

# ARTLOG

October, 18, 2010

## Dave Cole: Unreal City



Dave Cole, *Flags of the World*, 2008, United Nations official 192 piece  
"Flags of the World" set, cut and re-sewn, with mixed media 180 X 342 inches

Dave Cole becomes visibly excited when he talks about materials. For a previous show, he wore through multiple protective Tyvek suits while weaving a 14-foot teddy bear from fiberglass insulation. Extreme knitting comes up repeatedly - Cole has knitted an American flag with two excavators, using utility poles as knitting needles. He has no qualms about staking out loaded territory where he's likely to be oversimplified or misunderstood: knitting, American flags, the machinery of war.

For his current show, Cole dialed the president of the world's largest manufacturer of steel wool (the direct line was accidentally left up on the company's Chinese website). They agreed to produce a small amount of their product from bronze, the same kind that monumental statues are built from. Cole proceeded to knit with it - this time, the knitting needles weren't utility poles but loaded guns.

Whimsical, reckless grandiosity: here is another aspect of Cole, the man who knits with excavators. It's present in all the pieces in the show, none more so than a vitrine of maquettes in the corner, mock-ups of ambitious projects awaiting funding. The most ambitious is the Truckmobile, a suspended mobile of dangling Detroit automobiles sourced from the heyday of the industry. Then there's the armada of floating rubber teddy bears moving in unison with the tides, the jackhammer pipe organ, the steamroller music box. There's something akin to Koons' suspended steam train in this play of big, sublime machines, though I doubt Koons would be up for a spirited explanation of hydrostatic ball bearings.

The difference is that Cole aims for popular but not Pop. The American flag, guns, war: these are both weighty and accessible. The loaded knitting needles are not an arbitrary display of bravado - the show meditates unrelentingly on violence and nationalism, on achievements that are built up and then torn apart again. A nation can be thought of as something knitted with loaded guns, perhaps. The metaphor is open-ended, and Cole would prefer for it to stay that way.

Nearby are small plots of earth built from jaggedly cut or melted shell casings, an image born of idly snipping spent ammunition after studying Eliot's *Waste Land*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and Carl Sandburg's "Grass." It's the earth both after and before incredible violence, the space between the World Wars observed by Eliot, or the landscape following the Civil War observed by Whitman. In the same room, a telegraph clicks out the Pledge of Allegiance in morse code, in time to a blinking light bulb suspended overhead.

Cole had just come from the Museum of Natural History when I met him at the gallery, and he remarked that he would like to see his work in such a setting, complete with didactic wall text and mahogany. Here is something for your attention, a piece of our reality and a few of its specifications. (Two loaded guns, safeties off.) Take from it what you can.

- Jarrett Moran