

April 30 - August 8, 2010

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SARAH FROST

(Born in 1967 in Detroit. Lives and works in St. Louis)

Sarah Frost received a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and painting from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from Washington University in St. Louis. Recent exhibitions have been presented at Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis; Regional Arts Commission, St. Louis; Foundry Art Centre, St. Charles, Missouri; Mad Art Gallery, St. Louis; The Jacoby Arts Center, Alton, Illinois; and Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Mt. Vernon, Illinois. She has recently exhibited in New York, and has been awarded grants from Arts in Transit, St. Louis and the Missouri Arts Council.

Cover image:
Pistol, 2010
Paper, glue
Courtesy of the artist



Sniper Rifle Tutorial (still), 2010

Captured You Tube video still
Courtesy of the artist

Great Rivers Biennial 2010 is generously supported by the Gateway Foundation.

General support for the Contemporary's exhibitions program is generously provided by the Whitaker Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; William E. Weiss Foundation; Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer Brown; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Regional Arts Commission; Arts and Education Council; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Special thanks to Chase Park Plaza Hotel, Glazer's Midwest, and Midwest Valet.



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Great Rivers Biennial 2010

Sarah Frost

Arsenal

Interested in the history of objects, Sarah Frost creates large-scale installations and sculptures using materials as diverse as computer keyboards, Bundt pans, and toilet-seat covers. Her work not only serves as a reminder of our object-driven culture, but also demonstrates a desire for the personal through her use of cold masses of forgotten objects. Laura Fried interviews Frost about her simultaneous interest in the finely crafted and the ready-made, revealed in her new, monumental installation in the galleries.

LAURA FRIED: Sarah, in your newest installation, you've combined a cascading paper cloud with photographic stills. On first encounter, we recognize the material as a catalog of handmade paper artillery and the photographs as video stills of the

boys who made them. Could you describe the project?

SARAH FROST: While browsing You Tube, I stumbled upon a paper-sniper-rifle tutorial made by an adolescent boy and subsequently discovered hundreds of similar videos of boys showing off their homemade paper guns. I was amazed by the ingenuity and functionality of the guns: shotguns that pump and spit out paper rounds; six-shooters with spinning chambers; guns with folding or extendable stocks; and so forth. The guns are made of the simplest materials, paper and tape, and are built using simple tubular forms, yet they are surprisingly sophisticated. I felt simultaneously attracted to the inventiveness and formal qualities of the guns and stunned by the knowledge the boys had about the workings of the guns.

The You Tube community itself is interesting because of the dialogue surrounding the boys' handiwork. Community members critique each other's work and collaborate on how to solve a specific technical problem, such as how to construct the curved form of a magazine. From a sculptor's point of view, this was exciting, even in this surprising form.

For the Great Rivers Biennial, I initially had a formal idea for the space at the Contemporary. The clerestory windows are a defining characteristic of the space. They have always drawn my eye upward toward their natural light and my attention to the distinctive height of the galleries and space above the exhibited works. I wanted to activate that space and thought of these windows as a point of departure for a piece that cascaded downward. The subject and formal idea came together as I worked with the paper guns; it became clear that the negative space around the guns was important and that suspending them was a solution. I tried to activate the space of the gallery through their dynamic configuration and to make the viewer want to walk among them, to walk a sort of gauntlet.

While the form of the installation in the gallery was important, communicating that these guns are re-creations of found forms was critical. The stills give a sense of the authors of these forms, and reveal a range of abilities in this online community.

FRIED: Following your practice for the last couple of years, I've

seen a rigorous attention to the found form as material for your large-scale built environments. You construct a texture, and indeed an architecture, through the found, the discarded, the plastic, and the handmade. What is the relationship between the object and the built environment in your work?

FROST: Many of my recent works rely on scale to create a sense that the viewer is within a larger framework. I often employ hundreds or thousands of similar units in an installation; together these units create a space that dwarfs or contains the viewer. The particular materials used are evocative of this framework, such as communications systems, technology, or commodity. I am also interested phenomenology—the idea that our knowledge of the world is gained through our bodies, both our physical and visual experience. I like the idea that one may first perceive my work and be drawn toward it without knowing what the forms are.

FRIED: In past works, you largely drew from found materials, but this installation brings craftsmanship and the homemade to the fore. Can you elaborate on this new direction?

FROST: For the past several years, I've worked with either found objects themselves or found form that I re-create in a different medium or context. For example, I have worked with found form by casting it in metal, plaster, or paper; through casting, the form of the original object remains but is transformed by the new material. I have also re-created found forms by fabricating them in a different scale, quantity, material, or in a different context. In short, I like to access the history inherent in found objects, and both ways of working facilitate this. Sometimes I just like making things.

FRIED: The culture of war and weaponry is part of the popular imagination, from the shootings at Columbine to violent video games and the collective trauma of war. How did you come upon your chosen form?

FROST: I try to make work that is of the moment. In this case, You Tube is only about five years old, and such an online community seems current. At the same time, our country has a military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our culture is full of guns. Love them or hate them, guns are

all around us.

FRIED: The hostile role of weaponry is belied in your project. From the You Tube stills picturing cute and clever kids hosting their own instructional videos, to the suspended delicacy of your installation, the latent violence is muted. How do you see these tensions playing out in your project?

FROST: Found objects or forms reflect upon a culture and the people who used them. The artist in this case plays the role of an anthropologist. This project appealed to me because it was thought provoking on its own terms; if only I could re-present them, the paper guns could collectively raise so many questions. I don't have an answer to these questions, but in my mind, this work touches on fragility, the need to be part of a community, sexuality and masculine identity, as well as the more obvious issues of guns and violence.