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EHREN TOOL: PRODUCTION OR DESTRUCTION

May 27 – September 9, 2012

Former Marine and ceramist Ehren Tool exhibits war awareness work at CAFAM



393, installation view, stoneware with glaze and ceramic decals, 2004. Image: Ian Martin/Courtesy of the artist



Untitled, photograph, 2008.
Image: Ian Martin/Courtesy of the artist

LOS ANGELES — Coinciding with Memorial Day, the Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) presents *Ehren Tool: Production or Destruction*, a solo exhibition of ceramist and former Marine, Ehren Tool. Emblazoned with haunting images of armed conflict, Tool creates handmade ceramic cups as a medium to address war and the violent rhetoric and imagery used to perpetuate it. The exhibition will feature 1,000 handcrafted cups, video, installation, photographs, and printed materials.

Twenty years after his service in the first Gulf War, Tool's firsthand contact with the reality of war is manifest in the thousands of cups he dutifully produces. The cups will be exhibited at CAFAM in "units" based on military formations of "squads" (13), "platoons" (55), and "companies" (225), serving as a visual reminder of each Marine within a military unit. Each cup is uniquely crafted, decorated with ceramic decals of soldiers' photos, propaganda, war porn, and sculptural reliefs shaped like bombs, guns, or medals.

Recent events such as the Occupy movements and the incendiary language of current election campaigns figure strongly in his new work, as well as veteran suicides and stories of U.S. Marines desecrating bodies of the deceased. Other imagery alludes to the culpability of video games, toys, and pornography in desensitizing the public to the emotional toll of war.

Tool insists that his art is not anti-war, and prefers to characterize it as "war awareness" work. "It is not my intention to teach or preach. It is not possible to communicate the pain, waste, or intensity of war. My work deals with the uneasy collision, and collusion, between military and civilian cultures," he says.

By putting people in contact with the imagery of war through an everyday household item, he hopes to make people think more often about war and its consequences in a meaningful way. "Letter to President Obama" (2009) is among the several letters he wrote to national and corporate heads urging them to consider the outcome of supporting continued war efforts. He also sent a cup to each of these leaders, which elicited responses from politicians such as Karl Rove.

Though the cups are functional drinking vessels, they are also memory objects that contain unspoken stories about fallen soldiers and wounded survivors. The installation "393" (2004) is a striking display of 393 shattered cups that represent the number of U.S. combat casualties during the first year of the second Gulf War. In the video "1.5 Second War Memorial," a different cup is shot to pieces every 1.5 seconds, each signifying a soldier or civilian who has died in a war.



One of Thousands, glazed stoneware, 2010
Courtesy of the artist



One of Thousands, stoneware with glaze,
ceramic decals, 2010. Courtesy of the artist

Tool will be on-site at CAFAM for an artist residency between June 1 and June 15, where he will set up a ceramic studio in the courtyard to encourage public conversations and share his work in progress. He will be giving away all the cups he makes at CAFAM.

Ehren Tool served with the 1st Marine Division during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He attended Pasadena City College and the University of Southern California on the G.I. Bill and received his Master of Fine Arts in Art Practice from the University of California, Berkeley, CA in 2004. Tool is a visiting lecturer of ceramics in the Department of Art Practice at UC Berkeley. He has exhibited nationally and internationally, including the Bongoüt Showroom, Berlin, Germany; Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Oakland Museum of Art, Oakland, CA; Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR; College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH; and most recently at Project Slogan in Aberdeen, Scotland. Tool is a 2010 United States Artists Fellow in Crafts and Traditional Arts.

CAFAM will host an opening reception for *Ehren Tool: Production or Destruction* on Saturday, May 26 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

This exhibition is generously sponsored by The Antonia and Vladimir Kulaev Cultural Heritage Fund and The Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING:

There will be several exhibition-related programs and workshops during the run of the exhibition, including an artist residency at CAFAM with Ehren Tool.

Friday, June 1 – Friday, June 15
Artist Residency with Ehren Tool
During museum hours

Thursday, June 7
Etsy Craft Night with Combat Paper Project
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, June 9 – Sunday, June 10
Collaborative Papermaking with Combat Paper Project
12:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 19
Artist Talk with Ehren Tool
3:00 p.m.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art — all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: FREE every Sunday

Regularly: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students, teachers, seniors, and veterans; free for CAFAM members

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.