

# CIVILIAN

ART PROJECTS

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## **NOELLE K. TAN**

Expedition Journals: United States of America, Vol. 1

### **On View:**

September 18 – October 24, 2015

### **Public Opening:**

Friday, September 18, 2015, 6-8pm

Civilian Art Projects announces **Noelle K. Tan: Expedition Journals, Vol. 1**. For her fifth solo exhibition with the gallery, Tan presents a series of twelve new photographs based on the idea of the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopaedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*). Edited by Denis Diderot and co-edited by Jean le Rond d'Alembert, the *Encyclopédie* was first published in France in the mid-eighteenth century, over the course of more than twenty years.

The *Encyclopédie*, comprising 28 volumes and containing 71,818 articles and 3,129 illustrations, was the major achievement of the French Enlightenment; its aim, in Diderot's words, was to "change the common way of thinking" through the expansion of knowledge and the development of critical modes of thought. The project sought to contain all the world's knowledge of the time, and encapsulate the shift from nature and theology to human reason. Consequently, it was highly controversial, and shunned by the church and other leaders.

According to Tan, the encyclopedia "presents a taxonomy of human knowledge, which was inspired by Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*. The three main branches for understanding the world were memory, imagination, and reason. The Diderot encyclopedia separated these branches into the fields of history, poetry, and philosophy. Inspired by these ideas, each individual piece in the series strives to incorporate these three branches into one image. Following an encyclopedic model, each piece covers one topic in U.S. history – civil war, civil rights, the Manhattan Project, etc."

Through a painstaking process typical of her work, the artist spent countless hours selecting images from her anthology of negatives to create each silver-gelatin print. Next, she stained each work as an aesthetic nod to the palette of the historic lexicon. Finally, she coated specific sections with liquid emulsion, exposing another image onto each print. The imagery is from important -- yet lesser-known -- American sites of historical note, as visited during one of the artist's many road trips. These images are historic, yet contemporary; subtly layered with traces of our collective past.

"The photographs involved are current images of historical and contemporary sites in the United States. The stained look grounds the work in history, but the photos were taken in the present. This allows the images to exist simultaneously in the past and present," writes Tan. "The layering of the images and the use of different textures reflects the multiple events involved in each subject. The integral appearance refers to how all these events are not separate but one."

In the tradition of photographers who seek a new way of imagining the world based on tactile and visual clues, the exhaustive anthology that inspired the work in this series thrust Western culture into an age of reason, seeking to break from the arcane notions of the past. Yet, this epic work is now itself arcane, with history showing where we have hit -- and missed -- the mark of what is true and just. And through one artist's vision, a new history is stitched together that depicts real markers of what has come before, to mark a path toward where we are going; not as judgment, but as a way of seeing in the present.

**Noelle K. Tan** earned her BFA from New York University and her MFA from California Institute of the Arts. Her work is widely collected and in permanent collections such as the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, the Albright-Knox Gallery, the Center for Photography at Woodstock, Crystal Bridges Museum and the Orlando Museum of Art. She received the prestigious Creative Capital grant in 2005.

Additional information can be found at [www.civilianartprojects.com](http://www.civilianartprojects.com). High-resolution images are available upon request. Exhibition hours are Wednesday, Thursday & Saturday 1-5pm.

*Image: "Forest," 2015.*