

[Exclusive] The Rainbow Paper Flower Garden Taking on Gun Violence



Irons for the Ages, Flowers for the Day, Li Hongbo, 2015. Images courtesy Klein Sun Gallery

From hippies penetrating the National Guard's rifles with flower power, to fleeting blooms and butterflies glimpsed amid the chaos of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the petal, juxtaposed with the metal of a gun, are as apt a metaphor for our dual desires for war and peace as any. Chinese artist [Li Hongbo](#)'s new installation at [The SCAD Museum of Art](#), *Irons for the Ages, Flowers for the Day* speaks to this duality with trademark paper sculptures that aren't what they seem.

Calling upon millenia of Chinese paper lamps and decorations, Hongbo and a group of SCAD assistants erected rows of unfolded rainbow blossoms, ending up with a vivid tower of color. Folded up, they become the titular "irons for the ages": dozens of cute-yet-imposing candy-colored pistols. This might sound familiar if you saw his 2012 Sydney Biennale exhibit, *Ocean of Flowers* (2012), but Hongbo says this update is built upon a deep relationship with SCAD: "The historical building together with this contemporary look makes people think about the lifespan of a flower, flourishing shortly, and of steel, which lasts much longer," he explains to The Creators Project. "Audiences will see a beautiful flower blooming in the space, but this image also hopefully makes people think and pay close attention to what's underneath. When viewers realize that such a wonderful space is actually made out of 'weapons,' they are going react."



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Discussion around mass shootings and gun control have become a part of our everyday lives since the [2012 Newtown massacre](#), leaving cultural and emotional scar tissue that is picked at and reopened with a fresh 'incident' [every month](#). Hongbo seeks to remind people that the will to kill with so brutal and effective a weapon as a gun surrounds us always, no matter how charming the setting. "Everyone has a dream. Dreams of a comfortable life, a beautiful environment, a peaceful society and so on," he says. "But some selfish people damage others' lives and dreams because of their own excessive desires. They revert to guns, one of most deadly weapons be used to threaten and kill people who do not 'obey' their dreams of beauty."

Hongbo's formal experiments with paper are often mesmerizing, as in the malleable busts of [Statues in Motion](#), but *Irons for the Ages, Flowers for the Day* plants a seed of tragic remembrance and contemplation for those with a stake in the issue at hand. "I hope my work can make audience think about others and social repercussions. I also hope people will see new directions and perspectives in this work, to learn to re-look things," Hongbo ruminates on the purpose of the exhibit. "Visitors of my work usually come from different life backgrounds, academic fields, work fields and social practices. I hope my work can help them all reflect on themselves."



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