



A VERY EASY DEATH

Date

2015

Primary Maker

Jeffrey Gibson

Medium

Glass and plastic beads, tin cones, steel and brass studs, nylon fringe, and artificial sinew on repurposed wool army blanket, mounted on repurposed canvas punching bag with steel chain

Description

“Many past histories,” the artist Jeffrey Gibson has stated, “have been disregarded because they seem irrelevant to our contemporary times, but I find that the social issues that people have dealt with for centuries have not completely changed.”

Gibson’s work melds such social issues with aspects of traditional Native American art and culture drawn from his half-Choctaw, half-Cherokee heritage. He often uses wool blankets and rawhide as substrates for colorful beadwork, arranged into intricate patterns as well as into words and longer texts from a variety of sources, including literature, popular culture, and his own writings. The punching bag is one of Gibson’s best-known motifs, to which he was first drawn in 2010 as a locus of routinized, aggressive masculine performance. A VERY EASY DEATH borrows its title from a 1964 work of nonfiction by Simone de Beauvoir based on the last six weeks of her mother’s life, before she succumbed to cancer. The book is one of Gibson’s favorites, as it describes a role reversal in which a child becomes the caretaker of a parent.

By embellishing a traditionally male, functional item with the title of

a book by a well-known feminist, Gibson calls attention to and complicates the gender-specific reading of cultural objects. Likewise, in its focus on the death of a parent, the work reveals a deep human vulnerability at odds with the notion of brute strength evoked by the bag itself. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) Gibson’s artwork incorporates traditions of Native American art and culture, drawn from his half-Choctaw and half-Cherokee heritage. He uses objects such as wool blankets, rawhide, and punching bags as substrates for colorful beadwork and patterning, which often convey text drawn from a variety of sources, including literature and popular culture, along with the artist’s own writings. “Many past histories,” the artist stated, “have been disregarded because they seem irrelevant to our contemporary times, but I find that the social issues that people have dealt with for centuries have not completely changed.” Gibson’s punching bags are one of the artist’s most recognizable forms. He is drawn to this object as a locus of aggressive, masculine performance. Complicating this gender dynamic, he named this work after a book written by the feminist Simone de Beauvoir. The volume, one of Gibson’s favorites, is based on the last six weeks of her mother’s life before she succumbed to cancer (SOURCE: Wellin Museum permanent collection label, Summer 2016).

Dimensions

Overall: 57 1/2 × 14 × 14 in. (146.1 × 35.6 × 35.6 cm)