



The Washington Post



An installation view of the exhibit "Wound Filler" by artist Robert Buck at Von Ammon Co. (Vivian Doering)

In the galleries: Sobering reminders of gun violence

Artist's works are uncomfortable but thought-provoking about deaths caused by firearms

Mark Jenkins | 12 November 2022

In 1971, performance artist Chris Burden had himself shot in his left shoulder. It's unlikely that any conceptualist will ever address American gun culture more viscerally than that, but Robert Buck has come close. His Von Ammon Co. show, "Wound Filler," demonstrates the effects of point-blank 12-gauge shotgun blasts into cylinders of the modeling compound used by embalmers to reconstruct damaged flesh. The voids blown through the waxy material are monuments in reverse to firearm victims, whose ranks have grown substantially since Buck made these pieces from 2004 to 2006.

If the holes at their centers are inherently catastrophic, the seven sculptures are otherwise quiet. Each tube of dried filler, in a variety of corporeal hues, sits atop one or more white plastic buckets and inside a sealed transparent vitrine. The blasted assemblages look like art objects and medical specimens, clinically detached from the brutality that made them.

Also included is a candle, complete with wick, that was cast as a positive impression of one of the shotgun gashes, and a sort-of drawing made by firing a shot through an artist's sketch pad. The top sheet of paper was left with a bloom-like design rendered in shades of gray that suggest pencil or charcoal, but are actually gunpowder. Again, the remains of violence are surprisingly tranquil.

There's no blood, viscera or pulverized bone in the sculptures made by the Baltimore-born Buck, who divides his time between New York and Texas. Yet the artist has found a material that, if not actual human fragments, is closely linked to the body. It's just that instead of repairing corpses, he has used it to simulate fatal devastation. Each of the seven simulated injuries is clean, simple and discrete, but also stands for a larger, and much messier, toll.

Wound Filler at von ammon co., Washington, DC runs through 26 November 2022