

TWO ARTISTS' FIREPOWER TURNS INTO FLOWER POWER ; GUNS PLANT THE SEED OF PEACE IN A SHOW CREATED TO NURTURE SOLUTIONS FOR A VIOLENT WORLD; [City Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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Humes said he and Scalin thought about the "seed ball as a seed bomb and how many ways to come up with a form ... that people would buy these and throw them into an area." They thought about fireworks, artillery, weapons - "warfare with the completely opposite intent."

"It just popped into our heads - guns. A gun takes a life. Let's reverse the process," Humes said. Once the guns are sown, they disappear, and in their place sprout flowers.

Full Text (725 words)

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During the past two days, Christopher Humes and Noah Scalin had to make five more guns.

"It's not fun," Humes said, standing Wednesday in his hot, backyard shed beside the guns he has already crafted and lined up like ochre tombstones. "It's not a craft you can get pleasure from."

It is, though, art. And it makes a statement that seems obvious but can get pretty obscure, or eclectic, or diverse, or broad.

The guns are made of clay, humus and wildflower seeds. They are made from a mold of a 9 mm pistol, the gun Humes and Scalin chose as "the most common symbol of violence. A 9 mm is pretty much the weapon," Humes said.

They had to make five more of them because the number of homicide victims in Richmond keeps climbing. There have been 45 this year, according to the police, not counting a man killed by an officer and another homicide being handled by Virginia Commonwealth University.

If there is another homicide before their art show opens tonight at Chop Suey Books they'll make another gun.

Humes, 30, an architect, and Scalin, 32, a self-employed graphic artist, came up with the idea for the guns during hours of discussion.

"I was offered space to do an art show," Humes said. "At the same time I was researching seeds," so the idea of using seeds in the art was a natural.

Humes had read about guerrilla gardeners, activists in other cities who made their statements with seed balls. Native Americans used seed balls, which are simply scattered on the ground rather than planted.

The seeds are protected from predators and kept from blowing away because they're encased in clay. When enough rain finally comes, the seeds sprout and use the fertilizer in the ball as nourishment.

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They thought about the war, but they didn't want to make a simple anti-war statement. So they thought and talked about what's going on locally.

"It just popped into our heads - guns. A gun takes a life. Let's reverse the process," Humes said. Once the guns are sown, they disappear, and in their place sprout flowers.

The show is called "Swords into Plowshares." It takes its title from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

Humes said he doesn't want to "come off as completely anti-war" and he also doesn't want to be lumped in with the anti-gun crowd. Though the show's sponsors include Drums No Guns, the Richmond Peace Education Center and Citizens Against Crime, he also doesn't want to be "engaged in any one organization." He added, though, that he wants to generate attention for all of the sponsors.

"What I hope comes of this is some kind of community outrage. I want to educate ... about agriculture, gardening, simple life- giving things."

Kris Iden saw the guns at an earlier installation at its last showing at Upcast Gallery, 321 Brook Road. She bought one.

"I was really touched by it," she said. By planting the gun- shaped seed ball, a person becomes part of the process of generating life.

For her, it wasn't just about guns or even the increasing number of homicides in the city. "Violence is a bigger issue. We are violent to each other, we always have been. It's part of our species."

Iden, who also is an artist, said "Swords into Plowshares" "is so beautifully designed, it's so thoughtful, not melodramatic."

War and violence are on all our minds these days, she said. "Swords into Plowshares" turns our attention to another life force.

Iden, who lives in Church Hill, yesterday set her gun out to grow.

THE EXHIBIT

"Swords into Plowshares" opens tonight at Chop Suey Books, 1317 W. Cary St. The opening reception is from 6 to 8 p.m. The show will run at Chop Suey through July 31.

For more information go to www.PlantThePiece.org

[Illustration]

PHOTO

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People: Humes, Christopher, Scalin, Noah, Iden, Kris
Section: *AREA/STATE*
Text Word Count 725
Document URL: