinal rule of always watching which way the tree is falling. Instead, he has turned his back.
14	An elephant is snigging a felled log out of the forest. We wanted it to be the slowest and saddest elephant imaginable.
15	“Conscience”. What can a conscripted soldier, with a sense of decency, do in a militarised world? He knows his comrade in the cutting is being struck across the face for a misdemeanour. He should be using fair means or foul to compel the two women and the compassionate soldier in the foreground of the window, back to work, but he doesn’t have the heart to do it. Instead, he avoids the problem and salves his conscience by finding something interesting to look at in the sky. There is also an irony here. He is carrying a .303 rifle obtained when the Japanese captured the largely intact arsenal at “Fortress Singapore”. The rifle that was supposed to defend the British is now being used to guard them.
16	He is standing behind a nicely stacked pile of cut timber.
17	“Despair”. Thousands of Tamils, who had previously worked on rubber plantations for the British in Malaya, were sent to work on the railway. This Tamil woman has just pushed a full 44 gallon drum of petrol up an incline. She is not only exhausted, but in despair. She is far from her homeland, and the Japanese had promised her good working conditions, good pay, hospitals..... Instead she finds herself struggling for survival and in deep despair.

	Symbolically the three teak piles with their sharpened points are pointing like arrows towards her broken heart.
18	The 44 gallon fuel drums are central to the composition. They represent the ostensible reason why Japan entered the war. The Americans had embargoed fuel supplies to Japan who had already invaded China. This led to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and began WWII in the Pacific.
19	The piles. Huge numbers of teak tress were cut to build bridges and make sleepers for the railway. These tree trunks have been sharpened and will be driven into river beds as piles for bridges. We delighted in painting the distinctive bark. Another pile is on the wagon behind the train.
20	A passing soldier is giving water to the fallen Tamil woman. His face is hidden under a hat, which makes him anonymous. He represents the idea of decency and humanity – that any man would risk rebuke in order to help somebody in need. All the uniforms, including his, are now much bigger than the bodies they clothe. This represents malnutrition and disease. Just how much body weight he has lost can be seen in the pleated waistband of his tattered shorts.
21	When medical supplies failed improvisation was needed. He has created a bandage for his arm from a nearby lotus leaf.
22	This Tamil woman was trying to push the beaten war damaged 44 gallon drum up the last steep pinch. She could not, and has fallen exhausted near the river bank. She has a youthful body but her face is prematurely aged. She is looking beseechingly at the soldier hoping to be freed from her misery, but he cannot do that for her.
23	We wanted to make the window look Asian, and what better way of doing so than introducing bamboo ramps, stakes and jetties.
24	A heavily laden small Thai river boat has brought food supplies up the river, which served as the major supply route for the building of the railway. This is a typical beautifully hand-built Thai boat with a woven bamboo canopy.
25	On its deck are bags of rice and fresh chillies and capsicums. Boon Pong, the Thai trader and friend of the prisoners, used to smuggle medicines and batteries in amongst the food baskets. These can be seen.
26	The boat is tied to the river bank by a rope which is broken and held together by a knot. The rope represents that the war has broken the bond of humanity.
27	Lotus flowers are growing out of the shallow water. In Thai culture the pink lotus flower is considered to be a supreme flower and represents Peace.
28	The text is from John Coast’s 1946 book “Railroad of Death”, reprinted in 2014. We chose it because it was the first book published about the railway after the war, and has a freshness and immediacy. His praise of Boon Pong is evident.
29	The Dedication is to “All” – everyone who was affected by the building of the railway. The Dedication recognises that many who returned home did not receive the support and understanding that they deserved. Many recovered quickly, but many also suffered for the remainder of their lives.
	<b>Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn. 2015</b>