

Conrad Atkinson & Landmines

Conrad Atkinson has been working with landmine imagery throughout his artistic career. In 1997 he was invited to be the official artist of the US Campaign to Ban Landmines (Vietnam Veterans of America). The landmine sculptures are covered in images both from popular culture, such as the late Princess Diana and *Gone With The Wind* references (Atlanta is the home of the landmine), as well as decorative patterns and historical, often religious, works of art. By having the decorated landmines manufactured to his specifications, Atkinson imbues these horrific objects with a "kitsch factor" that calls attention to the ease with which these weapons are manufactured, distributed and integrated into the global village.

Artist's Statement

Landmines are not only functional weapons of destruction that cost three dollars to make and three hundred to deactivate, but will continue to kill children at random for the next thousand years at the current cleanup rate. They are also objects of political, economic and cultural significance, serving as metaphors for a variety of contemporary issues and ideologies. Landmines represent the globalization of culture as much as the Golden Arches of McDonald's. We love our beautiful bombs: they defend our way of life. By bringing these symbolic values into focus, I have tried to offer a different and more productive perspective on our propensity for creatively destroying each other. From Goya to *Guernica*, from Roger Fenton to Don McCullin, artists have sought new, more effective ways to picture war and horror. But the image of children with bandaged limbs and missing legs - like all images of human tragedy - produces only compassion fatigue when repeated several hundred times. Rather than seeking to represent this horror literally, I have focused on its source. We are imbricated with these weapons, ideologically economically and imaginatively. In this sense, imagination has itself become a source of death and destruction. Like Bob Dylan wrote on his guitar, "this weapon kills".