



UNLOADED



UNLOADED

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***Unloaded* explores historical and social issues surrounding the availability, use and impact of guns in our lives. It presents images of guns and their impact from a number of perspectives though none endorse them as a means to an end.**

Issues surrounding gun ownership and use continue to divide the United States. In 1997, the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives) reported that our country manufactured eight firearms every minute and the Center for Disease Control reported that someone died by gun every 16 minutes.^{1,2} Eighteen years later, the statistics for fatal and non-fatal gun crimes have declined but gun deaths remain at unacceptably high levels with 86 deaths each day.³ Each bullet fired potentially shatters a world, and mass shootings have risen drastically in the past six years.⁴ Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, reports that a "child is killed or injured by a gun every 30 minutes. What kind of country lets its children be killed by guns and does not do something about it?"⁵ Doctors for America, co-founded by Vivek Murthy, the newly confirmed Surgeon General of the United States, has petitioned President Obama and Congress with urgency: "Thirty thousand American lives are lost each year because of bullets, stray, or intended. This constitutes a public health crisis of the highest order. The complexity of gun violence and politics of gun safety laws can no longer be excuses for our elected leaders to avoid taking action to curb gun violence."⁶ Despite and amidst these calls for action, each accidental death, suicide murder and massacre of innocents seems to take us by surprise, saturating the media anew and creating a resurgence of arguments for and against greater gun control.

The American intimacy with guns has many roots, largely stemming from the culture's glorification and protection of individualism and personal liberties. Lauren Adams' sculpture, *Granny Smith & Wesson* evokes that tradition, through a domestic object of comfort. A stool is upholstered with fabric that imitates French toile and American Colonial motifs, but is hand-painted with

a pattern of Smith & Wesson handguns. The fierce individualism that stoked the survival of colonists and settlers and drove development of the "frontier," coupled with the need to hunt for food, made guns common household objects, like the mug in *Echinacea Plus, Cold Defense*, a photograph by Dadpranks. The image is both a humorous and ominous commentary on the gun's integration in our daily routines. Steaming with tea, the mug's handle is that of a gun. The cup bears a logo from Cabela's, a retailer of hunting, fishing and camping gear—all considered recreational activities. But the ubiquity and normalcy of guns in American life can lead to consequences that are anything but benign: accidents can and do happen.

The United States has the highest rate of gun ownership in the world with an average of 88 guns per 100 people.⁷ It is clear that not all guns are used irresponsibly or with ill intent, but they play a huge role in this country's murders and suicides. Sixty percent of U.S. homicides occur using a firearm.⁸ But far more people kill themselves with a firearm each year than are murdered with one. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. Cathy Colman's printed poem, *The Last Time I Saw Virginia Woolf*, connects the single suicide of a British poet during WWII with surges of individual and organized violence in this country. The poem is a meditation on both suicide and homicide, inflected with psychological trauma, paranoia, and pharmacology.

Politicians and the media stress the need for better mental health treatment as a way to reduce gun violence, despite the fact that only 4 percent of violence in the United States can be attributed to those with mental illness.⁹ *Guns & Suicide: The Hidden Toll*, an article published by the Harvard School of Public Health, reports that in 2010, 19,392 people in the U.S. committed suicide with guns, compared with 11,078 who were killed by others. In those states with the highest rates of gun ownership, suicide by firearms is more than three times higher than in states with the lowest rates of gun ownership while the numbers of suicides by other means in both are nearly comparable.¹⁰ There is a longer litany of such statistics but its length fails to persuade. Deborah Azrael of the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center summarizes: "Cut it however you want: In places where exposure to guns is higher, more people die of suicide."¹¹ Matthew Miller of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center asserts: "The public health message is neither anti-gun nor pro-gun. It's pro-data."¹² Americans and our representatives seem wary of and impervious to such data, resisting almost any measure that restricts access to guns.

The fact that one can, in a single encounter, purchase eight AK-47's in a country store in North Carolina does not bode well for the country's public health. Mel Chin made such a purchase to fashion the sculpture *Cross for the Unforgiven*. It is a somber icon evoking contemporary and historical symbols to reflect on dialectical conditions both international and domestic. In another fully stocked Southern gun shop, Casey Li Brander stages a self-portrait, *Destiny Fulfilled*. She sports another consumer item spawned by hobbies and fandom—a Destiny's Child T-shirt that seamlessly blends girl groups with guns.

Today, guns know no gender; however, their association with machismo persists. Weapons are common accoutrements in the popular perception of masculinity, from the gunslingers of the "Wild West" to Hollywood action heroes. Artists mock or undermine the associations between gender and the power that a gun can represent—through imagery, text, material or process. *Dog*, James Duesing's animated gif, shows a gunslinger wearing sunglasses and twirling his gun in a masturbatory gesture. In Joshua Bienko's *Zwuernica*, the barrel of a macho movie star's gun fires a hand-held torch. The torch is a detail from Picasso's anti-war masterpiece, *Guernica*. The blast is potentially benign, though the flame of the torch resembles an eye of the dead.

Resistance to the violence and victimization inflicted by guns occurs in other ways as artists absorb and respond to attendant facts and figures. In the U.S., a woman is murdered with a gun every five hours and when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, the chances a woman will die increase by 500 percent.^{13,14} The assault on women is both embedded and repelled in *Romantic Resistance*, Susanne Slavick's painted panels of pearls that cohere as a strand, despite being punctured by actual bullet holes. Renee Stout also turns the tables on the victimization of women, again mixing romance and resistance. Her captioned monoprint *The Conversation* confesses a desire to put on perfume and make guns, merging femininity with self-protection and potential rebellion, rejecting passivity of any kind.

The companies that make guns and the lobbies that promote them have done much to expand the appeal of guns to all sectors of the population. A Glock company ad features an African-American adult training a teen with the slogan "Proven Performance: Confidence to Live Your Life." The Second Amendment and Calguns Foundations present an image of an Asian woman overlaid with the question: "Can you afford to be unarmed?" Gun manufacturers

target the larger female demographic through color and style. Glock twists the Broadway musical hit from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* with "Forget diamonds, a Glock is a girl's best friend."¹⁵ It sells models in Hot Pink, Tiffany Blue, and White Pearl while Smith & Wesson offers one in Goddess Purple and Stainless Steel. AR-15 rifles have been customized and modified to become pink, cute, and decorated with unauthorized Hello Kitty logos and party stores sell pink gun and holster sets for \$9.85. The market has responded. According to a 2013 Pew Research Center study, 26 percent of American women owned guns.¹⁶

Children are not immune to similar political and market forces. In 30 states, it is technically legal for a child to possess a rifle or long gun.¹⁷ Their admiration and desire for guns may arise from childhood imaginations that convert and use broken sticks as weapons, defending the good and slaying all evil. Jennifer Nagle Myers' configuration of found sticks and branches invites us to question "nature vs. nurture." Are we born or trained to want, need and use guns? Myers' title, *A City without Guns*, pronounces a dream that counters historical and contemporary realities.

A vintage Daisy Air Rifle ad recommended: "Help your boy grow." The National Rifle Association (NRA), the most powerful gun lobby in the country, included a "Youth Day" in its 2014 annual convention to promote firearms for children.¹⁸ It currently advertises an NRA branded foam rocket gun for kids on its web site.¹⁹ Satirical works by artists Don Porcella and Renee Stout effectively indict the easy proximity between guns and children. Porcella's diminutive pipe-cleaner guns are packaged as if they were bags of sweets in a candy store, and Stout's assemblage, *Baby's First Gun*, marks a grim milestone in childhood development. It is questionable whether the firearms access that the NRA fosters will reduce the number of children murdered in the U.S., who account for nearly 75 percent of all children murdered in the developed world.²⁰ Youth between the ages of 5 and 14 in the United States are 17 times more likely to be murdered by firearms than their counterparts in other industrialized nations.²¹

The impact of guns on a community, especially its children, cuts close to home for Vanessa German. The artist lives in Homewood where she runs ARThouse, a safe and supportive place for kids to go after school and on weekends. The Pittsburgh neighborhood is one where gunfire is not exceptional. German has witnessed its victims first hand and has helped children cope with what they have seen and heard. Several of her prior sculptures are

contemporary *pietas* bearing titles such as *Symphony of Sorrow cuz I am sick and tired of guns having more rights than human beings and my soul is tired of it too* and *motheraskswhypolice hadtokillherson*. Through spoken word performances, poetic posts in social media, and sculptures like *Unwhipped*, in which a toy pistol balances on the head of a child, she mourns each loss, derides the violence and lambasts the pain. But she also celebrates courage, creativity and love.

Through several photographic projects, Nina Berman depicts America's love affair with guns. Images from her *Homeland* series also depict children. They are not terrorized; instead they are being acculturated to weapons. Along with their parents, they are caught up in a national obsession over preparing for new terrorist attacks, expanding the rationale for gun ownership and training. Seeing guns in the hands of teens and children is disconcerting. There are too many fresh accounts of tragic results when they actually fire them. Real terror happens among the most mundane errands and ordinary transactions. On December 26, 2014, a curious two-year-old boy accidentally shot his mother in the head with a legally permitted gun concealed in a specially compartmented purse, a Christmas gift from her husband. There is no minimum age or holiday for death by gun.

The use of guns by law enforcement in interventions with unarmed civilians, particularly black civilians, is another raw wound in the national psyche. Whether committed by police on city streets or by civilian neighborhood watch coordinators in gated communities, too many adults and minors who never had a gun never had a chance. The slaying of Trayvon Martin, clad in a hoodie with Skittles in his pocket; the shooting of John Crawford who held an air rifle picked up from a shelf while shopping in Walmart; and the killing of Tamir Rice, who waved a toy gun on a playground all reflect both implicit bias and explicit racism across society and its judicial systems. Triggers are pulled less quickly for white suspects. Whiteness bleaches out the face of the 17-year-old In Adrian Piper's print *Imagine (Trayvon Martin)*, framed by a red gun sight. The subtle fade is captioned with "Imagine what it was like to be me." The draining of color is individual and collective—the lost blood of one black teenager and too many black men.

The case of Trayvon Martin's acquitted killer was a notorious courtroom test of expansive self-defense statutes that exist in many states like Florida, which is not unique in its "Stand Your Ground" provision. *Stand Our Ground*, the title of another work by Nina Berman, alludes to this provision. The photograph was shot at a

"Come and Take It Rally" in San Antonio, Texas, where she observed a "subtext of white supremacy." There is a surging recognition of this subtext operating within institutions across the country among people of all colors, especially in courts of law. The recent and highly publicized confluence of acquittals, exonerations and failures to indict law enforcement officers who kill unarmed civilians have spurred works like Renee Stout's *The Verdict*. It features silhouetted corpses encircled by guns. She chooses the words of freedom fighter José Martí for her caption against the debasement of human beings: "Man is not free to watch impassively the enslavement and dishonor of men, nor their struggles for liberty and honor."

The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution ostensibly and arguably guarantees the right of individual citizens to "keep and bear arms." Our country insists on interpreting this amendment in ways where individuals bearing and keeping arms actually threaten rather than protect "the security of a free state." How secure is a country, state or a town where 20 children in an elementary school can be shot by a 20-year old? Can we learn anything from such boundless tragedies? Might not our individual rights (perceived and not inalienable) be subsumed by the commonweal? Might not violent urges be sublimated or thwarted; might not instruments of death be disabled?

The works of Stephanie Syjuco, Anthony Cervino and Jessica Fenlon embody some of these questions. They defuse arms by flattening, enclosing or degrading them through crochet, carpentry or creating deliberate glitches. The crocheted yarn of Syjuco's *Standard Issue Smith & Wesson* turns metal into something soft and pliable as well as downloadable—as a needlework design template, available online at no charge. Lest anyone thinks free web access to the design glorifies guns or advocates gun violence, the artist assures us of her ironic intentions: "I mean, fillet crocheting and guns, right? Like grannies on the loose doing bad things, ha ha!" The grandmother surfaces again in *Gun* and *Grandmother* from Cervino's *Composition with Redacted Objects*. Found objects of authority, from a family portrait to a rifle potentially passed down from generation to generation, are redacted and partially encased by painted black wood. Their power is censored, sapped and suffocated. Fenlon's animated film *Ungun* also disempowers and neuters. Built from 5,000 odd glitch images, the animation breaks the gun's capacity to harm through visual sabotage. Would that such sabotage be so easily committed against the roughly 270–310 million guns in this country.²²

A 2013 Pew Research Center poll showed that most Americans support new gun control legislation including broader background checks or bans on assault-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips.²³ Yet such legislation stalls or fails to pass. A year later, the same Center released another poll finding that, for the first time in more than two decades, Americans believe it is more important to protect the right to own guns than it is to control gun ownership.²⁴ Andrew Ellis Johnson's sculpture *Rehearsal* might embody this quandary. *Rehearsal* features bookends supporting cast human ears that are plugged by live bullets. Despite evidence from countless studies and statistics, we tolerate a government that behaves like the proverbial three monkeys who see, hear and speak no evil against the guns associated with so much damage and death. Johnson's video *Massacre of the Innocents* further reflects the consequences of our ignorance, indifference, fear or inaction. Target practice sheets appear in succession, but from their reverse sides. We imagine the bullets coming at us, not fired *away* from us, as in typical first shooter positions so popular in films and gaming. Objects of innocence revolve around the bull's eyes, caught in the crossfire. The work is a stark pronouncement: it is our own safety that is compromised and threatened by guns. While most American citizens claim to own guns to hunt or for personal protection, the surfeit of weapons in this country ultimately endangers us all. It is time to disarm and unload.

Susanne Slavick

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All accessed online the week of January 5, 2015.

Vanessa German,
Stop Shooting We Love You,
yard sign; 20 x 24 inches



Lauren Adams

GOLDSBORO NC > BALTIMORE MD

Granny Smith & Wesson is among the vernacular furniture created for Lauren Adams' *Domestic Disturbance* installation. It is a stool, a domestic object of comfort reupholstered with hand-painted fabric that imitates French toile and historic American textiles. She replaces their typically pastoral scenes with images or implements of destruction in a form of domestic camouflage. The repetition of the Smith & Wesson handgun in the footstool's covering suggests how violence is at the foundation of American culture, literally at our feet. Pistols and revolvers from the Smith & Wesson Company, founded in 1852, have become standard issue to police and armed forces throughout the world and are used by sport shooters. The possession and use of guns has become so prevalent over generations and so taken for granted that there seems to be no disparity between guns and those cherished providers of comfort and cheer—our “grannies.”

OPPOSITE:

Granny Smith & Wesson (from the *Domestic Disturbance* series), 2003; hand-painted acrylic on appropriated fabric and furniture



Nina Berman

NEW YORK NY > NEW YORK NY

Nina Berman's *Boy and Girl at US Marines Recruiting Event* and *Human Target Practice* are from her *Homeland* series that portrays the evolution of the "American security state" from 2001 to 2008, after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Traveling around the country, she photographed military weapons displays, SWAT team training, a Pentagon funded public high school, as well as numerous drills and simulations designed to prepare Americans to respond to the hypothetical threat of a terrorist attack. She operated from the uncertainty as to whether this groundwork was a rational response to a real threat or displays of theatrical propaganda aimed at building support around a foreign policy that imagines endless war. In much of her work, war and play are conflated. This is particularly apparent in the military recruiting events where children are given guns and encouraged to assume the role of armed combatants.

In October 2013, Berman attended a "Come and Take It Rally" in San Antonio, Texas where hundreds of gun owners assembled at the Alamo and marched to a Confederate War Memorial, vowing to carry their weapons openly despite a local ordinance prohibiting firearms in public parks and other locations. *Stand Our Ground* shows some of them in patriotic costume and attire. Compared to her earlier work in the '90s on NRA activists and militia members, Berman regarded this group as a whole new generation of gun owners who wear "their weapons like Madison Avenue socialites wear their Hermès bags."

Nina Berman from San Antonio: Gun Rally Fashion Then and Now, www.bagnewsnotes.com/2013/11/nina-berman-from-san-antonio-gun-rally-fashion-then-and-now/

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:

Photographs from the *Homeland* Series:

Human Target Practice, All America Day, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, USA, 2006; 23 x 32 inches

"Come and Take it" Rally, The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas, USA, 2013; 25 x 37 inches



Joshua Bienko

DUNKIRK NY > KNOXVILLE TN

Joshua Bienko's *Zwuernica* arose as part of a freely distributed PDF pamphlet/booklet originally created for a 2013 exhibition on Facebook at the invitation of OUTER SPACE. *WORLD PEACE @ OUTER SPACE* consisted of posting an image every minute or so in sequence during the "opening." People from all over the world "attended" and commented mostly from the comfort of their own home.

The 2015 version of *Zwuernica* involved repainting parts of Picasso's famous *Guernica*, a work from the canon of modern western painting, onto an advertisement for *Killers*, a 2010 romantic comedy action film starring Ashton Kutcher. Further complicating the conflation of profound principles and crass commercialism, he appropriates and superimposes the address of blue chip gallery, David Zwirner, familiar to all those who read *Artforum*. The relationship between text, photo and paint is both antagonistic and humorous as it raises questions about the responsibility of an artist today. Bienko's alignment of Picasso's hand held torch with the end of the gun's barrel positions the work as an exercise in tragicomic hope (the third pillar of democracy according to Cornel West). Veering between the comic and tragic, this gesture responds to difficult realities without falling into nihilist despair.



OPPOSITE:

Zwuernica, 2015; oil on printed canvas; 22 x 28 inches

Casey Li Brander

HARTFORD CT > NEW YORK NY

Casey Li Brander's photograph is an unlikely fusion of a variety of American subcultures: gun enthusiasts, zombie sci-fi aficionados; and pop music fans. Her T-shirt features an American R&B girl group formed in 1990, one year after the artist's birth. Originally known as Girl's Tyme, the group launched their mainstream career as Destiny's Child which later became a trio and eventually led to Beyoncé's solo career. Sporting apparel that commemorates a tour that would have occurred while she was a teen, Brander brandishes a rifle and a target practice sheet of a crazed animal, documenting one moment during her travels through the South. It is a self-conscious portrait that ultimately denies any stereotype of gun ownership.

National Rifle Association leadership considers firearms a great equalizer between the sexes, so they may be pleased that the number of women who owned guns spiked to from 13 percent to 23 percent between 2005 and 2011, according to Gallup poll data. But the impact of firearms availability on women is hardly positive. While the National Association for Gun Rights advertises "Mama didn't raise a victim," a 2014 study published in *The Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests otherwise, finding that women with access to firearms become homicide victims at significantly higher rates than men. Gun threats in the home *against* women by their intimate partners appear to be more common across the United States than self-defense uses of guns by women. Women in the United States account for 84 percent of all female firearm victims in the developed world, even though they make up only a third of the developed world's female population.

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OPPOSITE:

Destiny Fulfilled, 2012; digital photograph on Hahnemühle paper; 25.75 x 17.25 inches



Anthony Cervino

GREENSBURG PA > CARLISLE PA

Anthony Cervino's *Gun* and *Grandmother* are from a series of sculptures that redact icons of authority. Encased within dispassionate geometric structures, the form and image are disempowered; they can exert no armed or parental control. The minimalist shrouding can also suggest negation and absence—the consequences of gunfire. Cervino's earlier wall assemblage *Pieces* evolved from the language of model assembly with all its leftover plastic sprues (the waste pieces remaining from a casting process). Fashioning these sprues from painted wood, Cervino created a loose grid of abstracted gun forms that refer to specific models such as Uzi's, bazookas, rifles and Thompson submachine guns along with those more associated with science fiction. The smooth surfaces and square configuration of these simulated byproducts appear neutral and systemic, indifferent to how they are produced and to the identities they assume.

OPPOSITE:

Pieces, 2006; wood, paint, steel; 60 x 60 x 3 inches



Mel Chin

HOUSTON TX > EGYPT NC

Cross for the Unforgiven configures eight AK-47s as a Maltese cross. When the artist Mel Chin approached a local country store for eight AK-47s, the proprietors asked, “What you’ens gonna do, start a War?” Chin recounts that he answered: “There was one going on already and I was going to make a sculpture. Deathly silence followed but they figured a way for me to purchase all eight that day. Word got around when it was done, and a sickly woman came calling on Xmas Eve through the falling snow. She had come to see the cross. I pontificated that the Kalashnikovs, a new International Symbol of Resistance to the West, formed this Maltese Cross from times of the Crusades, now eternally welded in opposition. She quietly whispered, ‘It’s beautiful ... and left.’”

Though frozen in perpetual opposition, the guns in Chin’s sculpture are rendered dysfunctional, unable to exact another drop of blood. *Cross for the Unforgiven* is a powerful visual dialectic, an indictment as well as an inspiration.



OPPOSITE:

Cross for the Unforgiven: 10th Anniversary Multiple, 2012; 1 of 2;
AK-47 assault rifles (cut and welded); 54 x 54 x 3 inches

Cathy Colman

NEW YORK NY > LOS ANGELES CA

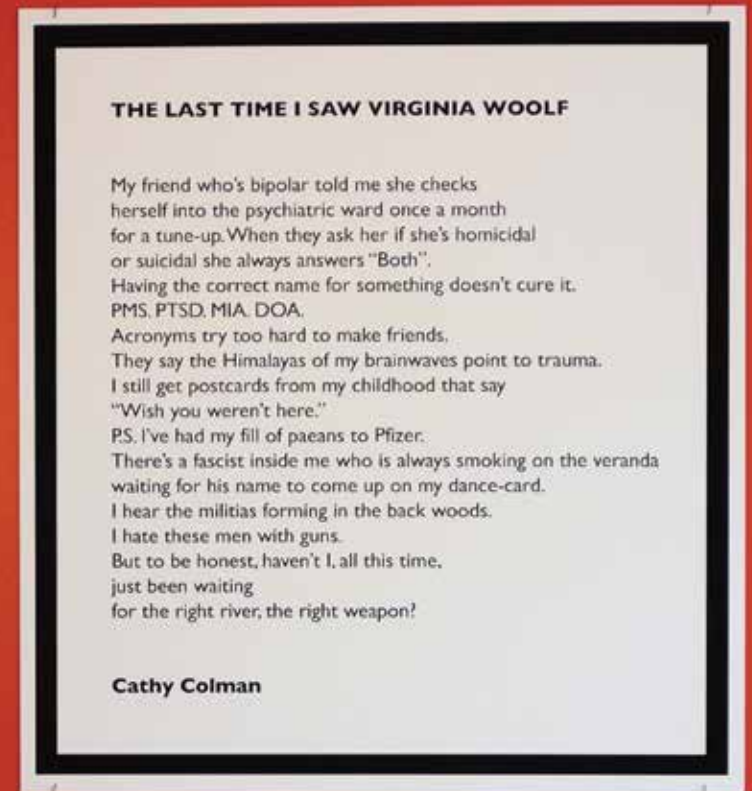
Cathy Colman is a poet troubled by the accessibility of guns to the sane and mentally troubled alike. The title of her poem, *The Last Time I Saw Virginia Woolf*, invokes the English writer who was disturbed by the violence of WWII, suffered from depression, and who committed suicide by drowning herself, sinking into a river, coat pockets filled with stones. The character in Colman's poem speaks of militias forming in the back woods, the kind that arm themselves as a defense against the meddling of "big government." The poem's speaker professes to hate "these men with guns" while admitting her own desire for the "right weapon" and the "right river." She speaks of trauma, mental illness, and psychological distress in which homicidal and suicidal impulses merge, of waiting for and loathing the demon of death within. The armed forces in and outside of her psyche have guns, but like Virginia Woolf, she seeks an alternative means, in life or death.

Recent mass shootings have turned national attention to the complex links between violence, mental illness and gun control. Focusing on treatment of the mentally ill may seem commendable but is over-emphasized, deflecting from other more effective measures to reduce gun deaths. The vast majority of people with psychiatric disorders do not commit violent acts. Only about 4 percent of violence in the United States can be attributed to those with mental illness. Alcohol and drug abuse are far more likely to engender gun violence than mental illness.

In *Gun Debate, a Misguided Focus on Mental Illness*, www.nytimes.com/2012/12/18/health/a-misguided-focus-on-mental-illness-in-gun-control-debate.html

OPPOSITE:

The Last Time I Saw Virginia Woolf, 2012;
digital print on Hahnemühle paper, 36 x 33 inches



Dadpranks

Lauren Goshinski, Kate Hansen, Isla Hansen,
Elina Malkin, Nina Sarnelle and Laura A. Warman

Dadpranks is a group of six women who create and present video and photo work on a shared Tumblr blog. *Echinacea Plus, Cold Defense* is a casual image of a novelty mug sporting a Cabela's logo. Cabela's is a retailer of hunting, fishing and camping equipment with an inventory that includes handguns, rifles and shotguns. It is unlikely that they market to a demographic that drinks herbal medicinal tea. The handle of the mug is fashioned to imitate the handle of a revolver, pointing in stark contradiction to the healing concoction contained within. The product is available in black or pink for \$9.99 on the "red neck gift ideas" page of the company's website. While intended as a gag, a grimmer reading can emerge. The motion it would take to raise the mug to one's lips is reminiscent of the motion it would take to bring a gun to one's own head. Real firearms are used in more than half of suicides in the U.S. where they are the 10th leading cause of death. Guns provide an irreversible solution to those who consider taking their lives. In the U.S., about 85 percent of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal.

The backdrop for the mug is a kitchen table, establishing a domestic context for the object. But home is not always the safest place. A 2014 Gallup poll reports that four in ten Americans have a gun in their homes and six in ten believe that those guns make their homes safer. These habits and perceptions are not supported by a 2008 article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, "Guns, Fear, the Constitution, and the Public's Health," which found that "Living in a home where there are guns increases the risk of homicide by 40 to 170 percent and the risk of suicide by 90 to 460 percent. Young people who commit suicide with a gun usually use a weapon kept at home, and among women in shelters for victims of domestic violence, two thirds of those who come from homes with guns have had those guns used against them."

Guns, Fear, the Constitution, and the Public's Health, www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp0800859



Echinacea Plus, Cold Defense, 2015; digital photograph on Hahnemühle paper; 9.4 x 6.6 inches

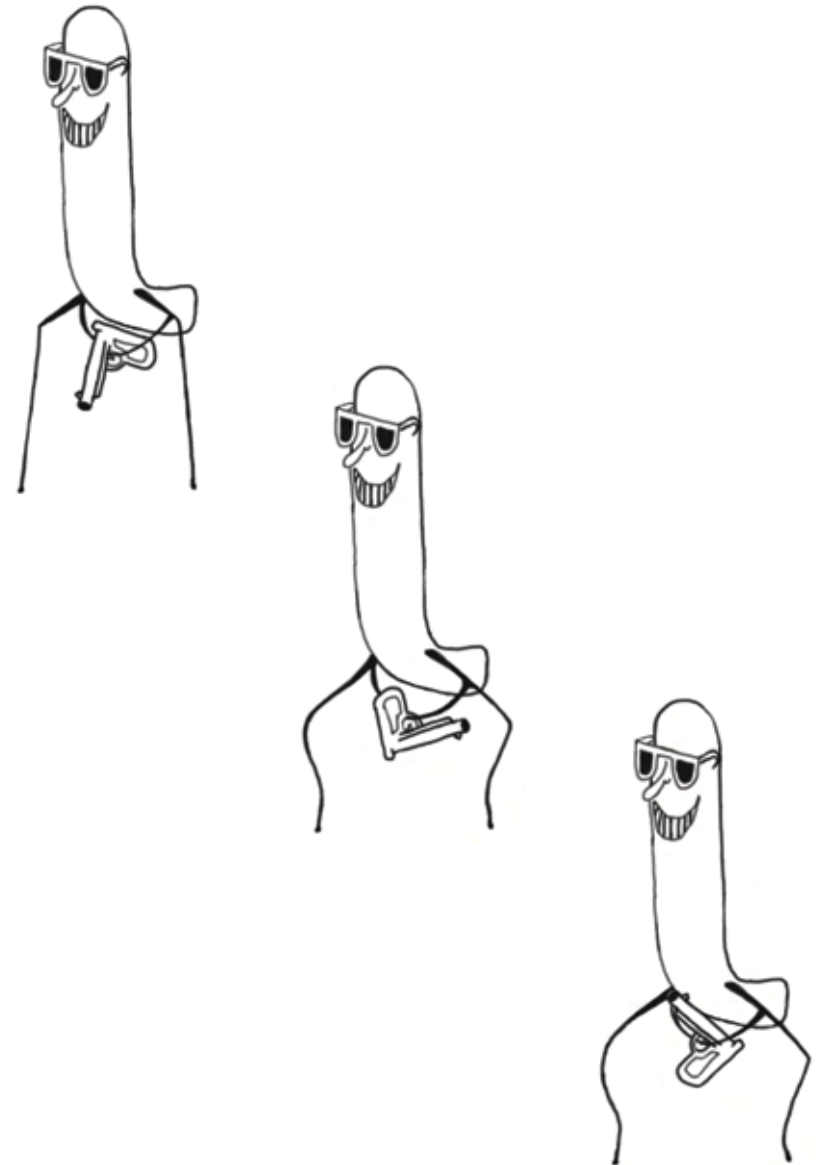
James Duesing

CINCINNATI OH > PITTSBURGH PA

James Duesing's animated GIF shows a grinning hot dog character twirling a gun as a substitute penis. "Hot dog" can be slang vocabulary for male genitalia but is commonly used to describe "one who performs showy, often dangerous stunts,"—stunts we might find in westerns with gunfighters squinting into the sun. The equation of guns with derring-do and manhood is exploited in the entertainment and gun industries alike. For example, an advertisement for the Bushmaster AR-15, one of the three guns used by Adam Lanza in the Sandy Hook elementary school massacre, directly appealed to men's machismo with its catch line: "Consider your man card reissued." In Duesing's comical rendition of machismo, the sunglasses worn by his gunslinger are but one form of ridicule that undermines such messages.

Sex, Safety, And Machismo: How Guns Are Advertised In America, www.businessinsider.com/heres-how-guns-are-advertised-in-america-2012-12

OPPOSITE:
Dog, 2014; HD video loop derived from a GIF



Jessica Fenlon

SAN FRANCISCO CA > CHICAGO IL

Jessica Fenlon's *Ungun* is built from animated sequences of 5,000 odd glitch images, using several hundred source images from the internet that were sampled and audio collaged from popular films. She chose films with narratives in which guns are prominent as instruments of adventure and justice, romance and revenge. The artist considers her appropriative process as neutering the destructive power of guns. The glitches and degradation of the images transforms the weapons into beautiful but dysfunctional objects that, if used, would "misfire, fire into themselves, or not fire at all."

Fenlon has observed how differences of opinion on gun rights and regulation devolve into shouting matches and shatter social relationships between otherwise reasonable people. She has seen how behavior changes when there is an actual gun in the room and how discussion becomes "squelched, false and polite." When the topic of gun rights arises, silence again helps avoid controversy and conflict. Curiously, the broken nature of the imagery in *Ungun* seemed to break that silence for those who saw the work in development. People would tell her stories about their experiences with guns, as if seeing them fractured loosened their tongues to talk about their service in war, their despair at a family member's passion for guns, or other personal matters. Such observations and responses strengthened her rationale for making the work: "When the gun leaves the room, the underlying tension of held breath walks out with it. So, I make unguns. I steal pictures of guns and make something else with them. Yes, I'm trafficking in stolen guns when I do this. Aesthetic vandalism."

OPPOSITE:

Ungun, 2013; DV; 6:36 minutes



Vanessa German

LOS ANGELES CA > PITTSBURGH PA

Vanessa German lives in Homewood, a Pittsburgh neighborhood tagged by the Rachel Maddow Show as “One of America’s Most Violent Neighborhoods.” German does not deny the characterization. She has friends “whose sons have been shot and killed, shot and wounded, or shot and in prison. I could break your heart with stories of grief and wailing and street corner memorials.” But she also loves Homewood and finds it “one of the most inspiring places in the world,” a place where she has “seen acts of love and bravery here that would leave you slack-jawed and damp-eyed with awe.” Some of those acts might include her own, such as founding Love Front Porch at her own front door where children could come and make art. It has since evolved into ARThouse that occupies a converted two-family home. Kids and neighbors gather there to create in a safe and supportive environment.

German’s sculptures, paintings, poetry and spoken word performances reflect personal trials and triumphs as well as those arising around her. Her mixed media sculpture *Unwhipped* shows a black child with a toy gun balanced on her head. She is a survivor. The gun’s barrel has the orange tip that distinguishes it from the real weapons that rupture the lives around her. Like the figures in her sculptures, German has seen too much. She has been awakened by shooting, heard rounds fired, seen blood on the pavement and rubbed the back of a man shot and dying in the street. Her answer to violence is non-judgmental love—through words, image and action. She has created and distributed over 1000 yard signs that say: “Stop Shooting: We Love You.” She publicly posts her lamentations and celebrations. She creates with critical compassion.

OPPOSITE:
Unwhipped, 2013; mixed media; 28 x 10 x 10 inches;
photo by Heather Mull



Jinshan

JIANGSU PROVINCE > SHANGHAI CHINA

The title of Jinshan's photograph, *I also like hijacking*, exudes bitterness with a smile. While it may profess sympathy for a desperate act against oppressive power, the word "like" trivializes as if hijacking were comparable to any other preference. It suggests a wistful admission of resignation. The "hijacker" has only a plastic toy gun that squirts a stream of water at an ascending airplane. It is spurious violence in an ironic and futile battle with an entity that is too great and too distant to ever feel any impact. This moment of rebellion is absurd in its inefficacy. The rebel remains powerless.

The artist photographed this action in the concourse of the Shanghai airport. Much of his work concerns the conflict between local and global, the individual vs. society, and the utopian vs. dystopian, especially against the backdrop of a rapidly developing China where economic forces easily sweep away private concerns. While the country is in flux, state power still trumps individual rights, with strong regulations. There are only 4.9 guns per 100 people in China while there are nearly 90 guns per 100 in the U.S. There are forty million guns in China, and an estimated 270 to 310 million in the U.S.

To gauge the terror of gun murders within an international context, a statistical map developed by Zara Matheson of the Martin Prosperity Institute shows that a number of U.S. cities have gun homicide rates in line with those of the most deadly nations in the world. If it were a country, New Orleans (with a rate of 62.1 gun murders per 100,000 people) would rank second in the world. Detroit and Baltimore's rates are just slightly lower than El Salvador's and Guatemala's respectively. Gun murder in Newark and Miami is comparable to that in Colombia. These comparisons might be less surprising if the United States did not have the highest level of gun ownership per capita in the world.

Gun homicides and gun ownership listed by country, www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/jul/22/gun-homicides-ownership-world-list
www.citylab.com/politics/2013/01/gun-violence-us-cities-compared-deadliest-nations-world/4412/



I also like hijacking, 2008; digital print on Hahnemühle paper; 45.7 x 57.8 inches

Andrew Ellis Johnson

CORTLAND NY > PITTSBURGH PA

Andrew Ellis Johnson's *Rehearsal* is a sculptural version of "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," representing the adamant refusal to face the facts on gun violence. Human ears, cast in marble, are plugged with live bullets that have not yet punctured the absence they flank, a silent emptiness that may represent incomprehension or denial, or those departed—whether by suicide or homicide.

Johnson's video *Massacre of the Innocents* presents the backsides of firing range targets; the viewers are the implied marks. Toys for children who are no more circulate in slow motion, sometimes aligning with the bull's eyes, suggesting who and what is endangered—cops and criminals, adults and children alike. According to the FBI and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, guns kill more preschool-age children (about 80 a year) than police officers (about 50), despite the existence of old and new technologies that could reduce those numbers. One can no longer buy the childproof Smith & Wesson handguns manufactured in the 1880s. New smart guns that can be fired only by authorized users (using fingerprint recognition) could prevent accidental or criminal use, but the NRA resists them, claiming they are unreliable and may become mandatory. Gun rights lobbies consistently oppose gun safety proposals, such as California Senate Bill 199. Seeking to visibly distinguish pellet, toy and airguns from real guns, a diluted version of the bill passed, requiring only two short colored adhesive stripes. Federal law requires only that replica guns have an orange mark on the tips of their barrels; children remove or paint over them easily. Colorful or not, most states have no age limits for purchase of airguns that share the risks inherent to carrying real guns. A 2009 University of Pennsylvania epidemiological study found that those with firearms were about 4.5 times more likely to be shot than those who did not carry. Successful defensive gun use is rare, despite the persistent and prevalent notion that guns protect.

Investigating the Link Between Gun Possession and Gun Assault, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2759797/

Growing Public Support for Gun Rights, www.people-press.org/2014/12/10/growing-public-support-for-gun-rights/

Smart Guns Save Lives. So Where Are They? www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/opinion/sunday/nicholas-kristof-smart-guns-save-lives-so-where-are-they.html?_r=0

Gov. Brown signs anti-Airsoft bill in California, <http://www.airsoftsociety.com/Gov-Brown-signs-anti-Airsoft-bill-in-California-Airsoft-Society.html>



Massacre of the Innocents, 2015; still from HD video

Jennifer Nagle Myers

NEW YORK NY > PITTSBURGH PA

Jennifer Nagle Myers' *A City without Guns* is an ongoing collection of found sticks. Our recognition of them as guns is an indicator of both childish and adult urges, urges that may remain harmless within the imaginary but harmful in reality. Children, most frequently boys, fashion guns from anything on hand, whether cardboard, duct tape, Legos, or Tinker Toys, prompted by genetics and environmental conditioning. Play shooting involving "good guys" and "bad guys" may arise from pure fantasy or early explorations of moral clarity. Pretend guns are more likely symbolic of power, leadership, authority, strength and control than it is about killing and death. A 2002 study published by the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) found that parental norms varied regarding toy gunplay, based on the gender and race of both child and parents, with most discouraging toy gunplay. Though there is apparently no study linking pretend gunplay to future violent behavior, some schools have a zero tolerance policy for any form of it, even pointed fingers.

Meanwhile fake and virtual guns entertain children, teens and adults alike through paintball, air gun games and video games. But imitation guns have a dark side, too. In a 1990 paper funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. police reported using or threatening to use force "in a confrontation where an imitation gun had been mistaken for a real firearm" at a rate of about 200 incidents per year. The U.S. government does not keep ongoing statistics on such incidents, but recent fatalities involving minors such as Andy Lopez Cruz and Tamir Rice have highlighted their risks. Pediatric associations and academies have taken more definitive stances concerning real guns. The AAP supports enacting stronger gun laws, including an effective assault weapons ban, mandatory background checks on all firearm purchases, and a ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines. Even these measures would not end all deaths by gun, but we can pursue practical interventions while still dreaming. Nagle Myers envisions a future time when "all our guns have somehow become petrified," when broken sticks might be "artifacts of that time."

Community Norms on Toy Guns, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/111/1/75.abstract>
Federal Policies to Keep Children Safe, www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/federal-advocacy/Pages/AAPFederalGunViolencePreventionRecommendationstoWhiteHouse.aspx



A City without Guns, 2014 ongoing; found wooden sticks, 60 x 60 inches

Adrian Piper

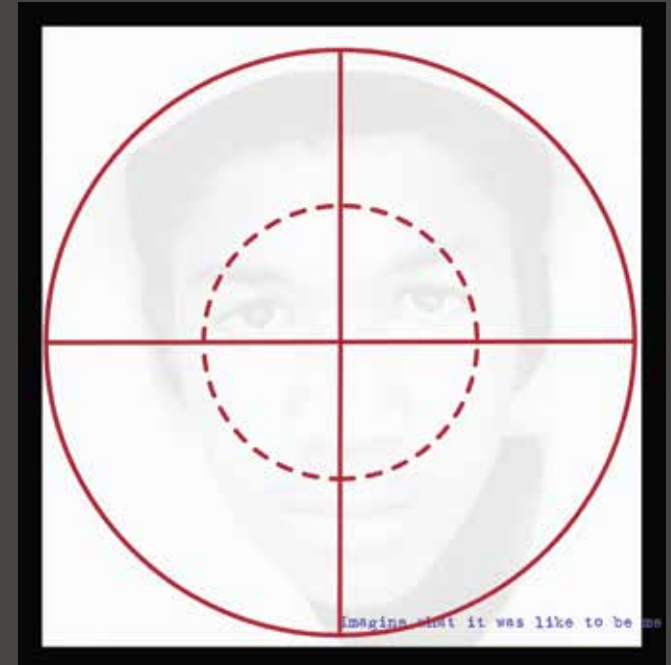
NEW YORK NY > BERLIN GERMANY

Adrian Piper's earlier works expanded the vocabulary of Conceptual Art and Minimalism by introducing issues of race and gender along with overtly political content. Often positioning herself as a subject assuming confrontational stances or adopting passive-aggressive strategies, she forces audiences to face their own prejudices or preconceptions. A recent work, *Imagine (Trayvon Martin)*, invites viewers to step outside themselves, to identify with someone like the 17-year-old teenager who was fatally shot in 2012 by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida. Zimmerman followed Trayvon Martin one evening after he visited a convenience store and reported him as behaving suspiciously. Despite being told by the non-emergency dispatcher that they did not need him to follow the "suspect," Zimmerman nonetheless encountered Martin. Claiming self-defense, he shot him with his licensed Kel-Tec PF-9 9mm semi-automatic pistol, a typical model for concealed carry. Regardless of the many conflicting claims surrounding this and similar cases, would such encounters end in death if weapons were not on hand, whether carried by civilians or law enforcement? The acquittal of Zimmerman, along with subsequent high profile verdicts favoring those who shoot unarmed civilians, has produced rage and dismay in and outside of this country. Piper's portrait of a black youth fading behind red crosshairs is both an indictment of a biased society's endemic racial profiling and an invitation to regard people like Martin as more than "mythic beings"—more than a "menacing black male" in a hoodie. She invites us personally and collectively to imagine what it was like to be Trayvon Martin, walking in the neighborhood where he was staying, 70 yards from his back door.

George Zimmerman's Gun: A Popular Choice for Concealed Carry, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/03/28/george-zimmermans-gun-a-popular-choice-for-concealed-carry/>

OPPOSITE:

Imagine (Trayvon Martin), 2013; TIFF formatted digital image on Hahnemühle paper; 10.43 x 10.76 inches. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. ©APRA Foundation Berlin.



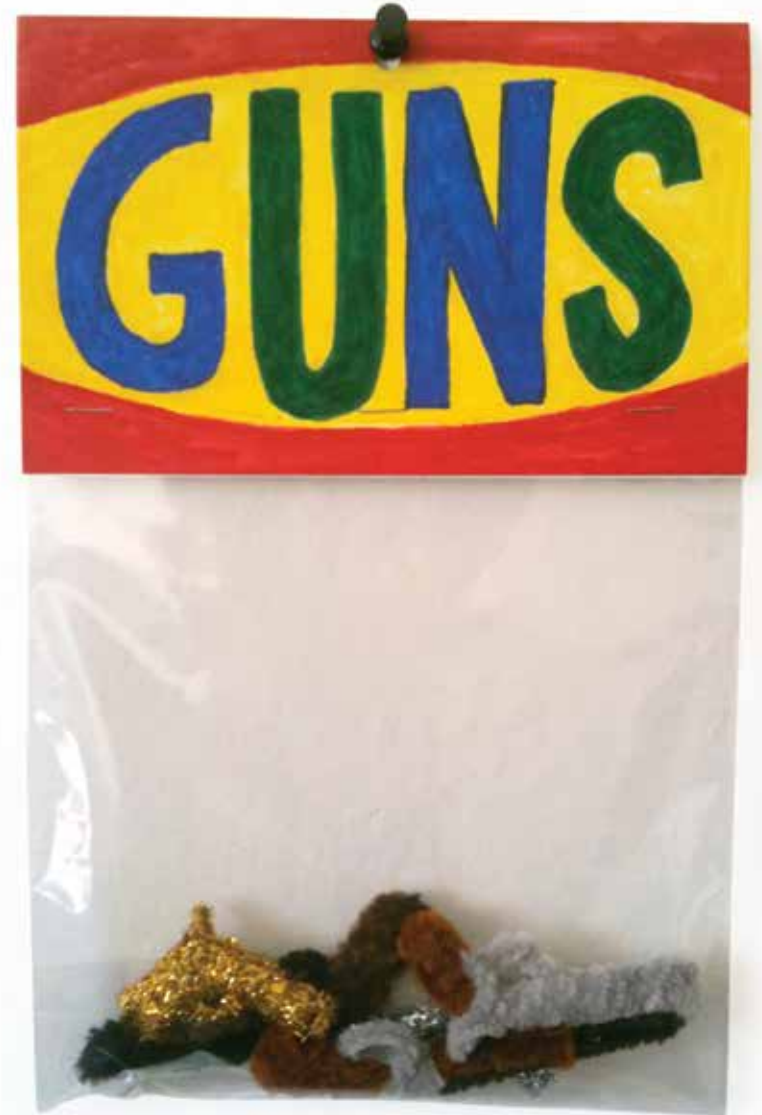
Don Porcella

MODESTO CA > NEW YORK NY

Don Porcella is a sculptor who uses craft materials, often to explore issues of consumerism. The miniature weapons in *Guns* are fashioned from pipe cleaners and bagged like candy for store display. They are fuzzy, cuddly and glittery and their brightly painted label promises fun and games. The entire package becomes a playful commodity, a novelty item that any child might buy at a local toy or convenience store. It may be one cheerful consumer choice like any other, but one that can rouse somber associations. The work can remind us of children shot for carrying toy guns that look all too real and all the accidental shootings committed by children curious about the guns they discover, whether they are properly stored or left unsecured. Porcella's diminutive and material transformation of these tools of death may also be a kind of wishful thinking—a way to render them inoperable.

OPPOSITE:

Guns, 2014; pipe cleaners, 11 x 7 x 2 inches

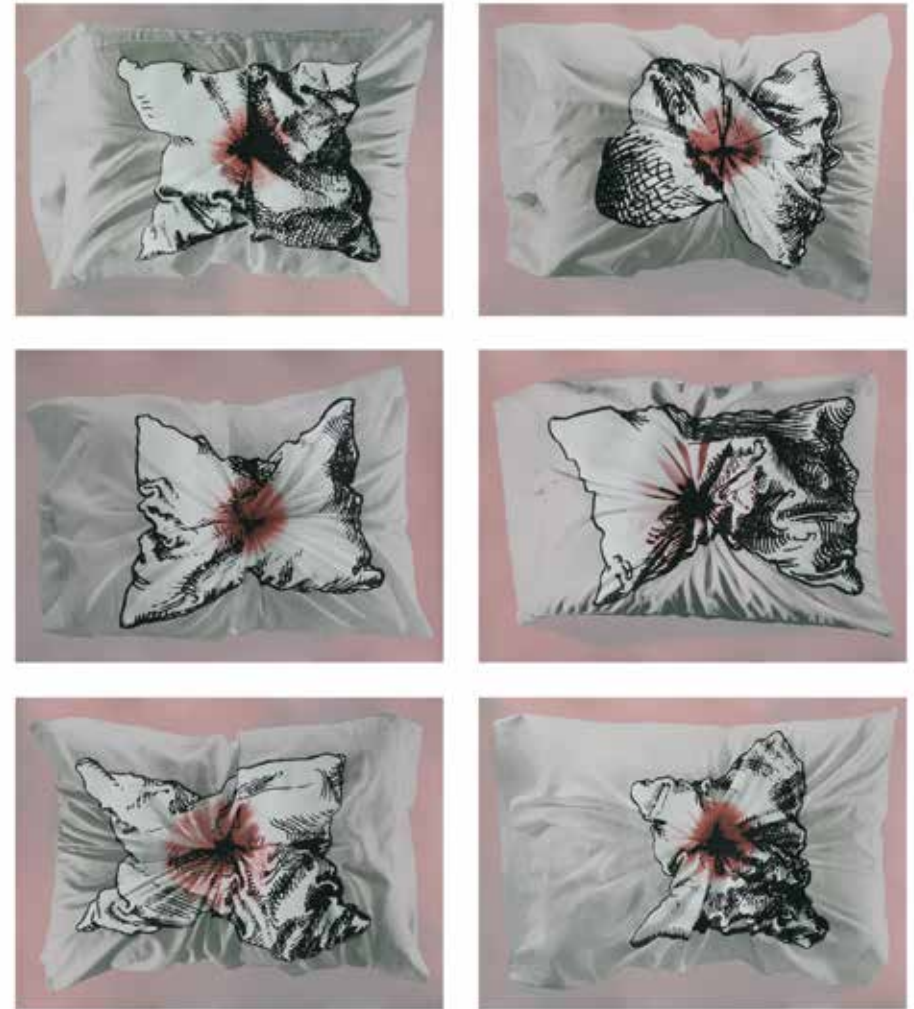


Susanne Slavick

SOUTH BEND IN > PITTSBURGH PA

Susanne Slavick's *(Re)setting Sights* is a call to re-set our sights. The series suggests a reconsideration of our targets, both metaphorical and real. Would that our aim inspire rather than inflict, nurture rather than annihilate, and question its own direction. In layering several modes of representation, *(Re)setting Sights* also injects doubts about its own claims and aspirations. Artifice is layered upon artifice, with hand-drawn observations etched by Albrecht Dürer, photographed and screened onto real pillowcases, re-photographed, digitally manipulated and combined with hovering reticles and simulated impacts from bullets. Perhaps these multiple and contradictory deceptions, like double negatives, can still convey a reality, like an aim, that is too true.

Romantic Resistance continues an investigation of the assault on the innocent and all their beauty. The beads of a pearl necklace are painted on 15 circular panels, each pierced by actual bullet holes. Despite all the gaps and holes, the necklace persists in cohering.



OPPOSITE:
(Re)Setting Sights, 2002; screen prints on Stonehenge;
22 x 30 inches each

Renee Stout

JUNCTION CITY KS > PITTSBURGH PA > WASHINGTON DC

Renee Stout's gun imagery interacts with text, running the gamut of issues both political and personal. In *The Conversation* a gun image floats above the following line: *After our conversation, I woke up the next morning with the overwhelming need to put on perfume and make guns.* Embodying the early feminist rallying cry "the personal is political," the image represents female empowerment. The words blend personal grooming with the potential of armed resistance or self-protection. Despite the neighborhood violence that surrounded the artist at the time, she refused to feel like a victim. Combining romance and rebellion, the piece refutes societal notions that equate femininity with passivity and helplessness. The artist certainly felt no less "soft and feminine" for her stance.

Stout's works often incorporate words of revolutionary sentiment, by leaders like Jean-Jacques Dessalines of Haiti or the Cuban freedom fighter and poet José Martí. Their exhortations place our own domestic issues within larger hemispheric struggles for freedom. In 2014, after baffling judicial decisions involving police shootings of unarmed civilians, Stout created *The Verdict*. She quotes Martí in a caption below black silhouettes of corpses surrounded by white silhouettes of guns: "Man is not free to watch impassively the enslavement and dishonor of men, nor their struggles for liberty and honor."

Baby's First Gun, a diminutive boxed assemblage, seduces with an initial sweetness that becomes cutting. Its lid bears a title that suggests a developmental milestone, accompanied by two seemingly playful animals. By painting the donkey red and the elephant blue, she reverses the hues associated with Democratic and Republican party symbols and states. This transference might decry the eternal divisiveness that leaves so many causes of violence untreated or it may yearn for the cooperation that could move us forward. Inside the box, a toy gun with "ABC" stamped on its metal barrel is juxtaposed with a cutout of a girl in a pink floral dress. Below, flanked by smiley faces, is another biting caption: "Society prepares the crime... the criminal commits it." Stout treats the gun as innocent toy, instrument of ruin, tool of reprisal, and implement of insurrection and independence, demonstrating how the gun has infiltrated every aspect of our lives.



Baby's First Gun, 1998; mixed Media; 2.5 x 6 x 4.75 inches closed, 1.75 x 6 x 9.75 inches open. Courtesy of the Belger Art Center, Kansas City, MO.

Stephanie Syjuco

MANILA PHILIPPINES > SAN FRANCISCO CA

In a June 15, 2006 post entitled *gun running* on her *anti-factory* blog, Stephanie Syjuco shared a work that she created for an art auction. Working from a downloaded image of the “standard” army-issue Smith & Wesson gun, she made a crochet pattern to match its actual size that could in turn be downloaded from the blog. Functioning ironically as a “small-arms dealer,” Syjuco’s transformation of a military issue weapon through a traditionally feminine craft is a potent, if humorous, act of subversion. The grid of the pattern, in a sense, traps the gun, flattening and de-solidifying it into a decorative plane. It offers directions to convert hard and lethal metal into soft fiber, further robbing the gun of its destructive power. A subsequent blithe email inquiry that the artist shared on Facebook shows how such irony can be lost on citizens living in a culture where mass production of weapons is a normal livelihood.

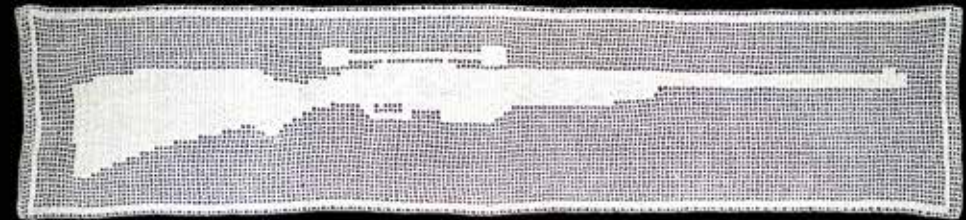
It is a larger political irony that it was Smith & Wesson that stepped forward in 2000 under the Clinton administration, committing to fundamentally change the way guns were made, distributed and sold. It agreed to accept stricter regulations and a “code of conduct,” hoping to distinguish its brand as a company that cared about safety. Financial reassurance through a governmental “preferred buying program” was meant to help offset loss of revenue from an anticipated boycott. That loss became real when the NRA, retailers and consumers boycotted Smith & Wesson for its stance. Its sales declined nearly 40 percent but rebounded under the Bush administration that failed to enforce the terms of the gun-safety deal and aided the company with major new federal contracts. Openly repudiating its gun safety pledge, Smith & Wesson introduced a new line of high-capacity pistols and its first-ever, assault-style rifle. They became top-sellers for the company.

White House Press Release, March 17, 2000: Clinton Administration reaches historic agreement with Smith and Wesson, http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/New/html/20000317_2.html

How Gun Maker Smith & Wesson Almost Went Out Of Business When It Accepted Gun Control, www.businessinsider.com/smith-and-wesson-almost-went-out-of-business-trying-to-do-the-right-thing-2013-1#ixzz3OIPL5lxV

www.stephaniesyjuco.com/antifactory/blog/2006/06/gun-running.html

Smith & Wesson Broke Clinton-Era Gun Safety Pledge To Boost Profits, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/21/smith-wesson-clinton-bush-nra_n_2348503.html



Rifle, 1995; cotton lace crochet panel; 12 x 53.5 inches. Collection of Marcia Tanner.

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