

M U R R A Y G U Y

453 WEST 17 STREET
NEW YORK NY 10011
TEL 212 463 7372
FAX 212 463 7319

WWW.MURRAYGUY.COM



AN-MY LÊ
29 Palms

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From 1999 to 2002 An-My Lê created a body of work entitled " Small Wars" photographing Vietnam War re-enactors in Virginia and North Carolina, who, like the better-known Civil War re-enactors, restage battles, training, and daily life of soldiers—both Viet Cong and American GIs. In this exhibition she has turned to the preparation for actual war.

At various times the US military has utilized vast areas of land to simulate the conditions and landscapes of other countries. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, the Marine's "virtual Iraq and Afghanistan", spread across hundreds of miles of California desert, has been the subject of Lê's recent series of photographs entitled "29 Palms".

Shot with a large format camera, the richly detailed, black-and-white images recall 19th century war photographs - Roger Fenton's troops camped in Crimea, Matthew Brady's dead soldiers on the Civil War battlefield – which, due to the slow film speeds and heavy cameras of the time, were always depictions of before or after the battle action. With the introduction of smaller, faster cameras, and a more contemporary hunger for gory details, action became the benchmark of good war photography - Capa, Burrows, Nachtway, etc. - while the clarity and, in Stephen Shore's words, "heightened state of consciousness" of view camera images left the battlefields for other, more benign, landscapes. Outside of the dichotomy of the staged versus documentary in contemporary photography, Lê's rendering of simulated desert battlefields evoke both the reality of soldiering in the conditions of a given terrain as well as the familiar narratives that have become such a part of our cultural imagination; from the sweep of the epic war picture - *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Longest Day* - to the current vogue for realism in our depiction of cinematic war - *Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down*. As photographs, the landscapes bear the weight of both tactical scrutiny and a provocative disjunction. Far from the CNN news-feed, she has confronted the individuals and surfaces that constitute the face of our military culture.

An-My Lê was born in Saigon in 1960 and came to the United States as a political refugee in 1975. She has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. This is her first solo exhibition at Murray Guy.

Gallery hours are Tuesday – Saturday 10am-6pm. For further information please call 212-463 7372.