

in von Rydingsvard's concurrent retrospective at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. Flat cedar slats are pieced onto linen pages that can be turned. The idea of the wood and linen as living histories that have been sliced from a tree or woven from a plant speaks for itself and directly represents nature and environmental issues. Each linen page has a kite-like torn tail or fabric strip hanging over the handmade cedar table on which the book rests. Another tribute to von Rydingsvard's connection to cedar can be found in the monumental bronzes *Now and She*, which remain on view in the sculpture garden at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through April 2019.

—Jan Garden Castro

HELSINKI

Matthew Cowan

Photographic Gallery Hippolyte

In "para field notes," Matthew Cowan expands on a highly intriguing program that examines regional customs and folklore through art. His previous projects have included "Walk on Roses and Forget-me-nots," a survey of courtship rituals mounted in Braunschweig, Germany, and *Wude-wasa*, an exploration of the wild-man archetype that he encountered while investigating European carnival traditions in England. Here, in what has been described as a notebook of artistic research, he induced consideration of the past and present, rural and urban spheres; and by underscoring the significance of butter, he linked Finland, Ireland, and Germany with his native New Zealand.

Stepping into the exhibition subjected city-dwelling viewers to a potent sense of disjuncture. Electric fencing encircled the space and its centerpiece—a mound of hay bales that suggested a parade float or massive decorated cake, adorned with portable aluminum gates, blue synthetic mesh, red extruded plastic



fence posts, an image of *Hexenbutter* (*para vomit/shit*), and a series of performance videos. A ribald and ghostly white ring of *para*, or milk stealers, was suspended overhead, their shadows dancing across the room's buttery yellow walls. These beings are never seen because their existence hinges on magic. A solitary and imposing figure, garbed head-to-foot in a suit of butter wrappers, doubled as a sentinel and a manifestation of this historically valuable commodity. References to plowing and male snakes, who

emerge first to prepare for mating, affirmed the presence of spring and its accompanying risks. A song presented by the Mynämäki men's choir underscored this fact, petitioning the Honey Paw, Lord Jesus, and Virgin Mary to keep the cows safe while grazing.

A second, smaller, flesh-colored gallery included objects from the Tavastila Local History Museum that not only revealed how people have responded to their environment and used the resources available to them, but also related to Cowan's

Left and below: Matthew Cowan, installation views of "para field notes," 2018.

installation in the main space. Thus, the introduction of electrical gadgetry, both on the farm and as medical instruments, evoked *para*, because electricity's imperceptibility, like *para*, implies a kind of magic. Seeing the resemblance between one of Minna Hokka's coiled birch bark shepherds' horns (inspired by Finnish and Karelian instruments) and a snake also caught one off guard. Who could have predicted that this object, used to warn of danger, would also emulate the shape of the creature posing a threat?

Though Cowan's background in folk dancing distinguishes his approach to art, he sidesteps incorporating live performance into his exhibitions. Still, a distinct sense of movement pervaded this presentation—in part because all of the objects he makes or chooses to present are performance related, and it is from such use that their meaning as art objects derives. Cowan, when asked, makes a significant distinction. As a



visual artist, "objects of performance" occupy his focus.

Some years ago, David Helwig wrote an essay in which he correlated the fiery light of Halloween with the radiance of Yuletide, two celebrations in which pagan and religious influences have long been intertwined. Cowan's project, which echoes this approach, spurs us to think about the meaning and use of material culture, the history and evolution of folkloric customs, and the lingering presence of ritual in today's increasingly urbanized world.

—John Gayer

DISPATCH

NEW YORK

Danh Vo

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

The Guggenheim proved a fitting setting for this mid-career survey of Danh Vo, its spiraling ramp and multi-leveled galleries complimenting the layered complexity that characterizes Vo's examination of the intersection between private experience and broader social constructions of identity, colonialism, religion, war, and capitalism. Vo is a master at staging what he terms "tiny diasporas of a person's life"—arrangements of



mundane, ordinary objects that gain meaning through presentation, attribution, and association. Photographs, letters, and objects, meant to be examined up close in vitrines, were juxtaposed with numerous items installed along the ramp and in galleries and alcoves, including a Mercedes-Benz engine, household appliances, a typewriter, chandeliers, cardboard boxes, and pieces of sculpture, some enclosed in armatures, others assembled into hybrid figures or cut up and stuffed in suitcases and backpacks.

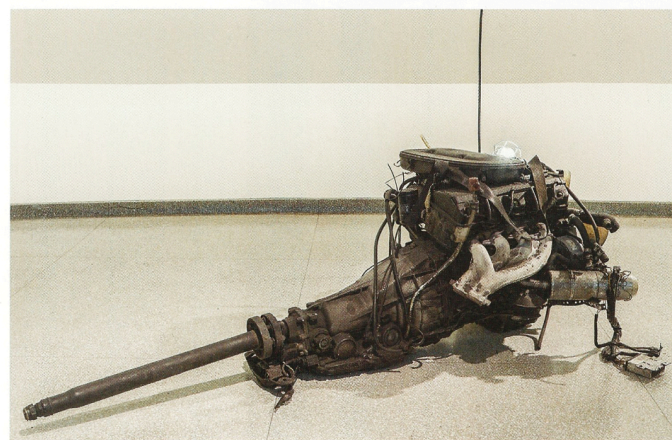
These combinations intertwined personal desire with larger public

narratives. *If you were to climb the Himalayas tomorrow* (2006), a meticulous arrangement of a Rolex watch, Dupont lighter, and military class ring once owned by Vo's father, resonates with aspiration to status, masculinity, and power. Suspended from an iron bar hung high in a tall gallery near the entrance, *Christmas (Rome)*, 2012 (2013)—14 pieces of faded velvet cloth from the Vatican Museum imprinted with the distinct shapes of the religious artifacts once placed on them—introduced the heavy weight of Catholicism that pervaded the show through numer-

ous installations referencing martyrdom, torture, and death.

Other groupings presented items that Vo bought at public sales. Pen nibs used to sign official documents like the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty or the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (authorizing President Lyndon Johnson to expand the war in Vietnam) were mounted and displayed under glass like fine jewelry. Elsewhere, one could read 14 handwritten notes on White House stationary from Henry Kissinger to New York Post theater critic Leonard Lyons thanking him for comp tickets as he contemplated the bombing of Cambodia.

Vo's artful juggling of the multiple associations in each object often required the assistance of accompanying wall texts. Three late 19th-century chandeliers gain in significance through their previous installation in the ballroom of the Hôtel Majestic, where the Paris Peace Accords ending the Vietnam War were signed in 1973. Titled 16:32, 26.05; 08:43, 26.05; and 08:03, 28.05 (all 2009) for the exact times and dates they were removed during a renovation, these fixtures, as redisplayed



Above: Danh Vo, *She was more like a beauty queen from a movie scene*, 2009. Mixed media, 96.5 x 54.5 cm. Left: *Das Beste oder Nichts*, 2010. Engine of Phung Vo's Mercedes-Benz 190, 66 x 101.6 x 205.7 cm.