

kurimanzutto

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log dog

danh vō

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Log Dog, Danh Vō's first exhibition with kurimanzutto, is inspired by two of the artist's favorite images: Theodorus De Bry's 1594 engraving of *The Discovery of America*, an inspiration and meta-myth since De Bry never traveled to the Americas and contrived the savage cannibalism of New World Indians from his imagination; and that of blond Spanish captain Diego Salcedo being drowned in Puerto Rico by Taíno Indians in an attempt to prove he was an immortal golden god. ⁽¹⁾ Vō references his own personal history in his art while simultaneously raising larger concerns about Western colonization and the radically arbitrary nature of identity. Yet, once embarked on this path, viewers soon find themselves confronting a thematic duality in which individual experiences, like Vō's childhood in Vietnam and his family's move to Europe in the late 1970s, combine with collective themes such as mass migration and cultural displacement.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors will encounter a pile of Mexican gilded beer cardboard boxes methodically assembled one above the other, some of them feature scenes of the American colonization. Vō papered the gallery walls in gold-leafed Mexican beer boxes with brand names that refer both to colonialism subjects (*Corona, Victoria, Pacífico, León, Indio*) and to Mexican nationalism. Seeming simple in its readymade state, this installation by Danh Vō, like many other works in the exhibition, resonate profoundly with the artist's personal history.

Danh Vō use of religious imagery in *Log Dog* comes from an interest that he has been cultivating for long. In all the places he visits, he takes a special interest in Christian churches and looks for antique religious icons. When he was a child his

father became a Christian devotee regularly taking the whole family to Church, and thus awakening Danh Vō's interest in this foreign iconography.

The second installation of the exhibition consists of different branches deconstructed and arranged by treasured Mexican church restorationist Manuel Serrano; some of them have been carved with different extremities that resemble religious icons (wings, angels, cherubs). In between those branches there are also parts of dismembered religious antique statues Vō found in Paris.

In the middle of the room, hanging from the ceiling, there is an American flag made out of beer cardboard boxes. The flag shows the 13 stripes and the 13 stars representing the British colonies. After its Independence, America continued to add stars to the flag and territories to the country, one of them belonged to Mexico. At the back of Danh Vō's cardboard flag, we see once more beer brands like *Corona* and *Victoria*, symbols of a second Mexican colonization by the Americans.

Finally, Danh Vō decided to present *Last Letter of Saint Théophane Venard to his father before he was decapitated, copied by Phung Vō*. The artist's father, a skilled calligrapher who does not speak French, carefully transcribed the amazingly poised text, written in 1861 by a missionary on the eve of his execution for proselytizing Christianity in a Vietnam not yet under French colonial domination. To this day, Phung Vō still handwrites the work, now offered as a multiple for collectors who commission their own copy. These attempts to erase the time gaps between the 1980s, 1960s and 2000s, and to illuminate a semi-obscure chapter of Vietnamese history, exemplify Vō's drive to question personal and collective history from the inside out.

(1) Slenske, M. (september 2014), *Spiritual Hustler*, *Modern Painters*.

(2) 2) Sánchez Santidrián, B. (march 2016), *Danh Vō: identidades fragmentadas*, *Descubrir el arte*.