

Sarah Hirneisen : "A Fragile State"

Exhibition Notes

1. "Naming Conventions" (2007)
2,100 etched glass vials, neon, wood, oil
42 x 22 x 14 in. (5 total)

It is a tradition in Shia Islam to erect and maintain a small shrine, or reliquary, over the grave of a martyr. Typically, these objects comprise elevated glass cabinets housed within a frame of white metal or wood, standing approximately 1 meter high with a peaked roof. Within the cabinet are placed photographs, personal effects, and other items of significance to the martyred.



Shiite cemetery, Beirut, Lebanon, 2006

The number of cabinets on display reflects the significance of the number 5 in Islam: 5 daily times of prayer, 5 pillars of the religion, 5 divine presences, 5 founding dogmas, and 5 actions.

The glass vessels are filled with oil. Hand-etched upon the vials are common Shia and Sunni tribal names. Currently in Iraq, warring Sunni and Shia factions often identify members of rival sects for killing based solely on names printed on ID cards produced and inspected at gunpoint.

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2. **"Shahada" (2007)**
Silk-screened and fused glass, wood, fluorescent light, acrylic;
34 x 22 x 5 inches (3 total)

"Sahada" is the Islamic prayer: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

The glass for each rug was knelt upon, cracked, and then re-fused in a kiln. The glass references sand, used in Islam to purify the body before kneeling in prayer when water is not available, as in desert environments.

The rugs are oriented toward Mecca.

3. **"Swords to Plowshares" (2007)**
Machine gun shells, soil, grass, in steel grid.
48 x 72 x 8 inches

Reclaimed machine gun casings, polished, containing soil and sprouting cat-grass seeds, are suspended in a canopy fabricated of steel mesh.

4. **"Unfamiliar Ground" (2007)**
Glass, soil, steel, wire; each 25 x 15 inches.

The artist sent care packages of toiletries, snacks, etc., to American soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan through the website anysolider.com, requesting that recipients send her a sample of the soil from their places of deployment. Each hand-crafted glass "pouch" contains samples received from those soldiers responding.

Please refer to the binder near the gallery entrance to view correspondence between the artist and soldiers.