

CRAVE

Exhibit | Necessary Force: Art in the Police State

Drones, tasers, and pepper spray, oh my.



by **Miss Rosen**



*Melvin Edwards (American, b. 1937) Freedom Fighter, 1992 Welded steel, 13 x 10 1/2 x 8 inches
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York, Melvin Edwards / Artist's Rights Society (ARS), New York*

With North Dakota now on record as the first state that allows police to legally mount Tasers, pepper spray, sound cannons, and other “less-than-lethal” weapons on flying drones, the U.S.A. is deftly transforming into a police state. With the mainstream media doing little to address this radical change, many artists have taken it upon themselves to voice their outrage. As James Baldwin said, “Artists are here to disturb the peace.”

Curators Karen Fiss and Kymberly Pinder recognized this, and in response have produced “**Necessary Force: Art in the Police State**”, a group show now on view in the Main Gallery University of New Mexico Art Museum, Santa Fe, through December 12, 2015. Artists in the show include Nick Cave, Max King Cap, Larry Clark, Danny Lyon, Ota Benga Jones, Mel Chin, Trevor Paglen, Josh Begley, Linda Kurgan, David Taylor, Dread Scott, Nani Chacon and Jaque Fragua and Lashawnda Crowe Storm, Bernard Williams, Charlene Teters, Tom Greyeyes, ARCO, Melvin Edwards and Hank Willis Thomas.

With “**Necessary Force**” the curators hope to encourage critical thinking and conversation around the history of police violence in the United States. As they explain, “This history is not simply about ‘bad cops.’ It is about the endemic gun violence across our country that claims thirty lives each day. It is about the steady militarization of local police forces around the nation and the ‘war on terror.’ It is about the pervasive role of surveillance, public and private, in every facet of our lives.”

The exhibition addresses a range of issues including surveillance, incarceration, drug abuse, inadequate mental health care, gun violence, racial profiling, as well as the power of collective protest and collective healing. The exhibition also examines the role of photography in shaping public opinion as well as the writing of our shared history. With the proliferation photography and video, the image itself is not only a work of art and activism, it can also be evidence of a crime that may or may not be prosecuted.

As history reveals, many of the tactics used by law enforcement have been illegal, and justice has never been served. Charles Moore’s photograph, Firemen turn hoses on demonstrators, Birmingham, Alabama, 1963, is a traditional example of police tactics used to infringe on the rights of civil rights protesters with sheer impunity. Looking at these historic images, we are reminded of how little has changed, and provides a larger context for the struggles of the Black Liberation Movement fighting today.

The exhibition also includes Larry Clark’s photographic series titled Police Informer from the portfolio Tulsa, 1971. Print in 1980, Clark’s silver gelatin print reminds us that there are spies living among us, working for and protected by the government. It is a chilling reminder that on every level, there will be counterrevolutionaries living among us and will betray our trust for the

sole purpose of feeding the police state just what it wants.

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Miss Rosen is a New York-based writer, curator, and brand strategist. There is nothing she adores so much as photography and books. A small part of her wishes she had a proper library, like in the game of Clue. Then she could blaze and write soliloquies to her in and out of print loves.