

Danh Vo (born 1975, Vietnam) achieved international attention with his solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2009. Since then he has taken part in biennials in Berlin, Gwangju, and Singapore and in exhibitions at the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His big solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel in fall 2011 attracted great attention. Here for the first time he presented part of an ambitious long-term project—a life-size duplication of the Statue of Liberty due to be shown as it grows in Chicago and Bolzano before experiencing its crowning finale at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2013.

In his objects, installations, photographs, and works on paper Danh Vo combines personal experiences from his childhood in Vietnam with the story of his family, their flight to Europe, and questions of colonialism, migration, and cultural identity. A no less important topic of his works are same-sex relationships and, generally, a questioning of standardized patterns of behavior both in society in general and in the art context in particular. Over and over he succeeds in creating works of iconic power, as for instance his copies of the American flag with the first design with the 13 stars as a celebration of independence from colonial power. Danh Vo transferred to cardboard in gold leaf or in his long-term project replicating the individual parts of the Statue of Liberty in thin copper.

His *Oma Totem* consisting of assembled washing machine, fridge, TV, and crucifix was one of the public's favorite works in the *That's the Way We Do It* group exhibition at the Kunsthaus Bregenz last year. The four objects, which the artist's grandmother received from the immigration authorities on her arrival in Germany in the 1970s, not only testify eloquently to what, at the time and from a Western European point of view, was deemed essential to life, but also their vertical ordering creates a striking visual metaphor of cultural self-definition. At the same place in the KUB one story higher, in dialog with this work, Danh Vo placed his Tombstone for Nguyen Thi Ty—a floor relief in marble and granite that translates washing machine, fridge, and TV, as indicated by the title of the work, into a gravestone, which a wooden cross and bronze figure of Christ complete. When the mortal remains of Danh Vo's deceased grandmother have been moved from Germany to the family grave in Denmark this work will exit the art context to fulfill its function as a tombstone.

Danh Vo repeatedly draws on his own history and/or that of his family and involves close relatives in the production of his works, for instance his father Phu. ng Vo. Among other things, his father has realized a work from an original farewell letter written by the French missionary Jean-Théophane Vénard to his father. Every copy of this work is a transcription of this letter, handwritten by Phu. ng Vo. How many copies the work runs to depends on the number of orders, in other words will be

determined by the death of Danh Vo's father.

Danh Vo's installation at the last Berlin Biennale also referenced his father. Here he presented in glass wall-cases the Rolex wristwatch his father bought from the gold left over from organizing the escape from Vietnam, the Dupont lighter bought with the first money he earned in his new homeland, and his signet ring. All three objects symbolize the yearning for the Western attributes of wealth, also their global range and presence.

It is not only in high-end consumer goods, however, that Danh Vo addresses the supposed attraction of the material values of the West. Products such as Coca Cola, as cited in his Bregenz exhibition in cartons with gold-leaf-printed wrappings, also tempt and hold out a promise of salvation according to the artist. Just as fairytales and legends of saints once tamed people with the prospect of heaven at the end of a humble, frugal life, so today consumer goods and status symbols often distract attention from the real social and political problems. Inverting values as he does in his well-known gold-leaf-and-cardboard works and assemblages of found objects, Danh Vo, who now and then prefers to distribute handwritten copies of »Cinderella« rather than press releases or exhibition texts, can be compared with artists like David Hammons and Felix Gonzales-Torres who have gone down in art history with their sensitive, socially charged works and have decisively broadened the Eurocentric gaze.

As with these two artists, so too for Danh Vo, lettering, language, and work and exhibition titles have a significant role to play and add interpretative levels. This is true of his Bregenz exhibition: When Danh Vo and his parents were looking for his brother's grave in a cemetery in Vietnam several years ago, he was profoundly shocked to read »Vo Danh« on a large number of the crosses and gravestones. This did not indicate the popularity of his name and a high mortality rate associated with it, though—in Vietnamese »Vo Danh« simply means »without name«: those buried there were unidentified.

So when Danh Vo calls his Bregenz exhibition, with ostensible self-referentiality, Vo Danh, he follows the custom of naming an exhibition—yet he also undermines it by calling the exhibition nameless.

The Kunsthaus Bregenz show is the first major institutional solo exhibition by Danh Vo in Austria and is being prepared specially for the occasion.

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