“HUMANITAS” WINDOW,
THE “DEATH RAILWAY” MUSEUM, KANCHANABURI, THAILAND
1.1 metres high x 1.1 metres wide

Window imagined, designed, made and donated by Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn 2016

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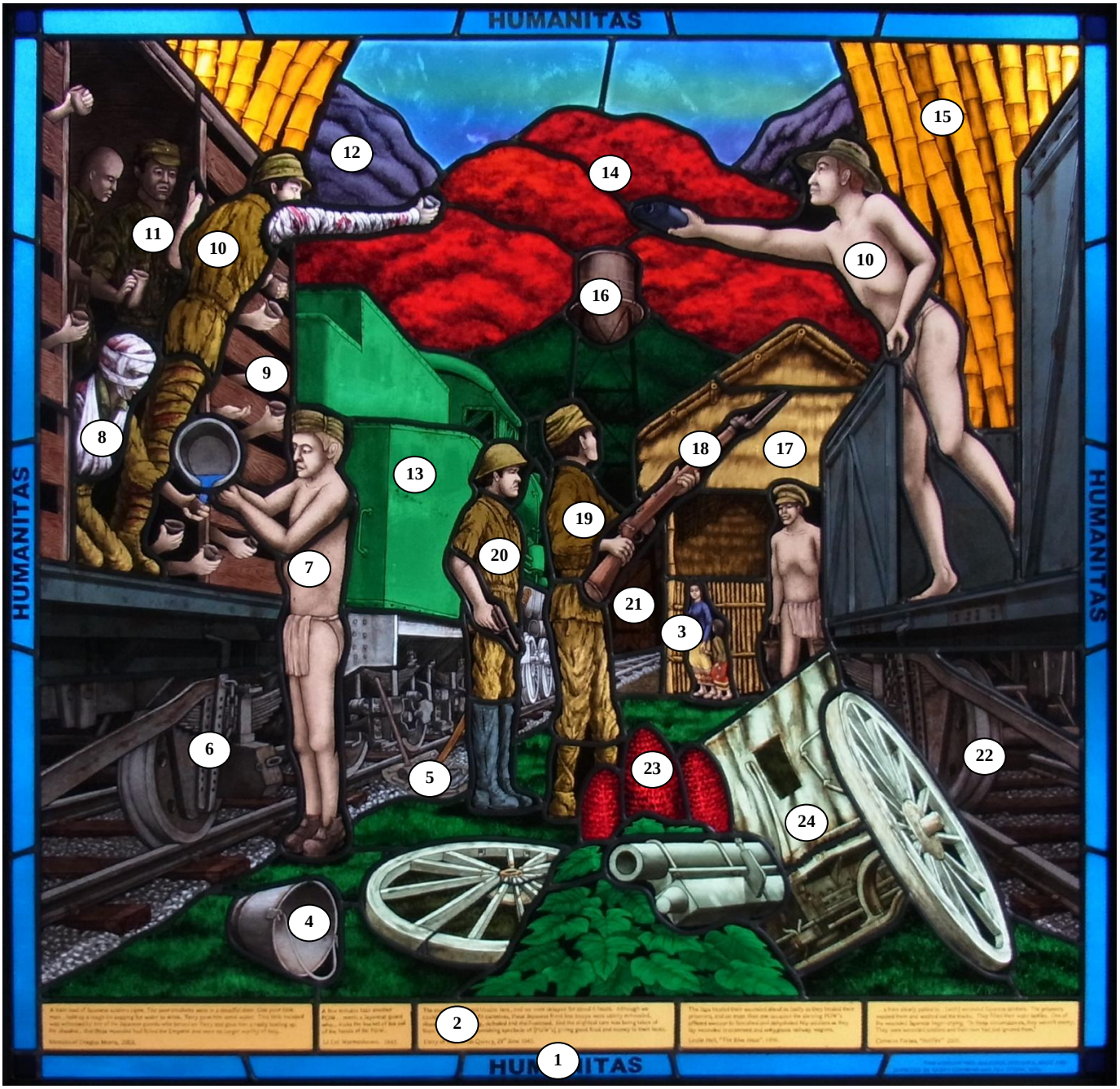

The "Humanitas" window is based on many accounts telling how the railway, which had been built to supply the Japanese Army in Burma twenty-two months earlier, was then used to evacuate that defeated and starving army from Burma.

The window is based on a specific incident which tells how, after six days coming over the mountains from Burma, the train broke down at Kanchanaburi. The Japanese injured were restricted to their wagons which sat in the sun for six hours.

The British, Australian and Dutch POWs heard moans coming from the wagons, and realised that there were injured Japanese inside crying out for water. The POWs, their years of suffering at the hands of the Japanese notwithstanding, tried to bring water to the injured. The Japanese officers and guards refused, saying the injured were not worthy of help because they had failed the Emperor. The Japanese officers and guards threatened to shoot, but the POWs ignored them and started giving water to the injured Japanese soldiers.

1	The window title "Humanitas" is repeated four times in the simple blue border. The artists carefully choose this Latin noun because it means "human nature, civilization and kindness". They wanted a title that described "being human" as ultimately being more important than nationality, politics, creed, colour, or gender.
2	Texts from five different authors describing five similar events. These accounts inspired the artists to make the window.
3	This Thai woman and her daughter are at the centre of the composition. They represent everyday family life. They are walking from one village to another. The woman has a look of disbelief on her face when she sees this miserable scene. Her innocent daughter, holding her mother with one hand and her doll with the other, has asked "Mummy, what are they doing?" Excellent question! "Out of the mouths of babes….."
4	The empty bucket illustrates the inscription below it.
5	This illustrates the third inscription. The journal bearing in the engine's tender has seized. It has been removed and the mechanics have gone looking for a new part. This symbolizes the breakdown of regular maintenance and the failing military supply chain.
6	The reference material for the undercarriage of this wagon is the WWII wagon in the back yard of this Museum.
7	An emaciated Dutch PoW has brought water and is pouring it into the makeshift cups of the thirsty and neglected Japanese sick and wounded.
8	A badly wounded Japanese soldier gratefully receives the water.
9	Many Japanese hands are coming from inside the cattle wagon, holding out their cups – one only has cupped hands – for water. While this was literally true, the artists intended it to be a metaphor for the soldiers also asking for the truth. Could they believe what they were being told by their military government, or were they being fed totally false propaganda? Was Japan winning the war? Was Japan really being bombed? What was really happening to their families in Japan? We should never forget Aeschylus (525-546 BCE), the Greek dramatist, saying "In war, truth is the first casualty".
10	Stretching towards each other, in an incomplete arch framing the top of the composition, a wounded Japanese soldier is holding out his improvised drinking vessel to an emaciated Australian POW offering water from his bottle. The gesture is unmistakable, but the reality is, despite their mutual goodwill, they are not going to reach each other. This symbolizes the vast cultural differences between a militarized Japan and the democratic Allies.
11	This face represents the calamity that has befallen Japan. This soldier may have been sent to Manchuria in mid-1930s, then to China, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, and then to Burma. He may not have seen his family or homeland for ten years. The thought that he has given

	his youth to a Japan that is "impossibly" losing the war, and that his homeland may even be occupied by the enemy, is dismaying.
12	The landscape is based on the limestone hills seen from the railway line at Kanchanaburi.
13	In June, 1942, Allied POWs destined to build the railway were packed into wagons for the four day journey from Singapore to Thailand. Three years later the Japanese wounded and dying from the retreating Japanese army were packed into the same wagons for the five day journey from Burma to Thailand. This reversal aroused the artists' imagination!
14	The beautiful semi-circular flame tree replaces the Imperial Japanese "Rising Sun" flag, and makes its own comment about nature and militarism.
15	The arching Giant Bamboo *(Dendrocalamus giganteus)* artistically echoes the Japanese and Australian soldiers reaching out to each other below it. It is also a strong Thai image.
16	This monumental WWII Japanese built water tower was built at Wang Pho to supply water to the steam engines. It is still in use today as the town's water supply.
17	This attap and bamboo railway station building was based on WWII photographs of the railway stations at Ban Pong and Konkoita.
18	A British POW is bringing buckets of water.
19	The rifle is an SMLE .303 captured from the intact British Arsenal at the Fall of Singapore, and still in use five years later. Its inclusion in the window is deliberately ironic, with a Japanese guard using a British rifle to threaten Allied POWs
20	This Japanese guard has been told by his nearby officer to shoot the POWs if they give water to his comrades in the carriages, but he is confused by the situation. To emphasise his uncertainty his rifle is held part way between firing and bayoneting positions.
21	This Japanese officer is likewise bewildered. His order to the POWs not to supply water to his own wounded soldiers has been disobeyed, and he is scowling. He has drawn his pistol, but it is not in firing position.
22	This water stand pipe is designed to swing over the engine tender to rapidly fill it with water. There is plenty of water for the steam engine, but none for the wounded soldiers. The stand pipe still exists at Wang Pho railway yard.
23	The failing military supply chain is evident everywhere in the window. All the uniforms are tattered, some bandages are made of discarded uniforms, metal is rusting, and there is an undetected crack in the wheel of the wagon. The end is nigh.
24	The Pagoda Flower (*Clerodendrum paniculatum)* with its distinctive shape is native to Southeast Asia. The artists saw this plant near Hintok Cutting. It is symbolically overgrowing the damaged and now abandoned field gun.
25	This Japanese field gun, built under licence from Krupp, was feared by the Allies. It could be dismantled and carried anywhere by soldiers. It is now ruined and overgrown by nature.
	Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn 2016