

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Exhibit | Hawk Galleries: Fired up about guns

Unusual works in glass  
take a bold stand against  
violence

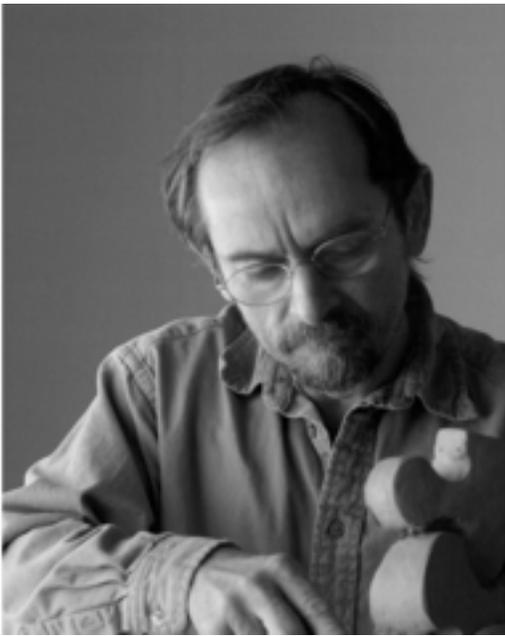


Purse With Gun  
Back to School (Pooh)



By **Melissa Starker**

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The issue of gun control in America inspires fervent opinions on both sides of the debate.

One view is found along the roadways of central Illinois, the home of glass artist Janusz Walentynowicz.

As he explains in a statement for his latest solo exhibition — “Guns Save Lives?” — at Hawk Galleries, Walentynowicz frequently drives by billboards

placed by the regional pro-gun group Guns Save Life. Lined up in the style of old road signs for Burma-Shave, they share rhyming slogans to promote the benefits of gun ownership as a means of self-defense.

“The signs are hard for me to drive by,” Walentynowicz, an advocate of gun control, explained during his visit to the gallery for the opening. “Finally, they caused a reaction. I had something to say, too — a counterpoint.”

Using kiln-cast glass and steel, the artist conveys an impassioned statement against gun violence and in defense of innocent victims: young children caught in the crossfire of a criminal act or felled by accidents involving loaded firearms in the home.

In personal background and visual style, Walentynowicz lends a unique perspective to the topic.

Born in Poland, he couldn’t legally own a gun in the United States until he attained permanent-resident status. Once he received his green card, he said, he had no desire to own one.

Aesthetically, his work has a rawness not typically associated with his medium.

“I don’t treat glass as a prima donna,” he said. “The sparkling aspect is not my domain.”

Heavy, blocky and pitted, his forms have a visual power — an effect intensified by the presence of remarkably lifelike glass firearms throughout the series. Yet Walentynowicz also incorporates humor to make his point more palatable.

With *Rage Aid*, he creates a prototypical hybrid of the public phone kiosk and the glass cases that hold firefighting tools for emergency use.

Theoretically, the glass and blow-torched steel frame holding a pistol could be coin-operated, allowing any individual with a grudge and the correct change to access what is inside and fire some rounds when the mood strikes.



*Purse With Gun* presents a colorfully painted handgun within a dense glass cast of a vintage-style handbag, hinting at a mindset in which guns are considered accessories appropriate for personalizing with decorative elements such as a smartphone.

Numerous works take the shape of books with guns embedded inside — including two pieces titled *Back to School*, in which child-sized guns in alluring Crayola colors appear within translucent versions of a primary-school reader and the A.A. Milne work *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

As is appropriate for Walentynowicz's subject, the feelings that his works inspire are deep, complicated and too troubling to ignore.