FROM BABY BLANKETS and baby bottles to souped-up tricycles and baseballs, the work included in Dave Cole: American Lullaby summons images of an idyllic American childhood—at first glance. *Fiberglass Teddy Bear* (2003 – 2014), an enormous stuffed pink bear visible through the windows of List Art Building, appears like a charmingly silly commemoration of youthful innocence. What, after all, is more emblematic of uncorrupted childhood than a teddy bear? Likewise, *Porcelain Baby Blanket* (2002), a white swaddling cloth encased in a glass vitrine, sits like a perfectly preserved relic. However, close inspection of either of these objects quickly reveals how monstrous they actually are. Both are knit from materials laden with tiny shards of glass, making them abhorrent to the touch and dangerous to the lungs: the bear from Owens Corning Fiberglas (typically used for home insulation) and the blanket from Fiberfrax (an industrial porcelain developed to replace asbestos). Throughout his practice, Dave Cole juxtaposes such hazardous materials with the nostalgia of childhood to elucidate tensions between the ideal and the real.

After graduating from Brown University in 2000, Cole began his career as a practicing artist in a world almost immediately turned upside down by the tragedy of September 11th and the ensuing War on Terror. In the wake of these events, “the emblems of American patriotism” abounded in the United States, from flags and bumper stickers to public recitals of the Pledge of Allegiance. Cole responded to this rising tide of nationalism by questioning “the sentimental unity” of such popular patriotism through his sculptural practice. In his many children’s toys and accoutrements he explores the ways in which such a false sense of community is cultivated while offering a dystopic vision of the future, in which children wear clothing made out of Kevlar and play with rattles in the shape of hand grenades. In his essay “A Citizen’s Response to the National Security Strategy of the United States,” cultural critic Wendell Berry warns against allowing patriotism to “degenerate into unquestioning deference to the objects of its affection...” Cole repeatedly returns to the signs and symbols of American military and economic power—from guns and flags to icons of industrialism—using various loaded materials to critically reconstruct their meanings. His work is at once aggressive, incisive, and nostalgic. Drawing on the adage that it takes a village to raise a child, his sculptures suggest we are all complicit in the construction of the symbolic meaning of our national icons.

Cole is perhaps best known for his series of American flags which he has knit together using John Deere excavators and light-poles as part of a sensational performance at MASS MoCA; sewn together from the flags of other countries; compiled from used bullet casings; and melted of nationalism by questioning “the sentimental unity” of such popular patriotism through his sculptural practice. In his many children’s toys and accoutrements he explores the ways in which such a false sense of community is cultivated while offering a dystopic vision of the future, in which children wear clothing made out of Kevlar and play with rattles in the shape of hand grenades. In his essay “A Citizen’s Response to the National Security Strategy of the United States,” cultural critic Wendell Berry warns against allowing patriotism to “degenerate into unquestioning deference to the objects of its affection...” Cole repeatedly returns to the signs and symbols of American military and economic power—from guns and flags to icons of industrialism—using various loaded materials to critically reconstruct their meanings. His work is at once aggressive, incisive, and nostalgic. Drawing on the adage that it takes a village to raise a child, his sculptures suggest we are all complicit in the construction of the symbolic meaning of our national icons.

Cole’s work seems to ask us to rethink patriotism in relation to human lives.

**Jan Garden Castor**
make this point unambiguously, declaring the very physical nature of American flag-making

both in elevating the quotidian value of common objects. In the late fifties and early sixties, Cole persistently returns to themes of nostalgia through both his sculpture and painting. In the former, he repurposes a vintage 1980s CAT CS-553 compact tractor from his proposal for a Colossal Monument for Central Park North, New York City, placing his baseball study on a wooden pedestal and casting his bottles in metal to give them the veneer of value. Mounted on the wall, the baby bottles are transformed, like bronzed baby shoes, into icons of a fugitive pastime — with the US-made M67 fragmentation grenade designed to similar specifications. The baseball grenade, as the M67 is known, was developed to make it easier for the average American to throw.

as critic Steve Litt observed, “the work implies the dangers of being spoon-fed official narratives.”

By contrast, as Francine Koslow Miller notes, Cole’s use of childhood imagery and his carefully researched embrace of American industrialism and the era of American hegemony, Cole’s sculptural objects are prescient in an era of American exceptionalism in the world’s leading global power, its divisive political landscape threatens to undermine its international credibility. In this late stage of the national anthem. As critic Steve Litt observed, “the work implies the dangers of being spoon-fed official narratives.”

In this light, the dull ringing of the Star-Spangled Banner plays out like a lullaby, putting this American past to rest. As Jan Garden Castro has noted, “Cole’s work seems to ask us to rethink patriotism in relation to human lives. “4 Sculptures such as American Flag approximately 30’ x 20’ x 1’ were developed to make it easier for the average American to throw.

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The Music Box 2012 – 2014
Mixed media (Caterpillar CS-553 vibratory roller-compacter, cherry wood, spring steel, electric motor, leather drive belt)
11’ 6” x 8’ 3” x 19’ 6”
Functional music box plays “The Star Spangled Banner” (by Francis Scott Key, arraignment for steamroller by Manya Rubenstein)

Fiberglass Teddy Bear 2003 – 2014
Mixed media (194 rolls of fiberglass insulation, hand knit)
16’ x 16’ x 14’

Lead Teddy Bear 2010
Lead ribbon, hand knit over lead wool armature
5 ½” x 5” x 4 ¼”
Collection of Lucy and Joe Chung

Untitled (Santa Fe Bear Study #5) 2004
Mixed media
33” x 29” x 14”

Kevlar Teddy Bear 2006
Used police body armor, dismantled, hand knit, and stuffed with shredded lead
4 ½” x 5” x 5”

Three Generations 2013
Hand turned hardwood and sterling silver
2 ¾” x 11 ¼” x 17 ½”

Untitled (Baseball Study #6) 2008
Mixed media with M67 fragmentation grenade
8” x 10” x 5”

Kevlar Romper (3-piece Suit) 2008
Used Gulf War body armor, dismantled and re-sewn
28 ¾” x 13 ¼” x 9 ½”

Kevlar Snowsuit 2008
Used Gulf War body armor, dismantled and re-sewn
21” x 19” x 6”

Porcelain Baby Blanket 2002
Fiberfrax refractory ceramic fiber, hand knit
40 ¼” x 29 ¼” with case and pedestal

Baby Bottles (After Discovery by the Artist of Military Specification MIL-B-16755B: Bottle, Nursing) 2008
Cast babbit metal
5 ½” x 2 ¼” x 3” each
Collection of the artist and Lucy and Joe Chung

American Flag (Toy Soldiers) 2002
Acrylic on panel with mixed media (toy soldiers)
22” x 41” x 4 ¼”

Machine Gun Nest 2008
Mixed media with decommissioned M60 machine gun
27” x 102” x 27”

The Music Box Credits
Shawn Gilheeney
Project Manager
Tim Ferland
Fabricator / Millwright
Curtis Arci
Fabricator / Mechanic
Rain Gilbert
Fabricator / Expediter
Christian Correa
Fabricator / Painter
Nate Nadeau
CAD Programmer / Painter / Patinator
Mark Dufault
Machinist
Michael Everett
Music Box Technician and Engineer
Robert Houllahan
Documenting Filmmaker
Scott Lizotte
Machinist
Dan Chaput
Machinist
Manya K. Rubinstein
Musical Arranger
Greg Pennisten
Painter / Patinator
Tessa Freas
Model Maker
William Cornwall
Typographer / Expediter
Tom West
Draftsman / Printer
Joel Taplin
Consulting Woodwright
Clark Sopper
Consulting Machinist
Luke Boggia
Consulting Musical Arranger
Ashleigh Carraway
Consulting Musical Arranger
Paulo Carvalho
Mechanical Music Consultant
Brian Dowling
Site Manager

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Kristen Dodge and Dodge Gallery
The Steel Yard
Craig Pickell and Bullard Abrasives
The Musical Wonderhouse
Precision Laser
Rhode Island Welding
Hall’s Garage
Industrial Welders Supply

DAVE COLE is a Brown University alumnus known for his use of scavenged and recycled materials in large-scale sculpture. Cole’s work has been exhibited at regional and international museums, including MASS MoCA (which presented The Knitting Machine in 2005); deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum; Museum of Arts and Design; Nasjonal Museet, Oslo; Haifa Museum of Art; and the Textielmuseum, Netherlands. His work is included in the collections of the RISD Museum, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 21c Museum, and the Pizzuti Collection. Cole lives and works in Hudson, NY.