

Chicago Tribune

Artwork on gun violence can't keep up with Chicago's shootings

By Alison Bowen
7/20/16



A mannequin wearing the clothing of gun-violence victim Hadiya Pendleton stands at the beginning of the "Killing Season Chicago" exhibit. (Alison Bowen / Chicago Tribune)

In 2010, Krista Wortendyke started taking her camera to Chicago crime scenes, her mission: to capture the place each person was killed by gun violence that summer. The 172 photos she took have since been shown through her exhibit "[Killing Season Chicago](#)," featuring a large wall of mounted photos in the form of a skyline that has been displayed around the city, from Wicker Park's The Violet Hour to [Moraine Valley Community College](#) in Palos Hills.

But this year, she said, feels different. The photos no longer seem to reflect the magnitude of an even more violent year.

"It seems sparse," she said of the photos, now part of the "This Heat" exhibit, which encompasses three rooms at the [Weinberg/Newton Gallery](#) through Sept. 24. So far this year, there have been 358 homicides in Chicago, more than twice the number in "Killing Season Chicago."

"This Heat" organizers expected the gun violence-focused exhibit, presented with the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, to be relevant and timely because of the ongoing violence in the city. However, with the more than 2,200 shooting victims in Chicago this year, Wortendyke is wondering whether, and how, to update her piece.

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"Killing Season Chicago" artist Krista Wortendyke. (Alison Bowen / Chicago Tribune)

She recently expanded her work by adding a separate display titled "Bloodspot (Death by Gun)," which shows 700 prints of a bloodstained sidewalk she photographed after the first homicide of 2013. She recalls looking for the exact spot where the victim fell in a Chicago alley only to realize she was standing in dried blood. She said the prints represent the projected homicides this year.

The title "The Killing Season" evolved from a conversation with a friend after she moved in 2003 to Chicago from New York. While talking about the city's violence, her friend noted, "It's not even summer."

Wortendyke remembers thinking, "There's a season for this?"



"Killing Season Chicago" features 172 photos taken at crime scenes around Chicago in 2010 by artist Krista Wortendyke. (Krista Wortendyke)

A few years later, a man shot two relatives in her neighborhood. She became obsessed, she said, with finding the location of the shooting — the street seemed impossible to imagine as a violent setting. And the house she located seemed eerily mundane.

"I think sometimes people are surprised to find where these places are," she said.

"'Rogers Park? Oh it looks like it could be Englewood.' And vice versa."

"This Heat" also features the work of Garland Martin Taylor, who said he wants his art to remind people of the bullets piercing local lives.

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"This Heat" also features the work of Garland Martin Taylor, who said he wants his art to remind people of the bullets piercing local lives. Bullets dangle from guitar strings attached to the ceiling. Feathers evoke spirits or movement. (Alison Bowen / Chicago Tribune)

Bullets dangle from guitar strings attached to the ceiling. When a visitor enters the room, walking through the bullets, they sway.

"We come in, and we get to pretend to dodge these bullets," he said.

Taylor used his own hair, mixed with acrylic medium and pigment, to fill them, some shot from his own .38 for the project and some collected from ranges. Feathers attached evoke spirits, or movement.

A third room includes a video installation by artist Cheryl Pope with two people silently trading "In Loving Memory" T-shirts.



Cheryl Pope One of Many, One 2014

The powerful reminder of crime in the city through these works leaves room for individual reflection.

Owner David Weinberg said the gallery, which aims to highlight social justice issues, opts not to include cards explaining the installations.

"It opens up a dialogue," he said.

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