

With *JULY, IV, MDCCLXXVI*, Danh Vo shifts the focus of his artistic investigations to the concept of freedom. The title designates 4 July 1776, the date of the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. The writing in Roman numerals is taken from the tablet that the figure of New York's Statue of Liberty is holding in her left hand. Since 1886, Miss Liberty has symbolized the hope of a better life for refugees and immigrants arriving in New York. She is the most important emblem of freedom and independence, which Danh Vo absorbs. Based on the dimensions of the original and its copper weight of some 31 tons, Vo had a replica of the Statue of Liberty made which forms the main part of *JULY, IV, MDCCLXXVI*. He calls the gigantic sculpture *WE THE PEOPLE*, reciting the first three words of the preamble to the United States' Constitution of 17 September 1787. But the monumentality of the statue is immediately qualified: the sculpture is dissected into its individual parts and thus abstracted. In his recreation, Vo concentrates on reproducing the thin copper skin (the iron scaffolding supporting the figure is missing), which gives *WE THE PEOPLE* a special fragility. The broken icon, the destroyed allegorical figure of Libertas, forms a strong counterpoint to the massive materiality.

The confrontation with physical mass contrasts with a spatial openness in the ground floor, where Danh Vo steers attention to a striking found piece: the original typewriter on which Theodore Kaczynski wrote the Unabomber's Manifesto. Kaczynski, a university professor and terrorist, who carried out bomb attacks in the USA for 18 years, waged a personal battle against so-called leftism, industrial society and its belief in progress. In 1995 he anonymously sent a manifesto, a detailed, pseudo-philosophical critique of civilization entitled *Industrial Society and its Future*, to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. In the text he offered to stop the attacks if the newspapers published his manifesto. Shortly after the text appeared, Kaczynski was found in a small cabin in the mountains of Montana and arrested. Recently this cabin as well as its contents were auctioned by the FBI.

Exhibiting objects based on the ready-made principle is a characteristic artistic strategy of Danh Vo. The objects Vo selects are multilayered bearers of meaning which he uses to tell stories and disclose relationships. They always contain a complex political and poetic system with which the artist perceptively links art and life. The exhibition in Kassel also involves a widely branching narrative strand, which, starting from the concept of freedom, explores failed political, social and personal aims, takes up issues of self-determination and responsibility, and extends the definition of guilt and innocence.

Exclusively accompanying *JULY, IV, MDCCLXXVI*, an edition under the title *Season's Greetings* by Danh Vo is being brought out which is closely tied to the exhibition. In an edition of 24 copies, the

artist compiled found objects, each of which refers to a work in the Kassel exhibition. The hand-made wooden boxes each contain a first-edition copy of the book "Harvard and the Unabomber – The Education of an American Terrorist", a T-shirt from the Statue of Liberty souvenir shop in New York, a cup from the "George Bush Library and Museum", with a quote by Barbara Bush printed on it, as well as an index card on which the title of the show – the date of the American Declaration of Independence – was typed on the typewriter used by Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski.

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