



Artist Statement

I am an artist, art writer and educator from Chicago, currently based in Michigan. I began my career in metalsmithing and fibers, focusing on the conceptual potential of functional objects. It is through this background that I gained a deep fascination with the diaristic capacity of everyday items; even the most mundane things have the ability to reveal truths about the social systems of which they are a product. In this way, banal objects such as clothing from a thrift store, children's toys, and national flags can be seen as keys to our collective psyche; they contain the story of our past mistakes, our current woes, and our hopes for the future.

Toys are of particular interest to me as evidence of a culture's accepted narratives about childhood and innocence. One of my recent bodies of work, titled *War Games*, is made from toys that allow children to pretend to be soldiers or police officers – effectively agents of state-sanctioned violence. My versions of these toys flirt with ambivalence: they are both toy and weapon, signifier and signified. While childhood play is often seen as a separate, safe space, it is clear that real violence and play violence overlap and influence one another, creating a murky line between safety and danger. The surreal toys presented here seem disconcertingly new, disturbingly familiar, and vaguely threatening; objects that remark on the insidious ways that the threat of violence impacts American domestic life. A question hangs over the work: what will keep us safe?

My ongoing series *Capture the Flag* and *False Flags* use the American flag to question the relationship between a symbol and its meaning. Here, the visual language of the U.S. flag is distorted. Stripes blur together, disappearing, re-emerging, fading, and transforming. The viewer is asked to reconsider not only what they're seeing, but what these new flags might tell us. The American flag is meant to represent the best parts of the United States, but what would it look like if other complex features of the current state of the nation were more



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visually salient? The deep social and political divisions in American daily life, along with the resilience, distress, and fear felt by many of its peoples are expressed visually through a variety of physical alterations.

Through my work, I investigate the complexity of American identity in the 21st century, and how that identity is made manifest through visual language. Like many symbols, those associated with American identity are both sacred and profane in nature. As a sacred object, the American flag is used to cover the caskets of fallen soldiers, but as a profane image it is used as a print for bikinis, bumper stickers, even toilet paper. A gun can be associated with the founding of the United States and the sacred duty of police officers to protect their community; yet this symbol is also fraught, bearing with it a history of institutional violence and brutal subjugation.

While visual symbols are often imagined to be immutable, they are in fact shifting signifiers whose meaning changes according to context, and how one interprets these symbols is often used as a way to delineate between social groups. Besides being reductive and potentially dangerous, this method of categorization can show the extreme limitation of these American icons. Complex ideas, emotions, and histories deserve complex symbols. Using the vocabulary of surrealism and pop-art, I deconstruct, combine, and repurpose this American visual shorthand, creating objects which seem frozen in transition, caught between contradictory states of being. By destroying, investigating, and ultimately rebuilding common symbols associated with American identity, I aim to question the relationship between signifier and signified, image and object, sacred and profane.