Dacchi Dang: An Omen Near and Far
Dacchi Dang: An Omen Near and Far is the first survey exhibition of one of the preeminent Vietnam–Australian artists working today. Presenting works spanning three decades by a founding artist member of 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Dacchi Dang’s practice across photography, printmaking, video and installation is principally concerned with articulating the complex nature of diasporic experience. Born in Saigon as the Vietnam War was intensifying, Dang fled on a boat to be eventually accepted as a refugee in Australia. His life and art is informed by this trauma and an ongoing redefinition of place and of home.

An Omen Near and Far unveils a new installation work, Et in Arcadia Ego (2017) commissioned by 4A, that embeds small hand-printed photographs in bamboo forms cast in wax. Set to burn and disintegrate entirely over the duration of the exhibition, this work situates within a lengthy residency in Paris two years prior, we witness a delineation of cultural memory. In 1982, Saigon’s Chinese district and where he grew up, and visiting family members in Bundanon. Following nine months at the camp, he was transported to Kuala Lumpur where he was accepted as a Vietnamese refugee by Australia in 1982.

Dang’s dislocating experience of returning to Cholon in 1994, Saigon’s Chinese district and where he grew up, is the central impetus behind one of his previous works, Lens of the Other (2011) that extends Dang’s experiments with the foundational principles of photographic technology by converting an abandoned hut on Peel Island (Teek Ro Ra) in Queensland’s Moreton Bay into a makeshift pinhole camera. The resultant images, inversions of the outside world exposed on photographic paper that lined the hut’s interior walls as if on a film plane at the rear of a camera’s lens, harness the highly concentrated sites of Indigenous dispossession by colonial invasion, further marked by the island’s past as a lazaret, asylum and leper colony.

“Maybe nothing’s so unfunny as an omen read wrong” is the most cited line in Michael Herr’s Dispatches (1977), a searing account of the experience of American troops in the Vietnam War that helped define what came to be called “New Journalism”, a highly subjective style of writing—that much like artists—prioritised “truth” over “facts”. Speaking of the double bind of traditional Vietnamese beliefs in omens and their connection to ancestral spirits against the American military’s hubristic and ignoble enterprise, Herr succinctly articulated the tragic consequences of misinterpretation, willfully imposed or otherwise. In this sense, An Omen Near and Far is a testament to Dang’s photographic imagery recorded by the artist in Vietnam in that same year, his first visit to his country of birth since he fled as a refugee.

Dang’s dislocating experience of returning to Cholon in 1994, Saigon’s Chinese district and where he grew up, is the central impetus behind one of his previous works, Lens of the Other (2011) that extends Dang’s experiments with the foundational principles of photographic technology by converting an abandoned hut on Peel Island (Teek Ro Ra) in Queensland’s Moreton Bay into a makeshift pinhole camera. The resultant images, inversions of the outside world exposed on photographic paper that lined the hut’s interior walls as if on a film plane at the rear of a camera’s lens, harness the highly concentrated sites of Indigenous dispossession by colonial invasion, further marked by the island’s past as a lazaret, asylum and leper colony.

“Maybe nothing’s so unfunny as an omen read wrong” is the most cited line in Michael Herr’s Dispatches (1977), a searing account of the experience of American troops in the Vietnam War that helped define what came to be called “New Journalism”, a highly subjective style of writing—that much like artists—prioritised “truth” over “facts”. Speaking of the double bind of traditional Vietnamese beliefs in omens and their connection to ancestral spirits against the American military’s hubristic and ignoble enterprise, Herr succinctly articulated the tragic consequences of misinterpretation, willfully imposed or otherwise. In this sense, An Omen Near and Far is a testament to Dang’s photographic imagery recorded by the artist in Vietnam in that same year, his first visit to his country of birth since he fled as a refugee.

Dang’s dislocating experience of returning to Cholon in 1994, Saigon’s Chinese district and where he grew up, is the central impetus behind one of his previous works, Lens of the Other (2011) that extends Dang’s experiments with the foundational principles of photographic technology by converting an abandoned hut on Peel Island (Teek Ro Ra) in Queensland’s Moreton Bay into a makeshift pinhole camera. The resultant images, inversions of the outside world exposed on photographic paper that lined the hut’s interior walls as if on a film plane at the rear of a camera’s lens, harness the highly concentrated sites of Indigenous dispossession by colonial invasion, further marked by the island’s past as a lazaret, asylum and leper colony.

“Maybe nothing’s so unfunny as an omen read wrong” is the most cited line in Michael Herr’s Dispatches (1977), a searing account of the experience of American troops in the Vietnam War that helped define what came to be called “New Journalism”, a highly subjective style of writing—that much like artists—prioritised “truth” over “facts”. Speaking of the double bind of traditional Vietnamese beliefs in omens and their connection to ancestral spirits against the American military’s hubristic and ignoble enterprise, Herr succinctly articulated the tragic consequences of misinterpretation, willfully imposed or otherwise. In this sense, An Omen Near and Far is a testament to Dang’s photographic imagery recorded by the artist in Vietnam in that same year, his first visit to his country of birth since he fled as a refugee.