

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AN-MY LÊ

đô-mi-nô

24 June – 20 August 2021

Marian Goodman Gallery is pleased to present *đô-mi-nô*, a solo exhibition by An-My Lê, featuring selected works from her photographic series *29 Palms* (2003-2004) and *Việt Nam* (1994-1998), as well as a new collection of objects. Lê's exhibition, her first in our New York space, recontextualizes two of her earlier series with the new presentation *đô-mi-nô*, 2021, and runs concurrently with the Robert Smithson show, *Abstract Cartography*. While Lê and Smithson are set apart by two decades, the works in these exhibitions respectively examine similar themes, including notions of landscape, historical legacies of the 1960s, and the infrastructural shifts of that period.

The title of the exhibition, *đô-mi-nô*, alludes to the Cold War-era geopolitical concept of "domino theory." *Đô-mi-nô* is the translation from French to a Vietnamese that is the modern national version that was romanized by European Jesuit priests in the 1600s.

For over twenty-five years, the Vietnamese American photographer An-My Lê has been steadily redefining the tradition of documentary photography. Working in distinct series which often span years, her work has shown her to be one of the most reliable witnesses to the complexities of American life. Her photographs, taken with a large-format film camera, often blur the boundaries between the actual and its representation, embracing performance as a means to explore conflict and war, the military-industrial complex, and national identity through memory and place. Her clear-eyed perception and distanced perspective call into question the status of photographic 'objectivity,' and coax the complexities of various sociopolitical settings and of human behavior.

Informed by the histories of 19th and 20th century landscape photography, documentary reportage, and conflict journalism, as well as her own personal history – growing up in Vietnam in the 1960s and settling in the US at the end of the Vietnam War – Lê's work offers a reflection on how reality and myth are portrayed and contested. Her work is informed by both world history and her own distinct path. As she stated in a 2005 interview with Hilton Als, "My attachment to the idea of landscape is a direct extension of a life in exile."

Lê returned home to Vietnam in 1994 after then-US president Bill Clinton normalized diplomatic relations. From there, she began the series *Việt Nam* (1994-1998). These photographs present agrarian landscapes and scenes of everyday life, often seen from an elevated perspective. Conjuring an interest in scale and architecture, Lê's panoramic views enable us to enter a landscape and to confront layers of history. These works bridge back to sites of Lê's childhood, as well as to those of her mother and grandmother, representing personal memory and culture lost through the schism and realities of war. As Lê says, "My understanding of landscape changed when I went to Vietnam. ...Instead of seeking the real I began making photographs that use the real to ground the imaginary."

With her 2003-2004 series, *29 Palms*, the historical legacies of war suddenly took on new immediacy with the reality of the Iraq War. These black-and-white photographs were made in the California desert, where US Marines trained for battle prior to deployment. Taking up the mode of re-enactment first explored through her series *Small Wars*, here Lê's photographs depict Marines on domestic soil acting out a theatre of conflict against "enemies" portrayed by fellow Marines. Taken near San Bernardino County, California, the desert landscape of these photographs bears resemblance to Afghanistan and Iraq – where Lê had applied but ultimately not realized her wish to embed as a journalist with the military.

In dialogue with the two photographic series on view, a collection of engraved Zippo-style lighters is installed along a corner bookshelf. Lê first began to collect these objects – "jumbo novelty flip top lighters" – at the

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beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Zippo lighters were significant to the Vietnam War, where they were first brought by American soldiers, and became symbols of protest and emblems of individuality in the midst of the conflict. Hand-etched with personal mantras, the lighters became both ‘amulets and talismans of protection’ as well as individual symbols of protest and violence. Here, they are swaddled in Lê’s hand-stitched ‘cozies,’ which she wove to quell anxiety in the frenzied lead-up to the US presidential election. The lighters bear idiosyncratic inscriptions, with engravings ranging from “Big Dog 1” to “It Don’t Mean No’tin” and “You Can Surf Later” to “Black is beauty Think black Act black Love black We shall over run” and “I am going home.” Witnesses to history, the lighters are remnants of a life in a state of perpetual contingency. Their installation here recalls Lê’s memory of the need for preparedness: the shelves reminiscent of the family pantry she had in Vietnam, stocked with American food cans from the black market and jars of rice for emergencies.

Lê has written of the series: *The Zippo lighters are forever associated with the torching of huts and villages, but they were also a form of social protest for the American soldier. The lighters were engraved in-country by the Vietnamese. It’s a thrill to discover the absurd inscriptions with inversions and misspellings. I first wanted to insert my own quotations but realized the vernacular nature of the existing Zippos is more compelling, and still very resonant today. The sleeves/cozies are inspired by the potholders that many of us learned to weave in preschool. They are used to hold something that is too hot to handle, or like a tea cozy, they keep things warm.*

This exhibition follows the artist’s major survey exhibition *An-My Lê: On Contested Terrain* which opened at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, is currently on view at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX through August 8, 2021, and will be travelling to the Milwaukee Art Museum, WI in September 2021. From June 3 to August 29, 2021, her work will be presented in the group exhibition *Toward Common Cause: Art, Social Justice, and the McArthur Fellow Program at 40* at the Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, IL.

An-My Lê lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Lê received her BA from Stanford University and a Master of Fine Arts from the Yale University School of Art. She is the Charles Franklin Kellogg and Grace E. Ramsey Kellogg Professor in the Arts at Bard College, New York, where she has taught since 1999. In addition to her survey exhibition traveling in the US, she has had solo exhibitions at the MK Gallery, Milton Keynes (England) and Museum aan de Stroom (Belgium) in 2014; Baltimore Museum of Art in 2013; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art / SFMOMA in 2008; Dia: Beacon in 2006-07; and MoMA PS1 Contemporary Arts Center in 2002.

An-My Lê is the recipient of numerous awards and grants: in 2012 she was awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; in 2010, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award; in 2007, the National Science Foundation, Antarctic Artists and Writers Program Award; in 2004 the John Gutmann Photography Fellowship; and in 1997 the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship.

The exhibition *đô-mi-nô* runs from 24 June – 20 August 2021. To visit the exhibition, please schedule an appointment on our website, mariangoodman.com. For further information, please contact the gallery at (212) 977-7160.