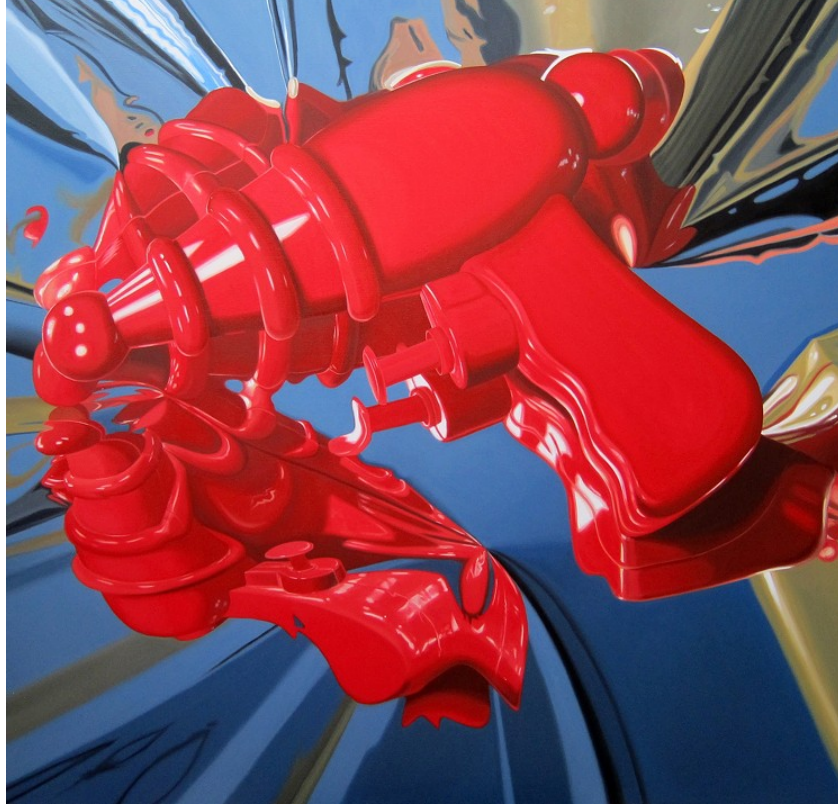


Texas Tech Professor Has a Toy Gun Exhibit at Cris Worley Fine Arts

By Brad Lacour



Part of the Triggered exhibit, courtesy Shannon Cannings

With your nose inches away from the portrait, you would swear the toy gun in front of you was real. The way light bounces off the plastic, the curve of the handle seemingly within graspable reach, it's inconceivable that the image in front of you is oil paint arranged meticulously on canvas.

These are the illusions Shannon Cannings creates with her paintings, and you can view them for yourself in her new gallery Triggered on display at Cris Worley Fine Arts in the Design District through March 23.

Triggered is a collection of her latest works that filter the plastic-coated toy weapon through a pop art lens, simultaneously elevating the subject matter

while questioning the form in which it's delivered. Cannings' paintings exist like the play guns on retail shelves do — to be both attractive to a younger eye, while symbolizing control for the individuals who understand their power.

against gun ownership or undermining the consequences a gun can introduce within poorly executed seconds. There is no absolute answer, and Cannings isn't claiming to have one to offer.

"I've tried very hard to sort of maintain a medium on it," Cannings says. "Because I think that that's where most people are. I don't think that most people — even in Texas — are crazy one direction or the other about guns. I think that we all want to see our kids grow up safe. We want to live in a society where we feel comfortable and happy, but we all have different ways of approaching that."

"Fear has become sort of a commodity, and people profit from that instead of paying attention to sort of common sense." - Shannon Cannings

Cannings says when she began, she was more anti-gun, but over the years, she has shifted slightly toward the middle. She proclaims to be against gun culture but is not anti-gun. In many ways she sees them as a necessary tool for specific jobs, but it's the idolization of them that's problematic.

"It has been given too much power," Cannings says. "And too much media. Fear has become sort of a commodity, and people profit from that instead of paying attention to sort of common sense."

Cannings has had many years to ruminate on the subject, her fascination growing since her arrival to Lubbock 19 years ago. She recalls it being a tough transitional period. Her husband was a full-time professor at Texas Tech, and she was starting a new adventure as an adjunct professor of the arts. She remembers the feeling of isolation in an environment unlike her previous home of upstate New York, not knowing anyone and crying while acclimating herself to the new surroundings. When she started to connect to people and

an art community she felt was vibrant, her outlook lightened greatly.

Growing up in Pennsylvania, she lived in a terrain that was too hilly and diverse to fence individual property, much different from the fenced-in spaces that make up the flatlands of Lubbock. Noticing the creature comforts that residents would adorn their yards with, Cannings took to painting the brightly colored beach balls, flamingos and plastic chairs that spiked color into the browns of a Texas summer backyard. It was then she found the plastic guns that encapsulated the essence of summer nostalgia with an indescribable darkness she wanted to explore further.

“I think my style has changed significantly,” Cannings says. “If you look at the beginning works, my painting has gotten better. I think my understanding of just the actual paint has gotten better, but I think that I have a more complicated understanding of my subject matter now. Both physically, what it looks like but also conceptually. I think that it’s — I’m feeling more comfortable being medium on things.”

And for each year Cannings pushes her art into fresh realms of discovery, she also ushers newly arrived Texas Tech students into finding their own artistic footing. She relishes the privilege of guiding the freshmen class as they make the first decisions and mistakes that turn a teenager into an adult. She feels her work as a teacher continually molds her work as an artist.

“They are constantly in conversation with one another,” Canning says. “I think that I hear my professor’s voice when I’m in the studio. And I do that to my students as well. There are these little things that you tell them that you know are going to stick someday. They’ll be stuck on something, and they’ll remember that thing that you said. And they inform me too. They inform the work that I’m doing.”