

Grand Arts presents:

THE PROPELLER GROUP *A Universe of Collisions*

Aug. 7 - Sept. 4, 2015



OPENING RECEPTION: Friday, Aug. 7, 6-9 p.m.

ARTIST TALK: Saturday, Aug. 8, 2 p.m.

CLOSING RECEPTION: Friday, Sept. 4, 6-9 p.m.

ABOUT A UNIVERSE OF COLLISIONS

Grand Arts is pleased to present *A Universe of Collisions*, an exhibition by Vietnam-based collective The Propeller Group, on view Aug. 7 through Sept. 4, 2015.

Inspired to replicate a rare artifact from the American Civil War – the result of two bullets, fired from opposite sides, colliding mid-air – The Propeller Group faced impossibly long odds from the outset of their Grand Arts project. In addition to the immense tactical challenges, the artists were navigating a network of weapons enthusiasts, an elaborate permissions process involving the U.S. Department of State, and a ticking clock on Grand Arts' tenure.

Eventually partnering with Chesapeake Testing, a ballistics experimentation lab in northeastern Maryland, the artists successfully re-created conditions, through trial and error, under which such the unlikely collision might occur. Using a Soviet-designed AK-47 assault rifle and an American-made M-16, the group re-imagined the artifact's narrative, too, placing it instead within the Cold War.

The poetics, of course, remained the same: Enemy soldiers with lethal motives, collaborating by accident to make a single, extraordinary object.

Nearly a year and a half after making first contact with the Chesapeake engineers, the Propeller Group's efforts finally yielded 21 successful collisions of ammunition, captured in oblong translucent blocks of FBI ballistics gelatin.

In the exhibition at Grand Arts, a looped video projection of these collisions, originally documented at 324,000 frames per second and now rendered in ultra-slow motion, explodes the beauty and violence of the encounters. Accompanying sculptural vitrines placed throughout the gallery arrest in perpetuity the moments of impact.

A separate video – combining artist recordings, found footage, and pop-culture film clips – positions the AK-47 and the M-16 as de facto characters in an epic ideological drama. The exhibition also includes large-scale black paper drawings capturing shrapnel patterns from the shots.

After three years of development at Grand Arts, The Propeller's Group's project celebrated its international debut in May 2015 at the Venice Biennale, chosen by artistic director Okwui Enwezor for *All the World's Futures*, the biennial's central exhibition. "At once frightening and spectacular," says Gregory Volk, *Art in America* critic and curator.

A Universe of Collisions marks the final exhibition of Grand Arts.



ABOUT THE PROPELLER GROUP

The Propeller Group was established in 2006 as a cross-disciplinary structure for creating ambitious art projects. With backgrounds in visual art, film, and video, Phunam, Matt Lucero, and Tuan Andrew Nguyen situate their collective on the cusp of contemporary art and popular culture, and their involvement in one realm often informs their work in the other, challenging the lines that demarcate both categories in the process. Through multi-platform work, collaborations with other artists, and dual headquarters in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Los Angeles, Ca., The Propeller Group simultaneously integrates and undermines the strategies of the type of global agency its name suggests.

ABOUT GRAND ARTS

Grand Arts is a non-profit art project space in downtown Kansas City, Mo., that commissions and assists in the production and realization of complex contemporary art projects. The gallery is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, and by appointment.

MEDIA CONTACT

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Images: The Propeller Group, *A Universe of Collisions*, 2015. Fragments of AK-47 and M16 bullets, ballistics gel.
Image credit: E.G. Schempf.