

# american craft

Glass  
Artists  
Break  
Free

Detroit:  
A New  
Mecca for  
Makers

Sneak  
Peek  
St. Paul  
Show



## Art on a Mission

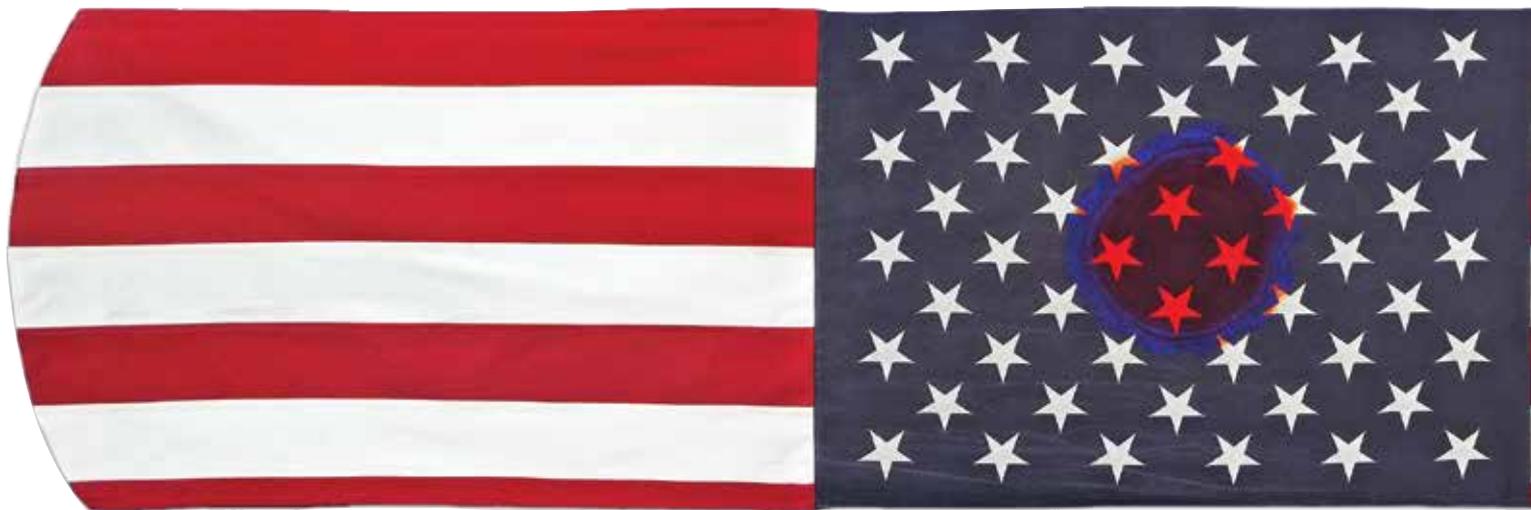
*Craftspeople turn their talents toward social change*

Julie Sirek's  
dresses speak  
for victims  
of domestic  
violence

# Visualizing Violence

INTERVIEW WITH *Kate Lydon*

BY *Julie K. Hanus*



ABOVE:  
**Kate Kretz**  
*Untitled (Flag)*,  
2008, embroidery,  
deconstructed  
canvas flag, batting,  
1.9 x 8.7 ft.



Kate Kretz

**Kate Kretz's**  
*Astray* (2012) is part  
of the Guardian Angels  
That Don't Come  
Through series.

A PECULIAR THING ABOUT violence is how it can be both omnipresent and, so often, unseen; the scope of the problem is too big, perhaps, the 24-hour news cycle too exhausting. Too much happens behind closed doors, or far away. And yet it touches all of our lives.

For “Enough Violence: Artists Speak Out,” the Society for Contemporary Craft asked 14 artists to use their unique skills to draw attention to this global problem, creating a platform for powerful meditations on war and genocide, domestic abuse, and street crime. SCC designed the exhibition as a springboard, partnering with advocacy organizations and supplementing the 40-some works with programming, a station stocked with resource materials, various hands-on activities, a classroom curriculum, and an online repository for sharing stories.

“At a time when needs are overwhelming and financial

resources are shrinking, we believe artists can offer creative leadership as problem solvers, educators, and agents for change,” SCC executive director Janet McCall observed in a catalogue essay. “Through this show, we invite you to feel, heal, transform, and become part of the solution.”

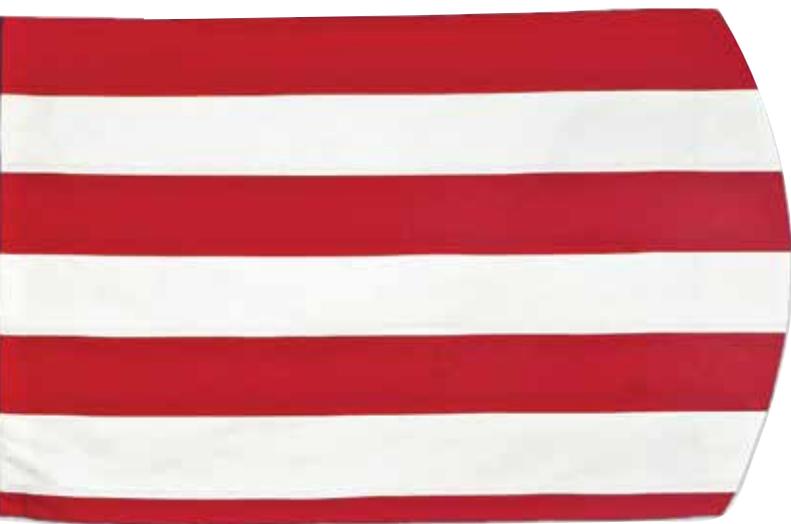
We spoke to Kate Lydon, SCC director of exhibitions, about the organization’s monumental undertaking.

## What was the impetus for this show?

One of our board members, Rolf Loeber, is a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, and has been involved in a more than 20-year study on youth violence. His work seeks to understand which people are going to have a high risk of being a perpetrator or a victim. He had come to us about four or five years ago and asked if we would be interested in doing an exhibition around the idea of violence.

*“We invite you to feel, heal, transform, and become part of the solution.”*

**JANET MCCALL**  
SCC executive director



Greg Staley

So we started a number of years back – talking about the idea and thinking about how we might pull together an exhibition like this. About a year and a half ago, as we were getting funding lined up and beginning to select the artists, we developed a real staff focus and we expanded the idea. Because we don't want people to leave

feeling depressed, like when they watch the news; we want them to leave thinking about how they can be part of the solution.

**Some of that involved partnerships with anti-violence organizations, which have been available to visitors in the gallery and through**

**programming, such as your lecture series. How else have you helped visitors focus on solutions? A lot of this work is unavoidably heavy.**

We also have a resource station with literature from those groups and a solution station, where people are invited to leave their responses to the show in the form of a written message or drawing. We have some very powerful, very personal, very difficult stories of personal violence that have been left behind, as well as messages of hope and peace and wishes for a brighter future.

**How did you prepare for this exhibition as a staff?**

Even in the early phases, we were all very concerned about the fact that we're not specialists. We talked a lot about what kinds of reactions people might have. We were concerned someone might come in and experience an emotional trigger – when the

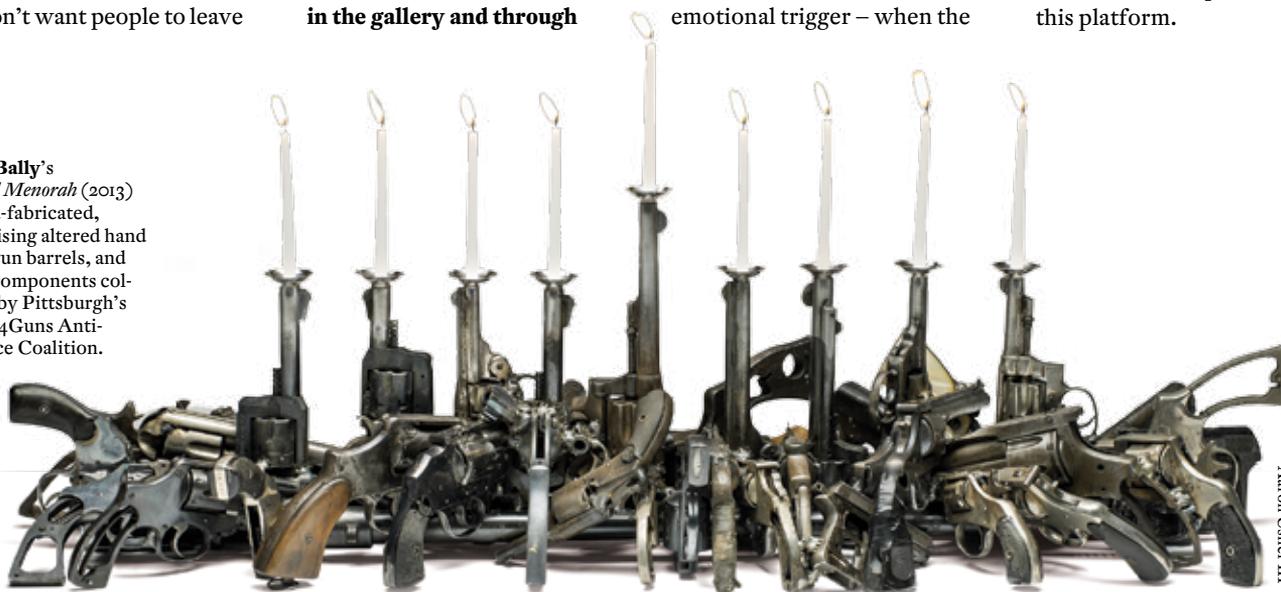
intent of the show, of course, is to support and help, to try to get people to understand these issues and want to be part of the solution.

So part of that was working with Patti Ghubril, an art therapist with the Center for Victims, who came on early as a partner. She was instrumental in various ways, and at one point she talked to the staff about trauma – the physical aspect of trauma and ways you can try to talk with people if they're experiencing a difficult trigger, how we could get them to a phone, listen to them, direct them to someone who might truly be able to help them.

**How have visitors to the show reacted so far?**

It has actually been extremely positive. People are being very thoughtful and serious about the exhibition, but also saying thank you – for the chance to view this, for providing this platform.

**Boris Bally's**  
*Loaded Menorah* (2013)  
is hand-fabricated, comprising altered hand guns, gun barrels, and other components collected by Pittsburgh's Goods4Guns Anti-violence Coalition.



Aaron Usher III



**Blaine Siegel**  
*Mirror Box*  
(detail), 2013,  
paper, 2.2 x 3.3 ft



**Dauvit Alexander**  
*Lyndsay*, 2013,  
found iron from a  
burnt-out car, polycarbonate reflector from  
a crashed car, sterling  
silver, garnets, black  
spinel, quartz heart,  
20 x 2.5 x 1 in.

“ For me, Blaine Siegel’s work stands out because it connects the dots between violence happening on an international level and violence that occurs close to home. As an artist working in Pittsburgh, Siegel has investigated what violence means to local community members, capturing their stories as part of his piece, *Mirror Box*, an evolving work in paper. Through the introduction of the young Pakistani education activist Malala Yousafzai, Siegel focuses our attention on the powerful role that education can play in decreasing violence for future generations worldwide. ”

~NATALIE SWEET  
*Exhibitions apprentice*

“ I consistently find myself gravitating toward the work of Dauvit Alexander. On the surface, I enjoy that he communicates with the audience by engaging multiple learning styles. More significant to me, though, is that he has taken the time to not only tell the stories of these individuals, but also that he has met them, he has learned about them, and he has connected us to them. His work in this exhibition has encouraged me to experience a moment with someone else. It leaves me asking myself difficult questions like: Who is the victim, who is the perpetrator, where is the overlap, and what role can each of us play in regard to making a difference in the life of another? ”

~RACHEL SAUL  
*Education program coordinator*

“ Claudia Alvarez’s *Perro Pendiente* draws you in through the beauty and innocence of this life-like ceramic installation of children at play, then grabs you by the throat when you see the hand of the tiny toddler in the back pointing a revolver at his playmates. The message is both bold and obvious. Even our most vulnerable children are not spared from a culture of violence. Toddlers are emulating what they see around them. Violence prevention programs in grade school or middle school are already too late. Alvarez urges us to think about the future – and what we must do now. Change must begin with the youngest children if we truly wish to reduce violence in our society. ”

~JANET MCCALL  
*Executive director*



**Julie Sirek**  
*A Family Matter*, 2010,  
handmade gampi  
paper, mixed media,  
installation dimensions vary

“ Julie Sirek’s work is a heart-wrenching combination of beauty and sadness. *A Family Matter* consists of 30 gampi dresses symbolizing victims of domestic violence. From afar, the dresses are charming, with their doll-like, diminutive size. As you get closer, you see that some are tattered and stained, while others are grotesquely stitched, burned, or adorned with chains and barbed wire. The switch is jarring, reminding us that domestic violence is often kept a secret; things are not always what they seem. ”

~NORAH GUIGNON  
*Marketing manager*



**Claudia Alvarez**  
*Perro Pendiente*, 2012,  
ceramic, 2.6 x 8 x 10 ft.

Perro photo: Claudia Alvarez, courtesy of Scott White Contemporary Art Inc. / Mirror Box photo: Blaine Siegel

**Why is art an important vehicle for this conversation?**

Here's one example. Claudia Alvarez, who does ceramic work, has an installation that we put right in the front of the gallery. At first we wondered, "Is this too much in people's faces?" It is an intense piece, where there is one kid with a gun [and others on their knees].

At first people are really taken aback by it. But then over at the resource station, people have brought in newspaper articles, and there was a recent story about almost the exact same thing. A 3-year-old pulled a gun out from under a sofa and shot himself.

So in some ways, Claudia's work is really intense for people, even more intense visually. But it almost gets them to think about the issue more than the news does, where they're so bombarded. Art is a different vehicle coming at you.

The other related thing is that with art, people are bringing their own half-circle to the artist's half-circle to make a full impression of a piece. We had some kids from a local high school here, and, looking at that same piece, one of the kids said: "Well, is the kid with the gun supposed to be the police?" It was this really interesting perspective – in the way that it revealed how it's maybe difficult for some people to trust certain authorities.

Art is a way of communicating that isn't always used for these issues, and when it is, it has its own assets and strengths – and ways of really touching us.

+ [enoughviolence.net](http://enoughviolence.net)  
*"Enough Violence" closes at SCC on March 22 with plans to tour nationally. SCC executive director Janet McCall tells us more about the show at [americancraftmag.org](http://americancraftmag.org). Julie K. Hanus is American Craft's senior editor.*

**Claudia Alvarez**  
*El Chupon II*, 2013, ceramic, underglaze, 35 x 17 x 14.5 in.



Claudia Alvarez



**BELOW: Doug Beube's** *Partition* (2006) consists of two altered books: *The High Walls of Jerusalem* and *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*.

**ABOVE: "Enough Violence,"** years in the making, installed at the Society for Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh.



Lynskay photo: Simon Murphy / *A Family Matter* photo: Petronella Ytsma / Gallery photo: Yu-San Kris Cheng