

# Newsday

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C34 art

## Visualizing FEAR

The 'Terrorvision' exhibition at Exit Art attempts to answer the question 'What scares you the most?'

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**W**hat are you afraid of? Rats in the basement, bombs in the subway, bees, snakes, dark closets, little bugs, pain, failure, President George W. Bush?

These are just a smattering of the phobias confided to artist Liselot van der Heijden by some of the hundreds of people she interviewed. She edited those responses down to a 30-minute tape, which visitors can listen to on headphones as they wander through "Terrorvision," a new exhibition at Exit Art that delves into the depths of people's anxieties.

### Defining terror

Exit Art, a nonprofit alternative art space, sent out an open call for submissions in December to the 10,000 or so addressees on its e-mail list. Artists were asked to "propose work that defines their visions of terror." Beyond that, criteria were vague: Personal traumas, national crises, global cataclysms all qualified, as did artworks derived from iconic images and events that were themselves mediated through TV news, film or literature.

The 36 selected pieces attack the subject with varying degrees of finesse. While the obvious works tend to upstage the subtler ones, this is, all told, a thoughtful explo-

ration of fears that resonate even when they can't quite be pinned down.

Paul Wirhun polishes 21 eggs to a glossy sheen, paints a toothy skull on each one and heaps the lot of them onto a pile. The morbid mass implicitly refers to towers of corpses in those indelible photos of concentration camps, and even more directly to the pyramid of skulls in "The Apotheosis of War," painted in

1871 by the Russian Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin to bear witness to wartime atrocities. The Wirhun sculpture is peculiarly beautiful in a dark way, perhaps because of the tension between the symbol of fertility and the international sign of death painted on its shell.

### Tapping the unconscious

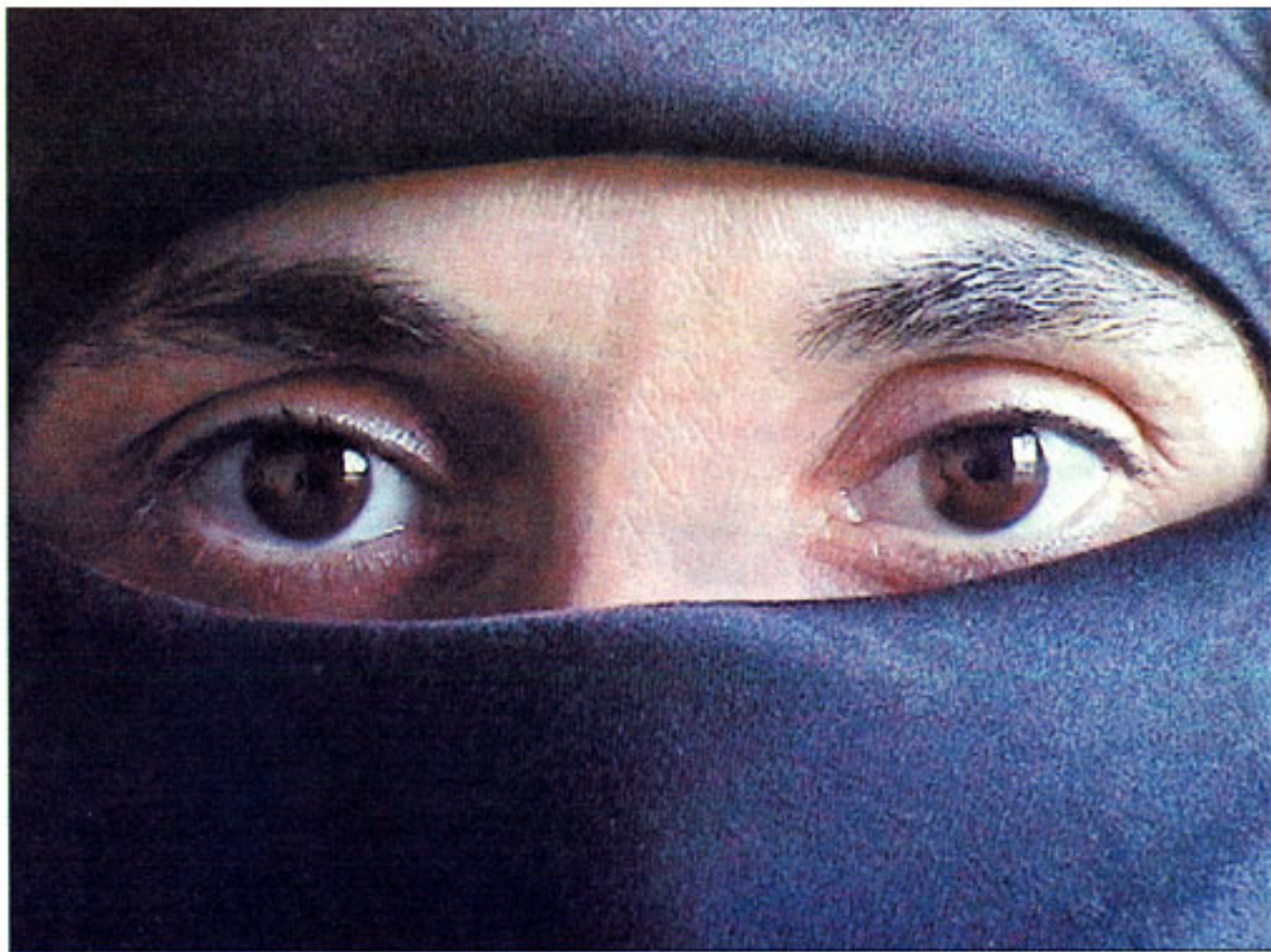
Arnoldo Morales taps into unconscious horrors with

sleek, sadistic sculptures that look grimly purposeful. A stainless-steel toilet, for example, is fitted out with a long probe that snakes up from the plumbing and out above the seat. Another industrial piece looks like a torture device crossed with a robotic vibrator, a fearsome instrument of pleasure and pain.

Like the profoundly creepy

gynecological instruments created for David Cronenberg's 1988 film "Dead Ringers," Morales' "tools" have been designed to invade our physical and psychic spaces at the same time. They are the products of society's ambivalence toward machines that heal and kill with ever-increasing efficiency.

In theory, Morales' objects are interactive, though it's



Visions of terror as seen through a woman's eyes: "Outside," by Florin Tudor and Mona Vatamanu



PHOTOS BY EXIT ART



Barbara Broughel's "Cuban Long Filter" box of cigar bullets, and, left, a windup doll linked to a bombing run video in Saoirse Higgins and Simon Schiessl's "Mechanism 1: War"

hard to imagine why anybody would try one on. Saoirse Higgins and Simon Schiessl, on the other hand, have fabricated an irresistible gizmo, which functions as a conscience stimulator. "Mechanism 1: War" consists of a wind-up drummer doll wirelessly linked to a video system that demonstrates what a bombing run looks like from the bomber's belly. Wind up

the toy and watch the plane disgorge ordnance in time to the tinny bass drum: a merry conflation of war games, Dr. Strangelove, the video-arcade air campaign, and the terrible disconnect between those who order the sorties and those who suffer the carnage.

#### Snapshot of mystery

One of the most eloquently inscrutable images springs

from an old-fashioned combination of hard work and happenstance, when a moment of poetry flitted before a photographer's ready lens. Having stationed himself patiently at an Israeli Army checkpoint, Pavel Wohlberg was rewarded with "Qalqilya," a snapshot of a young Palestinian woman in a headscarf giving an Israeli soldier a shy, mysterious smile. We

barely see the man's face at all, just the symbols of his authority — helmet, firearm, bulletproof vest — and, poignantly, the slender wrist of a youth barely out of adolescence.

years ago when he placed the Stars and Stripes on a gallery floor and asked, "What Is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?"

#### Sloganeering as art

Someone who goes by the name of Flash Light covers similar ground with "I Am Terrified of the Patriot Act." The title phrase appears on a computer monitor above reams of tiny text. When viewers step close enough to read the minuscule words, little flags pop out from either side of the monitor, and the Pledge of Allegiance takes the place of the original writing on the screen. There's something witty about the cause-and-effect game, but it's a form of sloganeering that doesn't spark much of a response beyond a wry grimace.

An artist known as Kosyo has crafted a plastic portrait bust of Adolph Hitler, true to life in every detail but for the missing mustache, which the artist has violently bitten off (his toothmarks can still be seen). He wants to deface Hitler, literally, or evil, metaphorically. That is the problem when art becomes too earnest: The moral ambition is laudable, but the piece itself warrants little more than a passing glance.

**WHEN&WHERE** "Terrorvision." Through July 31 at Exit Art, 475 10th Ave., at 36th Street, Manhattan. For hours call 212-966-7745 or visit [www.exitart.org](http://www.exitart.org). Suggested donation \$5.

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#### Anxiety of misunderstanding

Her expression is inscrutable. In another context it might be sexual rapture, but it could as arguably be suspicion, flirtation, apprehensiveness or just a squint into the sun. The picture crackles with a less explicit kind of fear than other artists flaunt: the anxiety of misunderstanding, and of missing a precious opportunity for friendship, or maybe even love.

The worst pieces here are not just didactic, but crudely so: visual one-liners that viewers can easily unravel and dismiss. Gabo Camnitzer's "273 Molotov Cocktails" consists of wine-bottle bombs with red, white and blue fabric wicks, arranged in the configuration of an American flag. Camnitzer, a student at Hunter College, makes a blunt point about infringements on Constitutional freedoms perpetrated in the name of patriotism, but it's a no-brainer. Isn't this the same brand of provocation for which Dread Scott gained notoriety 15