

Al Farrow



Artistic arsenal arrives at Crocker
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Using guns and ammunition as building materials, artist Al Farrow contrasts the violence, misunderstandings, fundamentalisms and perversions of power threatening many societies today. 32 of Farrow's sculptures are on their way to the Crocker Museum along with preparatory sketches that compel viewers to consider how modern socio-political conflicts have come to be. The exhibition, "Divine Ammunition: The Sculpture of Al Farrow," will open its gallery doors Oct. 11.

Combining Uzi parts, copper bullets, brass casings and steel shot, Farrow frames and builds perfectly scaled, elaborately detailed religious monuments and sculptures dedicated to invented saints and sacred wars. These materials saturate cathedrals, synagogues, mosques, mausoleums and reliquaries with a heady alchemy of meanings that compel the viewer to consider the history behind present-day conflicts. The exhibition also examines the profound creative leap the artist made in 1996 when he first began to use guns and ammo as his materials.

An internationally exhibited artist, Farrow's career spans 45 years. Working in his San Rafael studio, he has honed his fascination with social critique resulting in the series of works featured in "Divine Ammunition." Whether a cathedral, mosque, or synagogue, each sculpture represents the artist's carefully reconsidered, fully contemporary

conceptualization of Medieval and Renaissance reliquaries. Just as these were made to hold some remnant of a saint or saint's effects, so do Farrow's. While he might include a human finger joint or leg bone in his creations, these are ascribed to wholly imaginary figures such as Farrow's invented Santo Guerro, the Saint of War.

"Something clicked when I started using real guns and bullets," Farrow said. His new material choices allow for wit, play and weighty seriousness. What makes his work stand apart from others drawn to such materials is the astonishment at the mastery Farrow possesses in transforming the basic elements of destruction into creation. His vision, combined with his material choices, results in objects that inspire awe and provoke meditation. For some viewers, the realization that guns and ammo comprise the sculptures tends to be jolting, a guttural response Farrow sees as a "reaction that reveals far more about the viewer than it does the artist."

Ultimately, Farrow's sculptures seek our consideration of what we think we know about history and religious symbols, contrasting it with what we might seek to better understand. The feat is both a triumph of concept and craftsmanship. Farrow's *Spine and Tooth of Santo Guerro* (2007), for example, weighs over 1,000 pounds and *Bombed Mosque* (2010) — a work examining how widely symbols vary within sects belonging to the same religion — took two years to create, requiring 50,000 bullets and shell cartridges, ultimately weighing in at 780 pounds.

The exhibition, which runs through Jan. 3 will be complemented by an artist talk with Al Farrow on Oct. 18, a panel talk discussing art and activism on Nov. 19 and a panel talk exploring satirical cartooning and the limits of free speech on Jan. 28. In celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Crocker's Teel Family Pavilion addition, Divine Ammunition will be open for a special preview on Oct. 10.

The Crocker Art Museum is located at 216 O Street in downtown Sacramento. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday–Sunday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursdays. For more information, call (916) 808-7000 or visit crockerartmuseum.org.