

**PUBLIC
ART FUND**

Danh Vo

WE THE PEOPLE

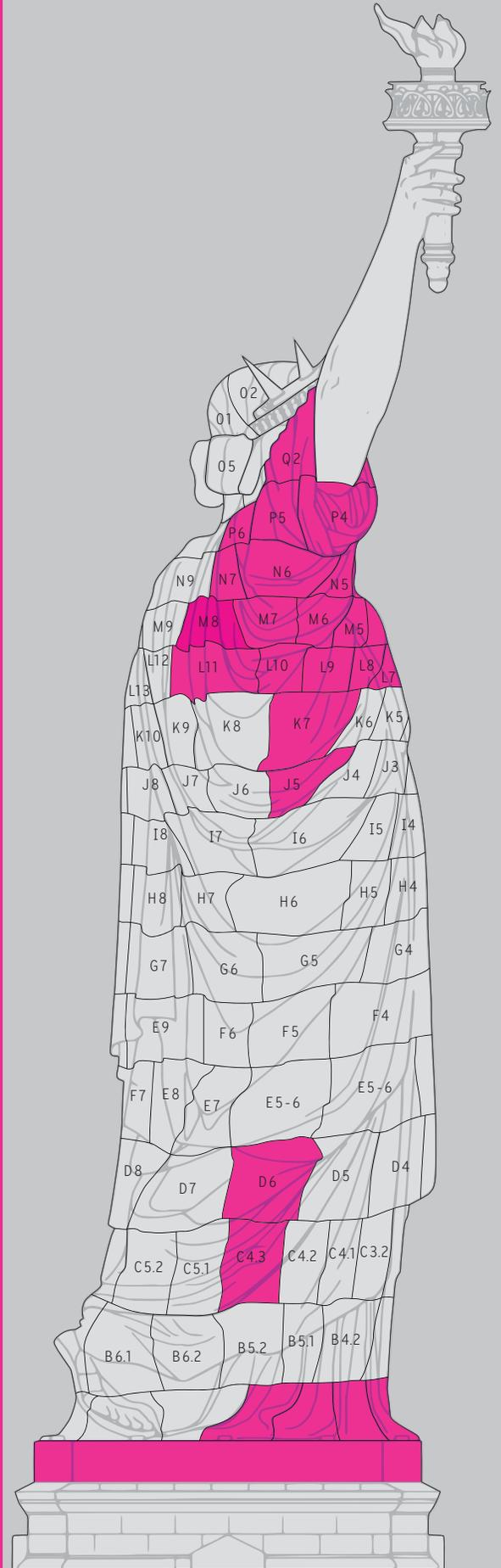
Brooklyn Bridge Park & City Hall Park
May 17 - December 5, 2014

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Brooklyn Bridge Park & City Hall Park

PublicArtFund.org

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An Educator Guide for *Danh Vo: We The People*

City Hall Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park, May 17 - December 5, 2014

➤ An Introduction to public art in the city

New York City is filled with public art. Public art — art in public places — offers us the potential to be surprised and opportunities to have chance encounters with art in various locations in the City.

Public art punctuates our day-to-day experience of the city, adding a layer of texture that makes us see a place or have an experience in new and unexpected ways.

At times, you may come across public art in parks or subways when you are in a hurry or absorbed in other thoughts. However, when you take time to observe the art around you, you may notice something new in a work of art that you've passed many times before.

New York City is a stimulating environment. There are so many people and buildings; there is activity and noise surrounding us. Sometimes it's all very overwhelming! Some people try to block out the outside world by listening music, reading a paper, or avoiding eye-contact with fellow New Yorkers. Sometimes it's the only way to create a sense of private space for ourselves.

But New York City also reveals itself to those who slow down and really take a look. The observations are endless — people playing chess, buying fish, flying a kite; street signs, unusual buildings; even birds, trees, and flower gardens! To notice these things only requires a shift in attention. When we take notice, we have the opportunity to truly feel connected to a place.

New York City itself, like public art, offers us the possibility of being surprised. Public art is consciously placed by artists and organizations like Public Art Fund, to encourage us to consider places and ideas.



Sol LeWitt, *MTA Whirls and twirls*.
Created 2004, Installed 2009. Porcelain
Commissioned by Metropolitan Transportation Authority Arts for Transit
and MTA New York City Transit



José de Creeft, *Alice in Wonderland* in Central Park
Courtesy Central Park Conservancy

▶ Getting Started

Throughout human history, monuments have become important cultural symbols that commemorate significant people and events for a particular place or social group. Monuments are most often used to reinforce connections to a collective history and to celebrate a shared cultural heritage. However, like any work of art, interpretations of monuments typically vary among individuals, and their meanings often change over time. The Statue of Liberty is one such monument that represents a range of ideas and meanings to people throughout the world. In creating the exhibition *We The People*, artist Danh Vo has produced a site-responsive installation that reflects the original Statue of Liberty, while also asking viewers to question many of the ideas the statue has come to represent, and to reflect on the role of art in shaping our beliefs about history, politics, and culture.

Materials and Preparation:

1. Print the on-site reflection and questions portion of this guide.
2. Provide pencils, blank paper, clipboards [or stiff cardboard] for drawing exercises.
3. Provide cameras [digital or disposable film cameras] for photo documentation if you have access to such technologies. Several students can share a camera for the day.
4. Provide, or have students make, journals for writing additional reflections and thoughts.

▶ Background: About Danh Vo and *We The People*

Artist Danh Vo (pronounced: Yawn Vo) makes artworks that raise questions about history and culture. For *We The People*, Vo hired artisans in China to recreate the Statue of Liberty to-scale in 250 different parts using the same methods that were employed to create the original. A selection, or “detail,” of *We The People* is now on view in City Hall Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park.



The Statue of Liberty. Photo by Daniel Schwen, Wikimedia Commons, 2012.



Installation view, Danh Vo, *JULY, IV, MDCCLXXVI*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2011. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel.



Map of where *We The People* has been exhibited internationally.
Map generated by Public Art Fund with assistance from Galerie Chantal Crousel.

In order to create the 250 pieces that comprise *We The People*, Danh Vo hired artisans and metalsmiths in Shanghai, China to shape and form copper sheets. This is the same method of fabrication used to craft the original statue in France more than 130 years ago. However, unlike the original, the pieces created by the contemporary workshops in China will never actually come together to form a complete replica of Lady Liberty. Rather, the pieces will remain as individual ‘sculptures’ that will be distributed, collected, and exhibited in private galleries, museums, and public spaces around the world. Many of the ‘sculptures’ produced for *We The People* have already been displayed in more than a dozen countries, and the largest selection ever shown outdoors is now on view here in City Hall Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park.

► Background: About City Hall Park

The selection of these two parks as sites for *We The People (detail)* expands the different kinds of interpretations visitors may have while viewing the project. Situated in the center of Lower Manhattan, City Hall Park is the site of significant historical events, commemorative monuments, and cultural symbols that *We The People (detail)* helps to reveal and, at times, even challenge. Among other uses, the land where City Hall Park is now located has been used as a pasture for cattle, a prison and public execution site, a parade ground, an almshouse, a site for protests and political gatherings, an art museum, a post office, a courthouse, and an African burial site. The concept of ‘liberty’ (both its celebration and denial) has been an important part of this site throughout its history, a fact that is commemorated by the “Liberty Pole,” a pillar originally erected in 1765 by pro-independence New Yorkers. **[Can you find it?]**

The installation of *We The People (detail)* at this site asks visitors to reflect on the triumphs and struggles with liberty that have contributed to the diverse experiences of Americans and the numerous immigrants and tourists who visit Manhattan every year.

[Note: for more detailed history about the park, ask your students to locate the circular tablet at the southern end of the park installed in 1999.]



► Background: Brooklyn Bridge Park

Unlike the more formal and ceremonious arrangement of City Hall Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park is comprised of meandering paths, open green spaces, recreational fields, and a series of piers that together form an 85-acre post-industrial waterfront park stretching 1.3 miles along the East River in Brooklyn. Located at the former landing site for a ferry connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn (before the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883) Brooklyn Bridge Park's overall arrangement has been influenced by layers of industrial and commercial uses dating back to the American Revolution. The park, as we experience it today, is the result of a design by landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh.



Brooklyn Bridge Park. Photo by Ingfbruno, Wikimedia Commons, 2013.

Once the site of an active industrial port that brought commercial trading from around the world, the new Brooklyn Bridge Park now offers visitors numerous spaces in which to gather, socialize, and enjoy views of Governor's Island and the Statue of Liberty. With an array of leisure and recreational landscapes as the foreground to prominent views of Lady Liberty, Brooklyn Bridge Park provides a very different context than City Hall Park from which to consider how *We The People (detail)* highlights the relationships between contemporary art, history, politics, and culture.

► Background: About the Statue of Liberty

The Statue of Liberty was given as a gift to the United States by France to celebrate their alliance during the Revolutionary War. A sculptor by the name of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904) designed the statue, and Gustave Eiffel (the man who designed the Eiffel Tower, 1832-1923) was responsible for the iron framework underneath the copper plating.

The statue was built and assembled in Paris from 1881-1884 and then taken apart into pieces before getting shipped to New York City. It took four months to put the Statue of Liberty back together again when she was installed on Bedloe's Island in 1886.

ACTIVITY: On-site Observations, Questions, and prompts NYC-Blueprint-Strand II: Developing Art Literacy

[Note to teachers: Ask students to bring journals or notebooks to write responses and collect their reflections and ideas about the artwork]

We The People is unlikely to ever fully come together like a completed puzzle. Instead, Danh Vo's sculptures will remain a series of fragments that will be shown in different locations around the world. In each site the project will take on new meanings. Below are some questions and prompts to help you think about some of the issues and ideas *We The People (detail)* evokes here in New York.

An Illustrated Glossary of Terms

During your visit to see *We The People (detail)*, keep a list of words or terms that you think about and discuss with your teacher and other students. You are also encouraged to write down words or concepts that you don't understand or have never heard before your visit (you can research them later). When you return to school, you and your classmates can research and produce an illustrated glossary of terms to help others understand the most important ideas and concepts represented by *We The People (detail)*. Some of these terms could be about the artist (Danh Vo), while others could be related to the parks where the artworks are located. Some of the terms may be related to the artwork itself, while others could be about the original Statue of Liberty. After you define your terms, you are encouraged to illustrate this glossary with images that you created during your visit (photos, drawings, etc.), or images that you find in books or on the internet that relate to *We The People (detail)* or the Statue of Liberty.

[Note to teachers: this exercise may be useful for helping the students prepare for some of the in-class exercises included in this guide - example "Sculpture - Monument Design" below]

On-Site Questions and Prompts: What, How, Why?

What, How, and Why? Divide your page into three columns and write one of the following headers at the top of each column: "What?," "How?," and "Why?"

- In the "**What?**" column, write all of the factual information about one of the fragments from *We The People (detail)*. What are the materials? Are they natural or man-made? How big is the sculpture? What shapes and forms do you see? What colors do you see? How heavy do you think it is?
- In the "**How?**" column, write a short description that explains how you think the artist made the object. What materials were used? What tools do you think were used in making the pieces? How do you think it was assembled? Do you think more than one person made the sculpture? How do you think it was transported to the site? As you can see from the fragments in the project *We The People (detail)*, the copper panels are quite thin for a statue as large as the Statue of Liberty. How do you suppose the Statue of Liberty is supported on the inside?
- In the "**Why?**" column, write a short explanation of the ideas and questions that this project made you think about. What ideas do you think the artist was trying to communicate in the project? Why do you think the artist wanted to show *We The People (detail)* in New York City? Does it make you think differently about the original Statue of Liberty? The Statue of Liberty and the fragments that comprise *We The People* are all made of copper. Why do you think the colors are so different? What are other similarities and differences between the original Statue of Liberty and *We The People*?



The building of the Statue of Liberty in Paris, 1880. Photograph by Albert Fernique, via New York Public Library.



The making of *We The People* [detail] in Shanghai workshop.

► Your Experiences

• Monuments, statues, and sculptures are found in cities, ancient and modern, throughout the world. Why do you think monuments and statues are such a common form of art in cultures everywhere? How does this project, *We The People*, make you think about monuments, statues, and sculpture differently?



Statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C. Photo by Gregory F. Maxwell, Wikimedia Commons.



The Marine Corps War Memorial, Arlington, Virginia. Photo by Adrian R. Rowan, Wikimedia Commons, 2013.



Columbus Circle, New York. Photo: Jesse Hamerman, Courtesy Public Art Fund.

• Have you ever been to visit the Statue of Liberty? If so, how are the copper fragments of *We The People* different or similar to the original Statue of Liberty? Have you ever seen the Statue of Liberty on a postcard or in a movie? If so, how are the copper fragments of *We The People* different or similar to those images of the original Statue of Liberty?



Film still from *Planet of the Apes*, 1968, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner. Distributed by 20th Century Fox.



Vintage postcard depicting the Statue of Liberty.

The Experiences of Others

- The Statue of Liberty is one of the most recognizable cultural symbols throughout the world. What are some important messages and ideas that you think the original artist (Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi) wanted to communicate in his design of the Statue of Liberty?
- *We The People* has been exhibited in places throughout the world (Italy, France, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Singapore, Spain, South Korea, etc.). What special meaning does *We The People* have here in New York?
- New York City has always been a popular place to live and work for people from around the world. What kinds of ideas and concepts do you think *We The People (detail)* will represent for different visitors who view the sculptures?

Activities based on NYC “Blueprint for Teaching and Learning Visual Arts” NYC-Blueprint-Strand I: Art Making

[Note to teachers: If you anticipate some drawing exercises during your site visit, you may want to ask students to bring their journals, or you can supply them with blank paper and clipboards (or cardboard) on which the students can draw. If you anticipate later in-class projects, you may want to tell the students in advance what they will be producing later, so they can prepare the necessary materials and documentation to complete the in-class project.]

Sculpture - Monument Design (in-class):

After visiting *We The People*, design and create a monument or public artwork for your school or community.

Concepts and Ideas:

In producing *We The People*, artist Danh Vo asks us to think critically about concepts such as liberty, culture, power, symbolism, colonialism, and equality. What ideas or concepts do you think are important to communicate in your project? Are there any important people, historical events, places, or significant cultures from your school, neighborhood, or community that you believe should be celebrated with a monument or artwork? What would be a good title for your project? What do you hope people would say about your project? As part of the planning and design process, include input from your classmates, friends, and neighbors.

Formal elements:

In *We The People*, Danh Vo recreated and presented many of the symbols that are so important to the ideas represented by the Statue of Liberty. What do you think the torch, chains, tablet, and the crown symbolize on the Statue of Liberty? What do you think they represent when reproduced in the fragments that make up *We The People*? Will your project communicate your ideas and concepts through recognizable symbols? Or, will your project communicate your ideas and concepts through more abstract forms? What kinds of symbols will best communicate the concepts and ideas represented by your project? What shapes, colors, forms, and elements will you include in your project?

Location:

Danh Vo chose to present *We The People (detail)* as a site-responsive project in NYC, which means that the fragments create ideas and concepts in our minds that relate to the specific locations for the project. For example, City Hall Park is the location of New York’s city government, but it was also once a prison. Also,

Brooklyn Bridge Park was once a major industrial port filled with busy warehouses. Do you think that these locations have an effect on how we interpret or understand *We The People (detail)*? Where will you choose to locate your new monument or artwork? Will it be in a public or private space? Who will have access to it? What issues do you think are most important for choosing the location for your project? Do you want your monument to be visible to large numbers of people, or will it be in a more remote location to make encounters more unexpected and rare? Will your project have a direct connection to its location, or could it be located anywhere and still have the same meaning? Will it contrast or blend with its location? Will your new monument or artwork make people think differently about your school, neighborhood, community, or city? How, and in what ways? Will your project have a direct connection to its location, or could it be located anywhere and still have the same meaning? Will it contrast or blend with its location? Will your new monument or artwork make people think differently about your school, neighborhood, community, or city? How, and in what ways?

Materials and Construction:

Danh Vo chose to use the same materials (copper) and methods of fabrication used in the original Statue of Liberty when creating *We The People*. Why do you think he chose to use the same materials? Why do you think the color of the fragments (copper) is different than the color of Lady Liberty (green)? What materials will you use in your project? What adjectives would best describe the materials you would like to use in your artwork? Will it be smooth, rough, shiny, dull, heavy, light, natural, industrial, etc.? Where will the materials come from? Where will they be formed or shaped into a sculpture (on site, in an artist's studio, in a factory)? What tools will you or others use to create your project? How will it be assembled? Will it require more than one person to assemble and transport? Will your project be permanent or temporary? Will it change over time?

➤ Drawing-01A (on site):

The sculptures on view in the exhibition *We The People (detail)* are replicas of fragments that make up the original Statue of Liberty. Draw one of these sculptures in the park to better understand how the artist interpreted the shapes and forms of Lady Liberty's body, hair, or clothing. Pay attention to the forms and shapes of the pieces. What types of shapes make up the sculpture? Are they straight or curved? How large is the work compared to your body? What are the main textures and colors of the materials used in the piece? How are these characteristics important to the meaning of the artwork?

➤ Drawing-01B (on site):

An exercise in abstraction: Locate an object in the park (a bench, tree, sculpture, fountain, trash can, etc.). Photograph or draw the object. Now, "zoom in" and select a small fragment of your chosen object and photograph or draw the fragment like it is a sculpture similar to those in *We The People (detail)*. How does the creation of a fragment change the meaning or understanding of the original object? Does the form or shape of the fragment communicate any new meanings? How would you build a large-scale sculpture of your fragment? What materials would you use to construct it? How large do you think that the fragment would need to be if it were built at the same scale as a fragment from *We The People (detail)*? (Hint: the Statue of Liberty is roughly 20 times larger than an adult human.)

➤ Drawing-02 (on site): At Brooklyn Bridge Park:

Locate one fragment from *We The People (detail)* and view it from a perspective where you can also see the Statue of Liberty in the distance. Create a drawing with the fragment in the foreground with the original statue in the background. What do you think the artist was trying to communicate in his work by producing fragments of the original Statue of Liberty? How do these fragments affect the way you understand the original statue?

➤ Drawing-03 (on site):

Locate one fragment from *We The People (detail)* where you can also see the framework or structure that supports the copper panels. Can you determine how the structure and copper skin are supported? Produce a drawing (or a several drawings) that explains to someone else how you think these fragments were constructed and assembled. This drawing might be like a drawing that an architect or engineer would make with notes, dimensions, names of materials, and sketches to help explain how the different pieces were constructed.

[note to teachers: this drawing may be useful for an in-class project for which students create small models of a fragment that they sketch on site using materials that represent “frames” and “skins” (for example: toothpicks, pipe cleaners, twist ties, and aluminum foil)]

➤ Collage (in class):

We The People uses ideas of “fragmentation” and “transformation” to create new ideas about the original Statue of Liberty. Collage is a form of art that also uses “fragmentation” and “transformation” to create new works of art by layering different images, materials, and texts side-by-side. First, look up and discuss the meaning of the words “fragmentation” and “transformation” with a group of your classmates. Also, find different examples of collages made by artists like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Hannah Höch, and Romare Bearden to see different ways of creating a collage. Now, create your own collage using various images, materials, and text that you have found in old magazines, newspapers, or on the internet. Your collage should represent some of the important ideas and concepts that you discussed in your class visit to *We The People (detail)*. How do different images, materials, or words create new meanings when brought together in your collage? How is the creation of a collage similar or different the process used to create *We The People*?

➤ Connecting *We The People (detail)* to other disciplines - Architecture and Engineering:

NYC-Blueprint-Strand III: Making Connections Through visual Arts

For the project *We The People*, artist Danh Vo conceived and organized a full-scale recreation of the original Statue of Liberty, rendered in 250 separate parts. In order to recreate the 250 pieces used in the original statue, Vo hired artisans and metal smiths in Shanghai, China to shape and form copper sheets employing the same materials and methods of fabrication used to craft the original statue in France over 130 years ago.

As you can see from the display of the artworks, these sheets of copper are thin and require a framework or structure to support the copper ‘skin’ of Lady Liberty. In fact, the original Statue of Liberty has an internal steel structure that supports the entire exterior form. This structure was designed by the French civil engineer and architect Gustave Eiffel in 1879, ten years before his most famous project, the Eiffel Tower, was completed in 1889. Eiffel’s design made the Statue of Liberty one of the earliest examples of what architects call a “curtain wall” construction, in

which the exterior of a building is supported by an internal structure.

Most of the skyscrapers you can see in Lower Manhattan are built with a type of “curtain wall” construction, often made with an exterior of glass and metal frames attached to an internal structure of concrete and/or steel. For example, “8 Spruce Street” (formerly known as “Beekman Tower”) is visible from both City Hall Park (one block to the east) and Brooklyn Bridge Park. This tower, completed in 2011, was designed by the Los Angeles-based architect Frank Gehry who is known for designing buildings that have curvilinear “curtain walls” similar to those seen in the copper fragments that make up *We The People*. One World Trade Center, or the “Freedom Tower,” is also visible from both sites and is now the tallest building in Manhattan. The original design of that tower was meant in part to mimic the profile of the Statue of Liberty, and it is also constructed using a “curtain wall.”

Upon returning from your visit to *We The People (detail)*, choose a building from the list of tallest skyscrapers in Manhattan and research the design and construction methods used to build the building. Is your skyscraper of choice another example of a “curtain wall” building? What type of structure supports your chosen tower? What materials are used to create the ‘skin’ of the building? How is the ‘skin’ attached to the structure? Compare the skyscraper that you have chosen with those researched by your classmates.

[Note to teachers: this is a link to the list of tallest buildings in NYC: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_New_York_City. You may also want to enquire with your school library about the availability of a book by author Kate Ascher called *The Heights: Anatomy of a Skyscraper*.]

Observing and interpreting the world of art and design:

For the project *We The People*, artist Danh Vo has recreated the original Statue of Liberty in 250 separate parts that are never intended to fully come together. By keeping the statue in fragments and scattered throughout the world, the artist is challenging our ideas about the meaning and interpretations of monuments and cultural symbols. But did you know that the figure of Lady Liberty is itself a copy of an earlier design created by its artist, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, for a lighthouse that he designed in the form of a woman holding a torch at the entrance of the Suez Canal in Egypt?

Likewise, *We The People* is not the first time that Lady Liberty has been presented in fragments. Prior to the erection of the completed Statue of Liberty (1886), the right arm and torch were presented in Philadelphia at the Centennial International Exposition of 1876 (the first official World’s Fair held in the United States), and her head and crown were on exhibit at the Paris World’s Fair in 1878. What else can you research and discover about the design and development of Lady Liberty that might have influenced Danh Vo’s *We The People*? Also, can you find different examples of statues or monuments designed to represent the ideas of ‘liberty’ from around the world? What are the different symbols and figures used to represent ‘liberty’ in different times, cultures, or locations?

Cultural Institutions: **NYC-Blueprint-Strand IV: Community and Cultural Resources**

Following your field trip to see *We The People (detail)*, plan a visit to an art gallery or museum and arrange to meet with a staff person to learn about the operation and the role that the gallery or museum plays in the community. Ask them how they might display and arrange fragments from *We The People* in that context. Think about curating your own exhibition. How would you display and arrange fragments from *We The People* in that gallery or museum? How would the meaning of the project be different in that context than at the park(s) you visited? What kind of information would you include to help a visitor understand *We The People* in a new location? What types of activities, programs, and projects would you plan to help visitors interpret and examine the artwork?

Online Resources and Libraries:

Now that you have visited *We The People (detail)*, research additional works by the artist Danh Vo through the Internet and/or your library. Create a list of other artworks by the artist that describes major themes and concepts he has explored in other projects. Are there consistent themes, concepts, or ideas that are shared across numerous projects? What have others written about when reviewing his artworks and projects in the press?

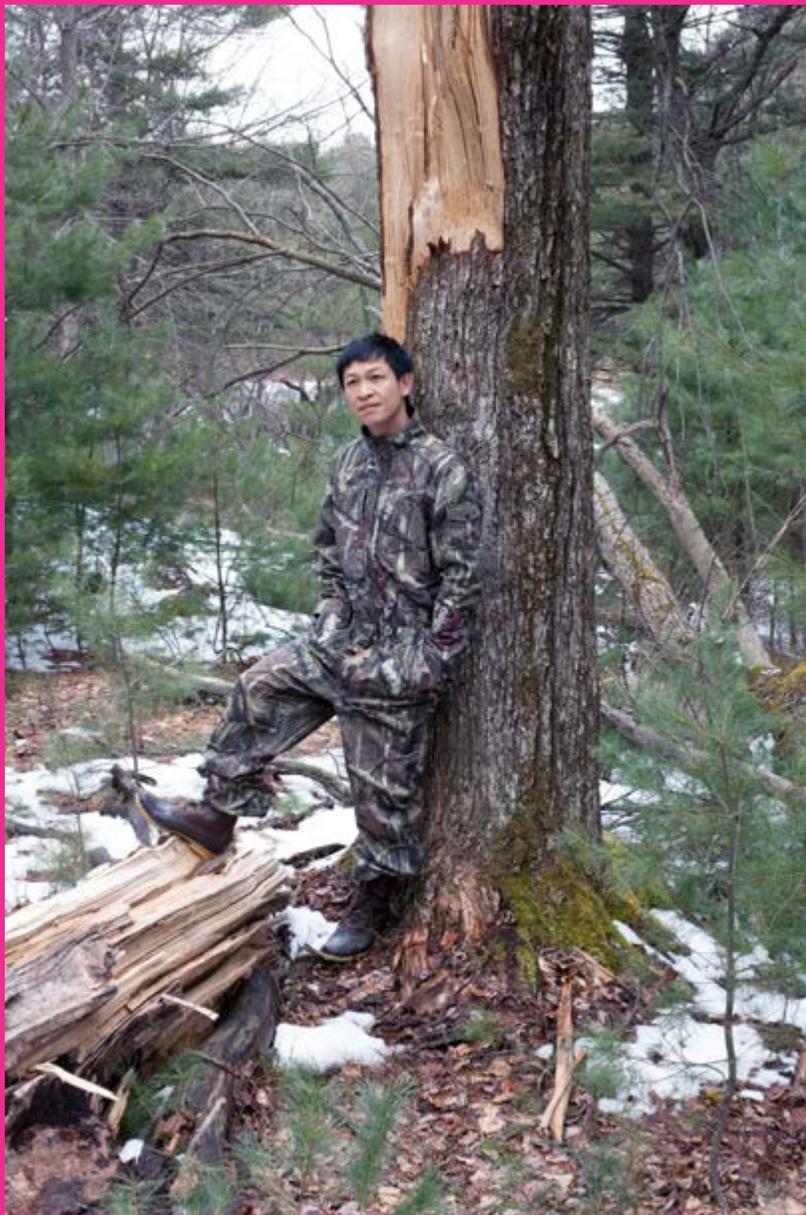


Photo: Heinz Peter Knes, 2013.

➤ About the Artist

Danh Vo was born 1975 in Vietnam. When he was four years old, his family fled the country on a boat made by his father. The boat was discovered by a large Danish freighter that took everyone on board to Denmark, where Vo's family decided to settle down and live. Just like *We The People* has traveled to many countries all around the world, so has the artist. He now lives in Berlin, Germany and Mexico City.

Vo approaches his artwork like a cultural anthropologist—someone exploring big ideas about humankind like migration, politics, freedom, and identity. And he often includes references to historical objects (like the Statue of Liberty) or to personal experiences. His work has been shown in many museums and galleries around the world including the New Museum and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum here in New York.

Additional Resources

About Brooklyn Bridge Park

<http://www.brooklynbridgepark.org/>

History of City Hall Park

<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/cityhallpark/history>

Monuments of City Hall Park

<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/cityhallpark/monuments>

History of Statue of Liberty

http://www.nps.gov/stli/historyculture/places_creating_statue.htm

<http://www.ohranger.com/statue-liberty/history-statue-liberty>

Fun Facts on the Statue of Liberty

http://www.nps.gov/stli/historyculture/places_creating_statue.htm

<http://www.howtallisthestatueofliberty.org/>

More about We The People

<http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=2163>

<http://www.myartguides.com/categories/art/item/1695-danh-vo>

<http://www.artic.edu/exhibition/danh-vo-we-people-detail-2010-2013>

http://artreview.com/features/feature_danh_v/

Support

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