

# Ben Turnbull Packs Heat in his Exhibition at StolenSpace Gallery

Ben Turnbull's earlier work used comic books to build collages of American icons such as JFK. He now takes on another symbol of Americana: the gun. Responding specifically to school shootings in recent years, Turnbull criticizes the violence that underlies much of American culture, and its presence in art and entertainment.

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Turnbull's new works feature in "SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT" (American History X – Volume II) at London's StolenSpace Gallery this month. The show follows up on his previous solo exhibition at the gallery, "American History X – Volume I – The Death Of America," in which he presented Warhol-like replicas of iconic images from American history, collaged from bits of comic books to depict the nation from the perspective of a contemporary British artist. Turnbull's new sculptures were made by carving guns into the wooden surfaces of vintage school desks.



Ben Turnbull  
'Smells Like Teen Spirit #1', 2014  
StolenSpace Gallery



Ben Turnbull  
'Schools Out', 2014  
StolenSpace Gallery



Ben Turnbull  
'Hurt Locker', 2015  
StolenSpace Gallery

Turnbull has referred to his work "Angry Pop," because of its use of aggression and violent popular imagery. The title of the show is a pastiche of references, including the 1991 hit rock song by Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," and the graphically violent 1998 feature film *American History X*. Both examine male violence and anger, though from very different perspectives. In *Smells Like Teen Spirit #1* (2014), Turnbull has transformed a wooden school desk into a cabinet, with a fake revolver behind a glass pane labeled "IN EMERGENCY BREAK GLASS." Here, the weapon is presented as restricted, but available. When asked about his interest in the gun, Turnbull has said, "It's the forbidden fruit—which is what draws me in. Here in the UK, you can't actually obtain the guns, so I have to hunt them out."



Ben Turnbull  
'Natural Born Killers Part I', 2014  
StolenSpace Gallery  
SOLD – £10,000 - 15,000

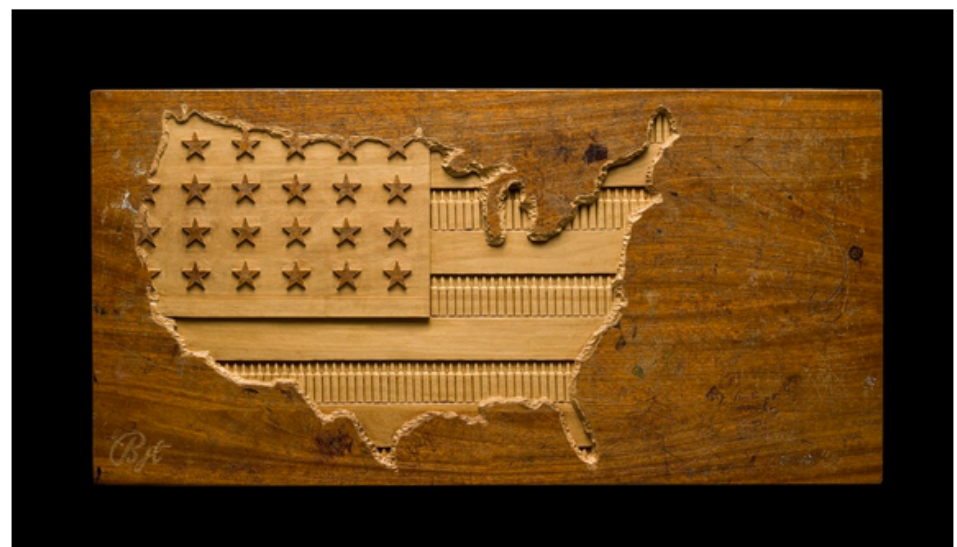


Ben Turnbull  
'Smells Like Teen Spirit No 5', 2015  
StolenSpace Gallery

Another filmic reference appears here in *Natural Born Killers Part I* (2014), which adopts its name from Oliver Stone's infamous movie *Natural Born Killers* (1994). Here, Turnbull has carved by hand two western-style revolvers into two school desks. The guns picture here, aimed at one another, may also allude to the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in which Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris massacred their fellow students and called their planned attack "NBK," an acronym for the movie's title. Another work, *School's Out* (2014), more directly references the Colorado school shooting, taking the shape of a tombstone with the date of the tragic events, April 20, 1999, inscribed below another carving of a gun and the message "School's Out Forever."



Ben Turnbull  
'Natural Selection', 2015  
StolenSpace Gallery



Ben Turnbull  
'And Justice For All', 2012  
StolenSpace Gallery

*Natural Selection* (2015) shows a beautiful yet horrifying pistol carved into a desk, with the title etched in athletic lettering. This dark, Darwinian sentiment is often associated with the hubris of mass killings. Similar to the interests of Luke Cornish, another of the gallery's artists who uses gunfire and conflict as inspiration, Turnbull places an image of the coldly calculated machine against the patinated wood grain and the jovial font of the text. Turnbull's art often relies on conflicting juxtapositions; through this he examines the contradictions of American culture, in all of its complications.

—Stephen Dillon

"Ben Turnbull: 'SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT' (American History X – Volume II)" is on view at StolenSpace Gallery, London, Apr. 17 – May 17, 2015.

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