

Rhode Island

**I.M.A.G.I.N.E.s** PEACE

A Metals Exhibition

October 7-29, 2021

### **Internationally celebrated comedian Trevor Noah's memoir *Born a Crime***

is this year's common book here at Rhode Island College. Its wit and humor does little to dampen the ferocity of racism, poverty, and domestic violence that troubled Noah's childhood in South Africa's apartheid and its aftermath. Guns play no small part, and Noah treats them with both irreverence and gravity as he describes scenes and events. Colonial armies, locked and loaded, slaughtered Indigenous communities. Police donned riot gear and poked guns out of armored vehicles. One time, police brandishing machine guns raided a party where Noah was DJing. He recalls how one cop "pulled this massive assault rifle on me," and when Noah couldn't shut down his system quickly enough, the flustered cop shot Noah's equipment, destroying the hard drive and years of hard work. In another encounter with police, the public bus Noah and his friends rode was pulled over and they were targeted. Police falsely accused them of carrying a gun, threw them in jail, and questioned them one by one. The last chapter of the book focuses on Noah's mother's brutal encounter with her gun toting ex-husband.

While Noah's South Africa might seem far flung from today's United States, there are interesting parallels. Guns contribute to the genocide of and continued violence inflicted upon Indigenous people, target people of color at higher rates, and escalate domestic abuse. These issues plague gun culture in the United States. However, possession of guns in the United States is expanding and growing more deadly, while South Africa has made efforts and progress in controlling gun violence.

In 2013, the United States had the highest rate of private gun ownership at almost 89 guns for every 100 people, and over 67% of homicides were by firearm. The same year, South Africa's rate was almost 13 guns per 100 people and the rate of homicides by gun was 45%. Fast forward to the past couple of years and firearm sales in the US increased dramatically, bringing civilian ownership to 120 guns per 100 people, and about 75% of homicides were by firearm. In South Africa, there are less than 10 guns per 100 people, but guns are still involved in 45% of homicides (an increase from previous years attributed to increased firearm ownership). South Africa has seen progress. One 2015-2016 study showed that the number of deaths by guns had cut in half from 1998. A report from 2014 asserts that South Africa's Firearms Control Act saved over 4,500 lives between 2001 and 2005. In contrast, gun culture in the United States remains an escalating epidemic, as durable as guns themselves.

Yet, gun violence isn't irrepressible and guns aren't indestructible. South Africa shows that positive change is possible. At the heart of this exhibition is hope for transformation in the US.

Rhode Island I.M.A.G.I.N.E.s (Innovative Merger of Art and Guns to Inspire New Expressions) Peace was inspired by and continues the work of independent Rhode Island artist Boris Bally. Like similar art exhibitions, such as *Guns in the Hands of Artists* (2014-2015), *UNLOADED* (2016), and *Art of Peace* (2019), we encourage dialogue about the intersection of art and activism in the context of gun culture. Charged with transforming decommissioned guns, defunct objects of destruction, into aesthetic objects of contemplation, artists in this exhibition draw attention to facets of gun culture and violence. Discarded materials gain new life, assert a new material presence, and ask questions about the role firearms play in the United States.

Firearms are an increasing cause of death for American children and teens. Over 5,000 youths suffered gunshot wounds in 2020 and a quarter died. More children died by gunfire last year than ever recorded, and the data for 2021 seems unchanged. Black children and teens are 14 times more likely than white children and teens of the same age to die by gun homicide. The impact of guns on children and teens inspired some of this exhibition's artists in their transformations.

RIC alumna Lauren DelBrocco's *Curiosity* invites the viewer to peep through the gun's cylinder slots to spy either a faceted stone or a bullet, reminiscent of a child's kaleidoscope or the classic ViewMaster. In *229 Under 13* Tim Lazure also uses faceted stones, here to represent the 229 children under 13 years old who were killed in gun violence from 2012 to 2014. His piece transforms the weapon into a shovel, the proverbial sword into a plowshare. Michael Nashef's *Degrees of Degradation* explodes into three rings evoking the growing circles of those impacted by gun violence.

Other artists' transformations draw attention to the material presence challenging the weapon's durability. Hoss Haley's *Reclamation* retains some original forms even after being pressed by 100 tons of pressure by hydraulic mold into a cube shape, weighted down with melted lead. The flaccid tubes and voids make it difficult to determine what was muzzle or trigger guard, evoking pop art. Displayed on a rectangular wooden pedestal, this sculpture also recalls the objecthood of minimalism further neutering the visual force of a rigid gun. In *Potential Material*, John Huckins has melted the steel down to a polished, flat prism asking "what could it be next?"

Guns are pervasive in the media and pop art techniques help gravity and whimsy coalesce. Shingo Furukawa's *Untitled (Be a Cowboy)* is an irreverent approach that takes the "sophisticated killing machine" and transforms it into "something a bit amusing, a bit absurd" (his words).

The gilded weapon in his kinetic sculpture hides and reveals a miniature red plastic cowboy, again a child's toy, but here for irreverence rather than memorializing. In *GAME OVER*, Stefan Gougherty has created a neon green outline and overlay to display information about the revolver and evoke the graphics of video games.

Two large scale sculptures, one by Peter Tenney and Howie Sneider and the other by Peter Diepenbrock, make defunct weapons dance with visual arabesques. Tenney and Sneider's *Stop, Dwell, Repeat* turns rifles into a kinetic fountain, inviting viewers to reflect on the previous lives of these weapons and potentially lives lost when someone fired them. Diepenbrock's *American DNA, Revealed* is a rotating dense helix suspended from the ceiling with various types of firearms pointing outward. The pathology is there to read, but now time to look for treatment.

Matthew Coté's *Necktie (Signature Collection)* is the only work that elicits suicide, which is responsible for 60% of gun deaths in the United States, the most common form of death by firearm. About half of the Americans who commit suicide do so with guns. A literal chain around the neck holds a blue and white striped tie that hides the deadly weapon and recalls the invisibility of this sector of gun violence.

Many targets of gun homicide are not visible in this exhibition and gun violence isn't equitably distributed across the US population. People of color and LGBTQ+ folks are more often killed than their white, straight, or cis-gender counterparts. In the reverse, the art world is persistently exclusive, populated by those most insulated from gun violence, those with the most privilege. As Noah explains in his memoir, much of the gun violence in South Africa was engineered through colonialism and racist policies to assert white supremacy and enforce Black oppression. It is state sanctioned terrorism, parallel to gun violence in the US. Guns in the hands of law enforcement (official and self-appointed) are too often used to terrorize and kill people of color. The Black Lives Matter movement was born of the resistance to this terror. Many communities struggle to imagine peace without a piece for their own protection.

When we imagine peace in this exhibition, we hope for peace for all those victimized by gun violence. We hope for a transformation in gun policy, gun culture, all forms of racism, generational poverty and trauma, gender-based and domestic violence, and approaches to public health and safety.

— Sara Picard  
Associate Professor of Art History  
Rhode Island College

Matthew Coté  
*Necktie (Signature Collection)*

2020

Brass, bronze, nickel, silver, steel sheet, steel chain, cotton, polyester, and a revolver  
23.5" x 6" x 4"



Lauren DelBrocco

*Curiosity*

2019

Dismantled hand gun, silver, brass, acrylic glass, copper

8" x 2" x 4"



Shingo Furukawa

*Untitled (Be a Cowboy)*

2019

Steel, brass, aluminum, found objects/materials

10 1/2" x 6" x 4.5"



Peter Diepenbrock  
*The Gun Collection – Submersion Project*  
2019  
Wood, mixed media, epoxy  
48" x 30" x 2.5"



Peter Diepenbrock,  
*American DNA, Revealed*  
2019  
Guns, steel, bronze brazing  
65" x 30" x 30"



Ingrid Goldbloom Bloch

*Child's Play*

2019

Decommissioned Glock, springs, Apoxie Sculpt, auto paint

10 1/2" x 5 1/2" x 3/4"



Stefan Gougherty

*GAME OVER*

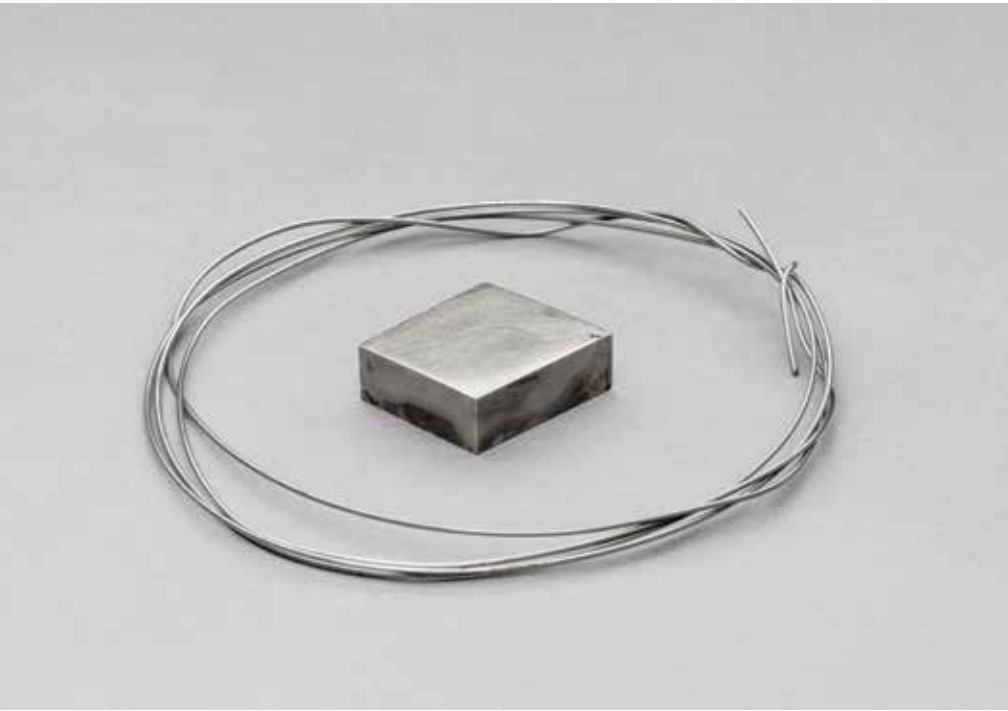
2019

Deactivated revolver, stainless steel, industrial paint

4.5" x 10" x 6.5"



John Huckins  
*Ingot & Wire*  
2020  
Recycled firearm  
10" x 10"



Hoss Haley  
*Reclamation*  
2019  
Steel, lead, wood  
12" x 5.5" x 5.5"



Rob Jackson

*Concealment*

2019

Decommissioned handgun, silver

3" x 4.5" x 1.5"



Nicole Jacquard

*An Unfortunate Education*

2020

Galvanized steel, wood, silver, acrylic, mica, brass, enamel, copper, paint, derringer gun

11" x 14" x 11"





Niki Johnson

Stripes

2019

Altered 32 caliber revolver, manufactured by US Revolver Company ca. 1910

8" x 2" x 5"



Terry Lavin

Go Ahead, Make My Day (and other cliches)

2020

Cast and fabricated brass and copper, cherry, ebony, handgun

10.5" x 4.75" x 12"



Tim Lazure

*229 Under 13*

2019

Decommissioned gun, copper, stainless steel, 229 gem stones, silver, ebony  
20" x 6" x 4"

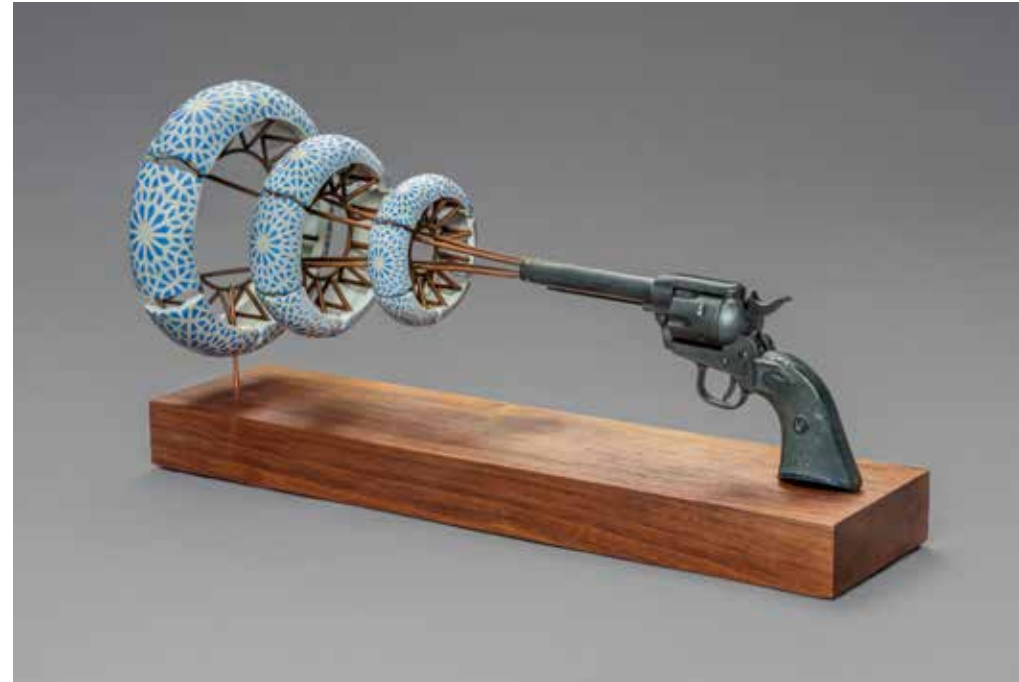


Michael Nashef

*Degrees of Degradation*

2019

Concrete, dyed concrete, copper, brass, steel  
22" x 12" x 10"



John Rais  
*Playtime*  
2020  
Steel, gun, patina, paint  
25" x 20" x 12"



Catherine Rubery  
*CHANGE*  
2019  
Brass, silver, and disabled gun  
12" x 4"



Howie Sneider and Peter Tenney  
*Stop, Dwell, Repeat*  
2020  
Mixed sculpture  
50" x 50" x 48"



Peter Snyder  
*"These are very, very good people."*  
2019  
Ash wood with pyrography, plasticene clay, iron oxide wash and acrylics, and handgun  
9" diameter x 11"



Billie Theide

*Imagine*

2020

Charter Arms Undercover .38 Special Revolver, commemorative postage stamps, cotton  
13" x 8" x 1.5"

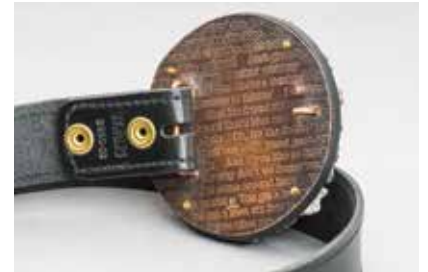


James Thurman

*Saturday Night Special (dump 'em to the bottom of the sea)*

2019

Belt buckle (recycled gun parts, Thurmanite, rubber gasket, copper, pewter, microhardware)  
4" x 4" x 1.25"



Jennifer Walstead  
*"Kill 'em with Kindness" Necklace*

2019

Brass, copper, silver, freshwater pearls, faux pearls, gun fragments  
12" x 6.5"



Stephen Yusko  
*Collateral Cathedral*

2019

Forge-welded firearms, steel, wood, silver leaf, paint, 18k gold  
12" x 2" x 5 3/4"



**R H O D E  
I S L A N D  
C O L L E G E**

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October 7-29, 2021

Sponsored by  
the Rhode Island College Art Club,  
Metalsmiths Club and Artist Co-Op

Organized by  
Boris Bally  
Victoria Gao  
Sara Picard  
Dianne Reilly

Gallery Hours:  
M-F, 12-8 pm

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