

GALERIE LELONG

528 West 26th Street New York, NY 10001
T 212.315.0470 F 212.262.0624
www.galerielelong.com

13 rue de Téhéran 75008 Paris
www.galerie-lelong.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nancy Spero

Maypole: Take No Prisoners

April 28 – June 17, 2017

Opening Reception: Friday, April 28, 6-8pm



Galerie Lelong is pleased to present the first ever US installation of Nancy Spero's large-scale, three-dimensional sculpture *Maypole: Take No Prisoners*. Initially created for the grand entryway of the 52nd Biennale di Venezia in 2007, *Maypole: Take No Prisoners* provokes critical discussion about the cyclical nature of history, war, and its victims. Lelong's smaller gallery room will feature an early inspiration for the *Maypole* sculpture, *Kill Commies / Maypole* (1967), alongside additional works on paper from *The War Series*, many of which have never been shown in New York.

Maypole: Take No Prisoners was Spero's final major work before her death in 2009. It synthesizes several themes that Spero explored throughout her influential, 50-year career and embraces the productive coexistence of anger and celebration. As a familiar centerpiece of traditional folk festivals, the maypole is presented as a continuation of Spero's interest in "victimage," a term she coined to describe the transition from victim to

protagonist. Over 200 decapitated heads, printed on cut aluminum and hanging from ribbons and metal chains, carry expressions of emotional anguish. Many are derived from elements of drawings from Spero's *The War Series* (1966-70), a body of work that confronts the dehumanizing horrors of the Vietnam War. The imagery of the sculpture directly references the war because, as Spero wrote: "In the 60's in Vietnam they would cut off heads from corpses and put them on poles." Created during the Iraq War, *Maypole* draws a direct line between the two wars that unfolded during her lifetime while calling for a broader examination of the universality of war as a tool for oppression. While considering the violent atrocities taking place decades after Vietnam, she angrily stated: "It's absolutely the same, damn it."

Spero first began interweaving art and sociopolitical activism after moving from Paris to New York in 1964. Preferring the undervalued medium of paper to the traditional discipline of painting, Spero created works on paper in 1966 and continued to do so throughout the rest of her career. *The War Series* drawings, which Spero described as "a personal attempt at exorcism," were intended as manifestos against the government's involvement in the Vietnam War. Spero sought to convey the full breadth of war's perversion and cruelty by representing the deadly instruments of war as anthropomorphized, monstrous figures populating hellish landscapes. Her involvement in the peace movement and anti-war activism, illustrated by *The War Series*, provided a springboard for further inquiries into many significant visual and cultural movements, including conceptual art, postmodernism, and feminism.

In addition to the 52nd Biennale di Venezia in 2007, Spero's *Maypole: Take No Prisoners* was shown as part of the major retrospective in Spain, *Dissidances*, which travelled from 2008-2009 to the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. In 2012, the installation was shown in a group exhibition at the Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Australia. Major monographic exhibitions of Spero's work have also been held at the Centre Georges Pompidou, France, and the Serpentine Galleries, England. Spero's work is included in over 50 prominent public collections worldwide including the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; Centre Georges Pompidou, France; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Spain; Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Tate Gallery, England; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Galerie Lelong is proud to have represented Nancy Spero since 2001, presenting key solo exhibitions such as *The War Series*, *Un Coup de Dent*, and *From Victimhood to Liberation: Works from the 1980s & 1990s*. Spero's work will be included in the upcoming exhibitions *Antonin Artaud 1936*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico, and *After the Fact. Propaganda in the 21st Century*, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany.

For press enquiries, please contact Danielle Wu, (212) 315-0470 or danielle@galerielelong.com.

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm.

Join in the conversation with Galerie Lelong ([@GalerieLelongNY](https://www.instagram.com/GalerieLelongNY)), Facebook ([Galerie Lelong New York](https://www.facebook.com/GalerieLelongNewYork)), Instagram ([@galerielelong](https://www.instagram.com/galerielelong)) and via the hashtags #NancySpero and #TakeNoPrisoners

Image: Nancy Spero, *Maypole: Take No Prisoners*, 2007. Installation view: Capilla de Santa Ana, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville, Spain, 2009.