MoMA ANNOUNCES AN-MY LÊ’S FIRST MUSEUM SURVEY IN NEW YORK

An-My Lê: Between Two Rivers Will Be the First Exhibition to Present Lê’s Practice Across Photographs, Embroideries, Videos, and Installations

NEW YORK, October 12, 2022—The Museum of Modern Art announces An-My Lê: Between Two Rivers/Giữa hai con sông/Entre deux Rivières, the artist’s first museum survey in New York. The exhibition will explore how Lê’s entire body of work considers cycles of global history and conflict, contemplating the impact of displacement, politics, and the sensationalizing of warfare. On view November 5, 2023, through March 9, 2024, Between Two Rivers will encompass three decades of Lê’s work in a variety of mediums, including a selection of well-known photographic series alongside new textiles, installations, and rediscovered films. The exhibition will also feature new photographs from her ongoing series Silent General (2015–present) and the debut of a site-specific, immersive cyclorama. An-My Lê: Between Two Rivers/Giữa hai con sông/Entre deux Rivières is organized by Roxana Marcoci, The David Dechman Senior Curator of Photography; with Caitlin Ryan, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Photography.

“The two rivers in the exhibition’s title refer to the Mekong and Mississippi river deltas,” Roxana Marcoci explains. “They are subjects that Lê has inflected with her own experiences of war and displacement, and a metaphor that invites viewers to reflect on the circularity of time and history, the layering of disparate geographies, and the intimacies that paradoxically grow out of conflict.”

Born in Vietnam in 1960, An-My Lê came to the United States in 1975, after the fall of Saigon, as a political refugee. The first gallery in the exhibition will feature a selection from her earliest group of works, Việt Nam (1994–98), a series of black-and-white photographs taken when she first returned to Vietnam. This early photographic series will be shown with a newer color photographic series from 2011, titled New Delta, which draws parallels between women in the Mississippi River area of the southern United States and the Mekong River in Vietnam’s south. Although made almost 20 years apart, both series explore the complexities of American militarism through Lê’s own Vietnamese heritage and experiences of war and dislocation.

Lê is known for intentionally ambiguous landscape photography, and the following galleries are dedicated to two of Lê’s well-known photographic series that showcase her ability to layer two landscapes, two wars, two time periods, and two cultural histories across different mediums. Between Two Rivers will include a selection of photographs and a newly rediscovered film from Lê’s Small Wars (1999–2002), a series of Vietnam War battleground re-enactments staged on a key American Civil War site in Virginia. Small Wars will be shown alongside a recent installation, đố-mi-nô (2021), which is comprised of a collection of hand-etched, jumbo versions of the Zippo lighters used by American GIs during the Vietnam War, reflecting the layered cultural meaning of these objects as symbols of both protection and violence. Merging real wars with staged locations, the third gallery will feature a selection of photographs from 29 Palms (2003–04) alongside the first US presentation of a two-channel video installation of the same name. In this series, Lê deliberately uses the camera’s supposed ability to capture reality to create visual confusion, capturing a replica war zone in California’s High Desert used for training US soldiers preparing for war in Iraq and Afghanistan.
In addition to photographs and films, the exhibition will feature a group of embroideries (2016–present) and a site-specific, immersive cyclorama that attests to the artist’s long-standing consideration of the cinematic dimensions of photography and war. Between Two Rivers will include all seven of the artist’s photographic series, including Trap Rock (2005–07), Events Ashore (2005–14), Gabinetto (2016), and a major installation of Lê’s ongoing series Silent General (2015–present), which will feature never-before-seen works that engage with such contemporary political issues as the removal of Confederate monuments and gun violence in the US.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue that examines the full sweep of An-My Lê’s creative practice. Edited by Roxana Marcoci, it will feature a lead essay by the exhibition’s curator; four focused thematic essays by scholars La Frances Hui, Joan Kee, Thy Phu, and Caitlin Ryan; two creative texts by authors Monique Truong and Ocean Vuong; and a chronology by Xueli Wang.

PRESS CONTACTS:
Olivia Oramas, olivia_oramas@moma.org
Sara Beth Walsh, sarabeth_walsh@moma.org
Press Office, pressoffice@moma.org

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