

Al Farrow



Forum Gallery Presents a Must-See Exhibition of Works by Al Farrow
By Brittany Good
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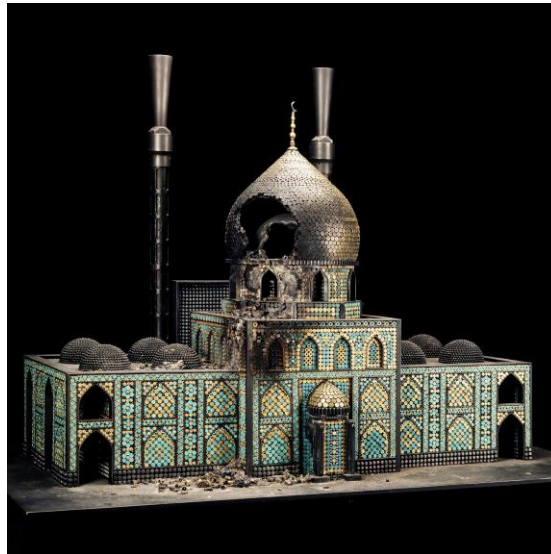
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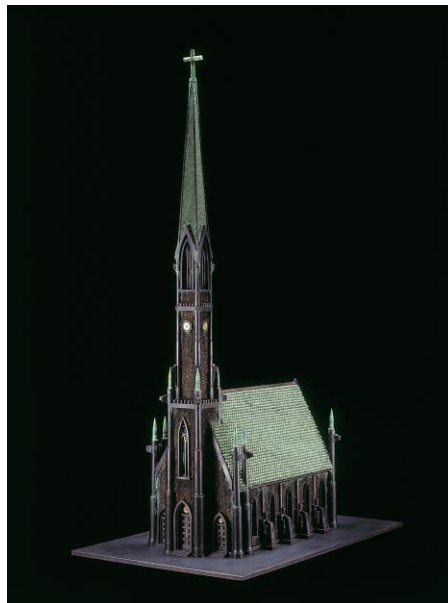
Al Farrow "Bombed Mosque," 2010. Guns, gun parts, bullets, shell casings, lead pellets, steel, 40 x 56 x 34-1/4 inches. Courtesy of Forum Gallery.

Al Farrow's meticulously crafted sculptures are both haunting and mesmerizing. Using materials such as deconstructed guns, bullets, bone, glass, and steel, Farrow creates ornate religious structures, ritual objects, and reliquaries that are visually striking and emotionally confounding. Through these shockingly beautiful sculptures, Farrow examines the abiding relationships between religion and violence, peace and brutality, the sacred and the unholy.

This unique exploration began after a trip to Italy when Farrow was confronted with a reliquary containing the remains of an ancient Saint. Reliquaries, which are containers that store and display precious relics, were often crafted of or enrobed in opulent materials such as gold, silver, ivory, enamel, and gems. The ornate objects were a major form of artistic production

across Europe and Byzantium throughout the Middle Ages and at one time, these highly embellished objects adorned every altar.

In an essay featured in the exhibition catalogue published by Forum Gallery for the show *Al Farrow: Wrath and Reverence*, Diana L. Daniels, the Curator of Contemporary Art at the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, California, writes, "In San Lorenzo's crypt, in 1995, Al Farrow encountered the inexplicable strangeness of a withered finger thus ensconced. The event sparked a cascade of thought in which he questioned the mystery, paying no mind to the saint, finding himself powerfully stirred by the finger's presentation: bent and lean, encased in glass, and surrounded by worked silver. Its fantastical appearance, locked like a finger with stenosing tenosynovitis (better known as trigger finger) in its artful home struck him not only as bizarre, but incongruous." Farrow's thoughts turned to the contemporary political climate, religion, war, history, culture, and faith, provoking reflections that ultimately served as the impetus behind the works featured in *Wrath and Reverence*.



Al Farrow "Revelation II," 2010. Guns, gun parts, bullets, shell casings, lead shot, steel, polycarbonate, bible with facsimile of Albrecht Durer's "Four Horseman of the Apocalypse." Courtesy of Forum Gallery.

Forum Gallery, which is located in New York's historic Crown Building on Fifth Avenue, is currently hosting *Al Farrow: Wrath and Reverence*. On view through May 2, 2015, the show presents churches, synagogues, mosques, a mausoleum, Jewish ritual objects, and Christian casket

reliquaries, all rendered from munitions. The highly detailed structures exhibit realistic proportions and authentic architectural elements. Daniels writes, "In the guns disassembled on his worktable Farrow derives the elements of architecture, from Doric columns to jamb figures, flying buttresses, and even minarets."



Al Farrow "Skull of Santo Guerro II," 2011. Artillery shells, bullets, shell casings, gun parts, steel, glass, crucifix, skull, glass lenses. H. 32 x W. 18 x D. 18 inches. Courtesy of Forum Gallery.

Among the works on view are *Bombed Mosque*, a monumental sculpture that took Farrow a year to create in his California studio, using over 50,000 disarmed bullets and shell casings. The sculpture features a central dome typical of Islamic religious architecture and is decorated with an elaborate pattern, a defining element in Islamic art, formed from alternating oxidized and polished brass shell casings. Standing in sharp contrast to the almost meditative pattern of the decoration, the mosque's dome bares a gaping hole on one side. A pile of rubble lays on ground below. The jarring juxtaposition is meant to address the conflict between sects within the same religion, specifically the Shia and Sunni denominations of Islam.

Visual contradictions, which hint at an underlying discord, are apparent in many of the works on view in *Wrath and Reverence*. In *Skull of Santo Guerro (II)*, a human skull is seemingly trapped in a glass case. Laid atop oxidized ammunition casings, the unsettling form gazes up at a brass crucifix. In *Revelation II*, the tower of a Protestant church reaches to the heavens, while a copy of Albrecht Durer's grim etching *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* lies in the austere structure

below. In *Menorah (Fence II)*, two rigid lines of barbed wire support nine shell casings, each holding a solemn white candle, joining the pure with the sinister.



Al Farrow "Menorah (Fence II)," 2011. Bullets, shell casings, barbed wire, steel. 23 x 32 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Forum Gallery.

Farrow's work does not focus on a certain religion, but on religion as whole, exposing the unfortunate repetition of history and the inescapable battle of mankind. In the exhibition catalogue's Forward, Chris Hedges, a celebrated American journalist, activist, humanitarian, and minister, writes that all of the works in *Wrath and Reverence* force us to "confront not only the role institutionalized religion plays in war, but the religion of war...In taking instruments of violence and annihilation, and creating objects of macabre beauty that open our eyes to the perversion of war, Farrow turns this hijacking upside down. He reclaims the sacred."

After the exhibition closes at Forum Gallery, *Al Farrow: Wrath and Reverence* will go on view at the Crocker Art Museum (October 11, 2015-January 3, 2016); the 21C Museum in Louisville, Kentucky (March 24-September 16, 2016); the Catherine Clark Gallery in San Francisco, California (Fall 2016); Aeroplastics Contemporary in Brussels, Belgium (2016); and Mac at the Cedars in Dallas, Texas (2017).