

IKON

Ikon Gallery, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday, 11am-5pm / free entry

Dinh Q. Lê *The Colony*

27 January – 3 April 2016



Dinh Q. Lê, Chincha Norte Island. Production shot of *The Colony* (2016). Photograph courtesy of the artist

Ikon, in collaboration with Artangel, presents *The Colony* (2016), a major new commission of video work by acclaimed Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê, from 27 January to 3 April 2016.

In three parts, featuring newly filmed footage, *The Colony* is loosely based on 19th century depictions of a cluster of islands off the west coast of Peru, rich in guano, a powerful fertilizer. Exploring the drama of absurdity, greed and human suffering, all for the brown gold of bird excrement, Lê's narratives revisit three important episodes in the islands' brutal history: the 19th century imperial wars between Spain and its former colonies Peru and Chile; the horrific fate of the indentured Chinese labourers; and the

US Guano Act of 1856 that authorised over one hundred claims for uninhabited islands, reefs and atolls in the Pacific and Atlantic.

As the first of Dinh Q. Lê's film installations which does not directly reference the Vietnam War, *The Colony* marks a significant development in his practice. However, the plight of individuals caught up in the currents of history which has characterised some of his most powerful work to date remains central to this new commission.

The islands in Lê's films are home to huge colonies of birds, where mountains of guano have built up and when its fertilizing properties were recognised, the deposits became one of the most valuable natural resources in the world. In the mid-19th century, the islands were contested by different powers - Spanish, American and Peruvian - each determined to exert control over their exceptional natural wealth. At the height of the "Great Guano Rush" bonded Chinese labourers were forced to work there under brutal conditions to collect the guano. Nobody lives on the islands now, but harvesting still occasionally takes place.

For *The Colony*, Dinh Q. Lê has filmed the islands from a number of different perspectives, from a boat circling the land and from video drones giving a bird's eye view from above. Also we see labourers involved in the back-breaking work of harvesting, transporting and loading the guano onto boats. The arid and unforgiving landscape and the drones' unmanned explorations of empty and abandoned buildings, with their traces of existence from past inhabitants, leave viewers in no doubt of the human suffering and isolation that form part of the islands' story.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue and includes an interview with the artist by curator and writer Zoe Butt and texts by Dr Frank Uekotter, Reader in Environmental Humanities, University of Birmingham and Moira Roth, Trefethen Professor of Art History, Mills College, California. *The Colony* is commissioned by Ikon, Artangel, Han Nefkens H+F Collection and Proyecto Amil, Lima. It is supported by Arts Council England and the private patronage of the Artangel International Circle, Special Angels and The Company of Angels, with the additional support of Catherine Petitgas, Shoshana Wayne Gallery and private collection, New York.

This commission follows the partnership between Ikon and Artangel in 2012 to commission and present *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007–2011), a film trilogy by Israeli artist Yael Bartana.

Social Media Handles :

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery

Note to Editors:

1. Ikon exhibition opening: Wednesday 27 January, 6-8pm. The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of public events, for full details visit www.ikon-gallery.org
2. Dinh Q Lê was born in Hà Tiên in then South Vietnam in 1968. In the late 1970s, his family escaped by boat before eventually settling in the US where he completed his education. He is the co-founder of Sàn Art in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where he has been based for the past decade. In 2010 he was awarded the Prince Claus Award for his outstanding contribution to cultural exchange. Lê's work has been included in many international group shows including Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany (2012), the 2nd Singapore Biennale (2008), the Gwangju Biennial (2006) and the Venice Biennale (2003). He was the first Vietnamese artist to have a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010).
3. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. www.ikon-gallery.org
4. In Spring 2016, *The Colony* will be presented in London by Artangel. Based in London but working across Britain and beyond, Artangel commissions and produces extraordinary art in unexpected places. For over 30 years, Artangel projects have materialised in a range of different sites and situations and in countless forms of media. Each new project evolves from a singular commissioning process, born from an open-ended conversation with an artist offered the opportunity to imagine something extraordinary. www.artangel.org.uk
5. *The Colony* is part of The Artangel Collection, an initiative to bring outstanding film and video works, commissioned and produced by Artangel, to galleries and museums across the UK. The Artangel Collection has been developed in partnership with Tate, is generously supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The Foyle Foundation and uses public funding from Arts Council England.
6. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
7. For more information and high-res images please contact Rebecca Small or Emily Luxford at Ikon on 0121 248 0708 or email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org

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Dinh Q. Lê. Guanape Island. Production shot of *The Colony* (2016). Photo courtesy of the artist



Dinh Q. Lê. Pescadora Island. Production shot of *The Colony* (2016). Photo courtesy of the artist



Dinh Q. Lê. Guanape Island. Production shot of *The Colony* (2016). Photo courtesy of the artist