

How Many Tears Are Enough? An Installation by June Ahrens

November 22, 2019 D. Dominick Lombardi

June Ahrens' installation *How Many Tears Are Enough?* is a contemplative work that slowly reveals its intricate symbolic, emotional content. It is comprised of various types of shape defining wires and ropes suspended from the ceiling, all hovering just above long sheets of highly reflective silver Mylar. While the main expression of three-dimensional lines dominates most of the space of the University of Connecticut's Stamford Art Gallery, there is also a back wall covered with unadorned black, knotted rope that creates a waterfall-like backdrop. When seen together, these two works give gallery visitors a basis for establishing personal links that may be viewed by some, as a dramatic field of ascending souls.

This may also bring to mind one of Ross Bleckner's seminal paintings, *Count No Count* (1989), which commemorated the overwhelming number of people who were dying from AIDS in the 1980's. In truth, Ahrens means to convey a representation of "life with all its emotions of pain and hopefulness", as her art directly relates to the ever presence of gun violence in our society – a brutal reality that touches way too many Americans with lifelong

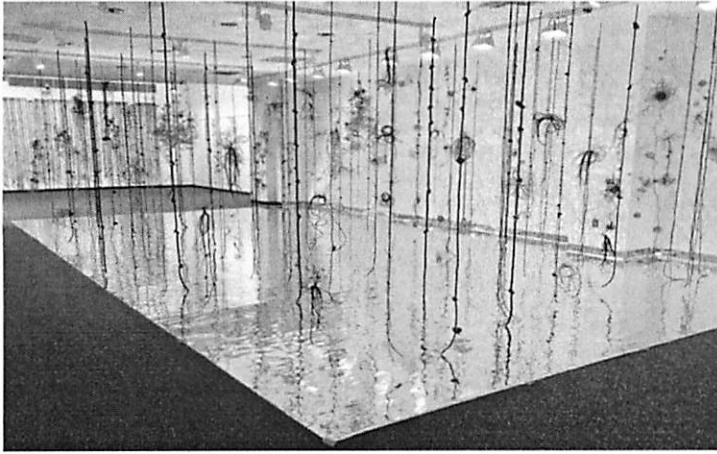
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loss followed hopefully, by gradual healing.



Left: June Ahrens, *How Many Tears Are Enough?* assorted wires, by monofilament, assorted sized ropes, wooden sticks and Mylar, 10' x 30' x 20', installation view, image: courtesy of the artist.

In the details in the main installation, we see delicately formed flowers that represent hope and the beauty that was lost; while thorns remind us of the pain that inevitably comes with living. Then there are the swirls and knots that show both the connections we have with all living things, and the anxiety we feel in today's troubled world. The Mylar on the floor, which expands the vision by both reflecting the forms created by the artist, and refracting the gallery's light, giving much of the space a feeling of an open sea – an affect that perhaps, represents all of the tears that have flowed from the dawn of man to today's most tragic acts of violence.

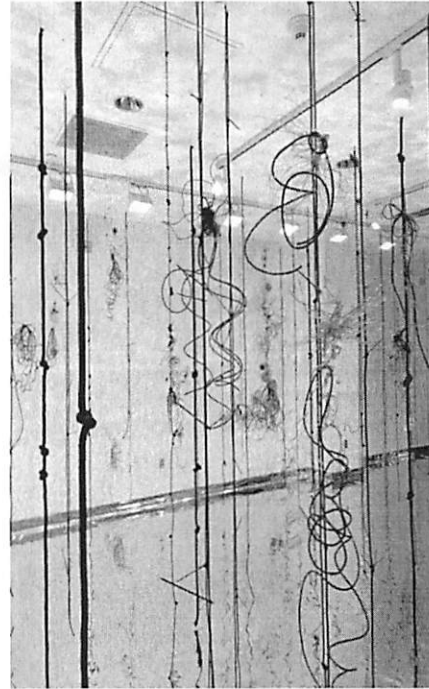
“But gun violence is a complex problem. It cannot be fully understood with opposing sides adopting catchy phrases or citing slanted surveys or statistics.”

What is most important as we ponder *How Many Tears Are Enough?*, is our ability to think about the past and our uncertain future, to seek out what our 'community' can offer as a place of restful recognition of all the facts, and to take the time to support each other with peaceful and positive actions. “Recognizing life, celebrating life, mourning life, saving life,” wrote Mr. Cheng, Director of the UConn Stamford campus, is the intended message



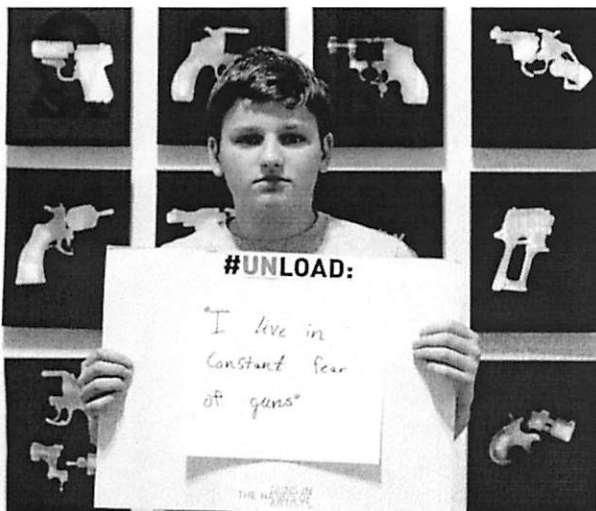
here. We must all do what we can to insure that the senseless violence, as it increasingly defines our age, must end and end soon.

Right: June Ahrens, *How Many Tears Are Enough?* (detail), assorted wires, by monofilament, assorted sized ropes, wooden sticks and Mylar, 10' x 30' x 20', installation view, image: courtesy of the artist.



A good place to start, for those with more creative answers regarding the increase in gun violence, is with #UNLOAD. #UNLOAD was co-founded by two residents of Fairfield County; Mary Scott Himes and Helen Klisser During. Their core mission is to create a greater dialogue about gun violence through the arts. Visual arts, music, dance, literature have all proven to be useful tools in getting important messages out there. With advancements in social media, artful expression has only increased in importance, as we tend to read less deeply, moving more and more toward quicker bursts of images and information.

But gun violence is a complex problem. It cannot be fully understood with opposing sides adopting catchy phrases or citing slanted surveys or statistics. This is where the art comes in. Art has a way of getting through to both one's conscious and subconscious. A powerful image of a child holding up a sign that states: "I live in constant fear of guns" is hard to forget, especially when we think of the six and seven year old children that perished in the previously unthinkable Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting of December, 2012.



Left: Fairfield University — Exhibition, *Guns in the Hands of Artists* (May to October 2018)

Klisser During, who also works on global art projects, is an art advisor and a photojournalist, sees The Unload Foundation Inc. as being most successful when it "promotes audience response and participation, where understanding what a challenging image is about can be very illuminating. Mary and I work hard to create a



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platform for visual and performing artists to create a deeper conversation so others will take action to stop gun violence in America.”

Right: Lily (13) July 17, 2018,
Neighborhood Studios —2 week
Summer Work shop facilitated and
sponsored by #UNLOAD facilitated

Himes, Executive Director of the Unload
Foundation Inc. and wife of
Representative Jim Himes, states: “we
are providing a welcoming space (where
an) all-embracing dialogue will help grow
the community of people who will demand common sense solutions to gun violence”.

Klisser During adding: “Yes, all the arts, if well done, have the power to illuminate, educate
and connect us. Visual artists, film makers, poets, actors, writers, performance artists all
can help us to look and really see, to listen and really hear, understand and feel. In this
creative construct will come a collective consciousness, one that can evolve and grow with
continued conversation and exploration, while new ideas can form and perhaps, together,
we can build a safer, more fair and a much better world.”



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