

Al Farrow



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*Shotgun Review*

## Al Farrow: Divine Ammunition

By Terri Cohn

April 17, 2019

*Shotgun Reviews are an open forum where we invite the international art community to contribute timely, short-format responses to an exhibition or event. If you are interested in submitting a Shotgun Review, please click [this link](#) for more information. In this Shotgun Review, Terri Cohn reviews Divine Ammunition at the Museum of Craft and Design in San Francisco.*

Al Farrow's exhibition, *Divine Ammunition* at the Museum of Craft and Design, San Francisco, was a topical, heady series of twenty-four sculptures of cathedrals, synagogues, mosques, religious objects, and reliquaries. Created with gun parts, bullet casings, lead shot, and bones, Farrow's sculptural replicas of religious edifices are a meditation on the poignant relationship between worship and violence that is endemic to religious traditions.

One of the defining characteristics of these sculptures is their materially embedded tension between beauty and incisive commentary. The visual impact of the bullet-adorned architectural detail of *Synagogue V (After the Great Synagogue of Brussels)* (2012) is heightened by imploring questions inscribed in arches over the doors: "Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? (Malachi: 2,10)." The seductive grandeur of *Bombed Mosque* (2010)—encrusted with blue

and gold bullet casings and topped with a golden dome—is disrupted by its shattered surface and flanking artillery minarets. This piece brought to mind recent ethno-nationalist attacks on religious groups; it felt chillingly prescient after the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, which occurred during the writing of this essay.



Al Farrow. *Bombed Mosque*, 2010; installation view, *Divine Ammunition*, 2018-2019. The Museum of Craft and Design. Photo: Henrik Kam.

Some of the most powerful works were Farrow's *Santo Guerro* series of reliquaries, named for his invented Saint of War, which contain various skeletal remains. The series was inspired by a 1995 trip to Italy, during which Farrow was particularly drawn to an enshrined relic—a shriveled finger—and its similarity to a trigger finger. For him, the digit became a visual symbol of our historical attachment to war in the name of religion. Farrow's artworks are unsettling as they also substantiate the obsession with war and violence among the three major world religions.

*The White House* (2018), Farrow's most recent work on view, is replete with irony, marked by the contradiction between its title and somber, burnt-looking exterior that insinuates the corrosion of our democratic ideals and freedom, stained by the exploitation of power and violence. As the critic Eleanor Heartney writes in the exhibition's catalogue, in the context of Farrow's incisive body of work, this

ominous edifice becomes a secular “visual metaphor for the marriage of death and dogma.”

*Divine Ammunition was on view at the Museum of Craft and Design, San Francisco through February 24, 2019.*