

BRAN SYMONDSON

THE ART BEHIND THE WEAPON

Bran Symondson is a British photographer, artist, philanthropist entrepreneur, and art collector.

He is considered to be one of the most acclaimed reportage photographers of the 21st Century. Bran started his career in the 1990s working alongside renowned photographers such as Gavin Bond, David La Chapelle, and Nadav Kander.

In 2004, Bran started the selection process to join the British Army Special Forces Reserves. After completing pre-deployment training in 2007, Bran was deployed to Afghanistan, Helmand Province.

During the tour in Afghanistan, Bran continued to capture images on his camera of the civilians he met along the way, collating images of the land and people - he vowed to himself he will create some inspiring art if he ever made it back to London. He documented his life-changing experiences under gunfire with a simple Canon G9 camera, these significant images culminated in his first show "The Best View of Heaven is from Hell".

The photographs Bran took of young Afghanistan boys holding decorated AK47s with butterfly stickers and flowers; gave Bran the idea to embellish the assault rifle with money and butterflies.

It was during his last tour of duty training the Afghan National Police (ANP), which now patrols this province, that Symondson became fascinated with the force's distinctive ethos. So he returned as a civilian photographer "embedded" with them to document something far more unique than the endless fields of opium.

The Sunday Times decided to commission Bran to go back to Afghanistan and re-shoot the images as a civilian photographer. After being awarded the 2011 Amnesty International Media Award for his photograph "Lost Boys", Symondson decided to develop the concept of his photographs further and he began to work on the sell-out show "AKA Peace".

The 2012 exhibition "AKA Peace" is considered to be a pivotal point in his artistic career. After his tour in Afghanistan, he established the concept of taking de-commissioned AK47 guns and masterfully embellishing them with dollar bills, iconography & butterflies. He gave decommissioned AK47's to artists such as Damien Hirst, Gavin Turk, Sam Taylor-Wood, Sarah Lucas, Gary Hume, Antony Gormley, and the Chapman brothers and asked them to reinterpret their own AK-47 assault rifles which were all exhibited in "AKA Peace". This critically acclaimed show raised more than £430,000 in one night.

Symondson's unique artworks of contemporary AK47 derive from a simple premise: taking something of fear and loathing and turning it into something of beauty and intrigue. Each AK47 has a narrative which is told through the meticulous craftsmanship of adorning the weapon with various objects which then is enhanced with the placement of bespoke handmade bullets containing different commodities which relate to the narrative of each work.

His pieces have been bought and collected internationally from the highly acclaimed artist Jake Chapman through to Elton John and the Prince of Bahrain.

Bran is also known for his philanthropic work not only in heightening the awareness of worldwide issues through his photographs but also in raising money for different charities through the donation of his AK47s at charity art auctions. To date, he has raised more than £580,000 through his contributions.

His last show was an amazing collaboration with the world-renowned photographer Terry O'Neill CBE. The body of works entitled "*Hollywood Re-Loaded*" was unveiled in September 2019. Bran came up with the concept of shooting photographs of famous actors and actresses with the same weapon portrayed in the film they starred in. Bran took the modelled weapon which was featured in the same photograph taken by O'Neill and then shot 11 iconic images creating bullet holes in the images.

Fast Forward to post-pandemic 2021 and the growing art world NFT trend, Bran is about to launch his debut digital artwork CRYPTO KALASH. Covid-19 has changed in the way we live, and humans are now catching up with technology. Using a deactivated AK-47 captured from conflict in Afghanistan CRYPTO KALASH reflects analogue currency merging into a digital formation. The piece will launch this autumn.

