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Heroism and Anarchism Intertwined in the Work of Aaron Sandnes



Installation view of Aaron Sandnes: *This Hollowed Ground*. Courtesy of Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer

For the past few years, Aaron Sandnes' artwork has put into question the venerated symbols of heroism, while also treating anarchists and insurrectionists as equals to war heroes. Sandnes' latest exhibition, and his first at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, continues this exploration through two new series, one consisting of paintings and the other sculpture. Titled "This Hollowed Ground" the show serves as an ironic and complex memorial to fallen soldiers.

The artist's new sculptural series consists of 169 black roses, made from nickel-plated brass, scattered all over the gallery's floor. The quantity of roses is important: 169 is 13 squared, a reference to the number of stripes on the American flag. Thirteen is also the number of times an American flag is folded when given to the families of soldiers killed in action—one of the subjects of Sandnes' new series of paintings, "Death Marks the Spot."



Aaron Sandnes. *Death Marks The Spot (Jaguar F-Type)*, 2015. Kayne Griffin Corcoran.

Raised amid the car culture of Southern California, Sandnes is well-versed in the use and symbolism of automotive paint. For "Death Marks the Spot," he created 13 monochrome panels using acrylic and car paint on wood, selecting his glossy colors from a palette used for super-fast cars (identified in the titles). Each work consists of an "X" in the middle of the panel, created at the intersection of four abutting triangles. The triangular shapes bring to mind the folded American flags that are given to families of fallen soldiers, while the "X," of course, is, like the black rose, a symbol of anarchy.

The exhibition is full of this kind of complex symbolism. The flowers scattered on the ground invoke roses thrown on stage—a nod toward the performative nature of both heroism and anarchism—and the references to famous fast cars (Bugatti, Corvette), adds an intriguing dose of materialism, self-image, and economics into the mix. Glossy, colorful, and tantalizingly perfect, the surfaces of these paintings are red herrings. The real ideas lie beneath, a bit out of grasp, ready to smash the system from the inside.

-Maxwell Williams