

frieze

Noriyuki Haraguchi

McCaffrey Fine Art

Noriyuki Haraguchi nimbly transforms weapons of mass destruction into objects of simple and pure construction. The Japanese artist's exhibition 'Works from Yokosuka' presented a small but focused selection of his anti-war oeuvre. These dated mostly from the late 1960s and early '70s, save for the most awe-inspiring piece, *A-7 E Corsair II* (2011), which was created specially for this show.

Recreating weapons in alternative media, neutralizing them both materially and spiritually, is, of course, a familiar artistic strategy. But it is Haraguchi's obsession with detail that distinguishes his pacifist voice from that of a work like Claes Oldenburg's darkly playful "*Empire*" ("*Papa*") *Ray Gun* (1959), which preceded the Japanese artist's bomber-tails of the late 1960s, not to mention Anselm Kiefer's elegiac and remorseful leaden plane *Melancholia* (1990–91). The smell of gasoline has been replaced by the comforting and lightly spiced scent of plywood, as the viewer stands in the presence of the full-scale replica of the tail of an American warplane. The sheer size is discomfiting, but the care and precision with which the piece has been crafted out of a wood armature – meticulously overlaid with canvas and outfitted with aluminium detailing – recalls a high-end piece of furniture rather than anything that could be responsible for the deaths of hundreds or thousands of people. The tail has also been neatly cut, so there is no sense of accident or injury; *A-7 E Corsair II* has not crashed to earth, but rests gently in the gallery space. This massive form, rendered unfamiliar by its proximity to us and separation from the rest of the plane, is reminiscent of a sea-creature, a whale shark with yawning maw exposing neat lines of ribs within. The canvas constructions of Lee Bontecou come to mind, but *A-7 E Corsair II* is a much gentler beast, emphasizing serenity and observation over anger and fear.

Through obvious but subtly executed changes, Haraguchi has managed to celebrate the precision and beauty of the Corsair aircraft. Clearly the artist is profoundly impressed with the ingenuity behind the assembly and design, but he has deftly redirected the viewer from issues of explosive tonnage to aesthetics. Comparisons of line – drawn in graphite, or

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By *William Corwin*



A-7 E Corsair II, 2011, replica aeroplane tail, installation view

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formed by two canvas panels abutting – and a highlighting of the purely abstract forms created by the panels and their aluminium appliqué replace fascination with the Corsair's killing capability. In effect, the plane has been rendered vulnerable, seemingly soft – an object of beauty that can no longer harm anyone.

Tsumu 147 (1966), a canvas and mixed-media reproduction of a door, with air vents and lock formed out of paint, plays a little more academically with Haraguchi's fascination with substitution. As with *A-7 E Corsair II*, there is a level of care taken with reproducing the size, scale and placement of objects in context that forces the viewer to make comparisons between perceived empty space, and the reality of a thickly applied layer of paint that effect a more than mere visual transformation of one object into another. Also from 1966, *Battleship Ref. A* represents another direction in transmogrifying magic, reducing a fearsome navy destroyer to a toy construction rendered in paper and lacquer. But the battleship seems emblematic of much more traditional forms, even perhaps ancient Egyptian and Chinese tomb accoutrements. Making something small makes it into a toy, but toys often harbour the same dangerous emotions as the real thing. It is *Air Pipe B* and *Air Pipe C* (both 1969) that constitute the bridge between Haraguchi's directly pacifist early works and his later material- and surface-obsessed projects, such as the giant milled rubber rings and oil pools. The air pipes refer to aircraft, through form and title, but, in media and their artful presentation, display the artist's admiration of human creativity divorced from its destructive nature.

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3-4 Hardwick Street, London EC1R 4RB, 020 7833 7270