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Reviews

BOSTON

DAVE COLE

JUDI ROTENBERG GALLERY

With US troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan for much of the past decade, one may safely assume that the “war on terror” has wound its way into the inner recesses of the collective American psyche. Dave Cole’s second solo exhibition, considered within the genealogy of postwar American art, suggests that all registers of civilian life have been radically transformed in the wake of September 11, 2001.

Cole articulates this new reality through his militarized adaptation of the Stars and Stripes. Updating Jasper Johns’s iconic artwork from the mid-1950s by using recovered bullets and bullet fragments in place of encaustic, oil, and collage, *Bullet Flag* (2008) suggests that the operations of power have lodged themselves within forms of national identity. This new world order lays the groundwork for Cole’s more eerily disturbing pieces, children’s clothes fabricated from Kevlar bulletproof vests worn in the Gulf War and “military issued” baby bottles cast from Babbitt metal. As far-fetched as these items may seem, they are only a step behind the adaptation of camouflage and Humvees as civilian commodities.

Art practice, Cole reveals, cannot be isolated from modern forms of power. In *Knitting with Loaded Shotguns (Safeties Off)* (2008), a large spun-bronze scarf knitted by the artist, as the title suggests, with two loaded 12-gauge shotguns, he implicates all material practices and means of visual representation, no matter how seemingly innocent, as equally involved in the production of America’s current martial mentality. This point is driven home in the sculptural readymade *Baseball Study #6* (2008), in which a juxtaposed baseball and grenade (à la Johns’s *Ballantine Ale*) indict the rampant psychosis that often constitutes what is today considered “all-American.” —NUIT BANAI



Dave Cole, *Knitting with Loaded Shotguns (Safeties Off)*, 2008. Spun statuary bronze with 12-gauge shotguns, 72 x 102 x 37 in.