

DOMINIC MCGILL

DEBS & CO.

Doomsday is nigh, and Dominic McGill is ready. In his first solo show, the English-born, New York-based artist, formerly half of the performance duo Standard & Poor, presented a fascinatingly ambiguous series of sculptural installations that address the nuclear age and the paranoia that has accompanied it. There was of course a generation of artists—from Motherwell, Rothko, and Pollock to the early Robert Morris—whose weightily abstract existentials made manifest a concern with the bomb and its potentially devastating effects. McGill's work is different in its embrace of pictorial possibility to render both the cliché and the residual fear of apocalypse in terms of a putrescent confluence of art, religion, and total war.

Model for a Death Wish Generation (all works 2002), a replica of an early H-bomb, sat like a giant globe, dimly spotlighted and mysterious, in the near-center of the darkened gallery. Over eight feet tall and seven feet in diameter, the piece is a fiberglass sphere cast by the artist and painted to look rustily metallic. With a tangle of black wires sprouting from its top, the globe/bomb looks like a cross between Medusa and Frankenstein's monster mid-"birth." It is split at its equator; on the circular, moss-textured surface of the lower half is a map of the Bikini atoll, with a detonation crater pitted in the sky blue water. The sphere appears foreboding, almost Pac-Man-like with "mouth" agape and glowing, yet somehow inviting. It seems to hold out the promise of some kind of revelation.

In *Ethics at the Shelter Doorway* a hideous stuffed raven guards a tattered Bible that hides a semiautomatic pistol in a niche cut into its pages. The gun fits so snugly it seems to belong there, as though in loving dialogue with the text around it. The expressionless bird aptly reflects McGill's approach to violence—seesawing creakily between Nevermore and Nevermind. The doorway in the title refers to another piece, *Love Is the Only Shelter*, a gothic five-foot-high model of a classically Puritan American church atop the squarish column of the bedrock it occupies, cut away from the surrounding earth. Into this rock McGill has carved a series of stairs and tunnels leading to a bomb shelter far underground. The effect is to render the beacon of God's truth dependent, literally, on a dark network of fear and evil at the heart of the earth. Nearby *Vampire Killing Kit* stood at the ready, while in another room a little sphere of cast polyurethane



Dominic McGill, *Model for a Death Wish Generation*, 2002, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.

vaguely illuminated by a distant light proclaimed, titularly, *This Is Tomorrow*.

An elaborate pencil drawing showed the extent of McGill's obsession with the world's end and what that end means (and, perhaps implicitly, with how the ends-means mind-set got the world in such a disastrous predicament). *Fear Is a Man's Best Friend* is a timeline of midcentury, addressing the collision (and collusion) of various historical, political, and cultural watersheds. But McGill chafes at the idea that time is a line at all, and, refusing to toe that line, he scribbles Munchlike emanations that seem to erupt off the page. In all these works, McGill may indeed be trying to register a protest against what the press release called "humankind's adaptations to its psychotic commitment to nuclear armament." But what his lovely, eerie, leery work shows even more explosively is our strange love—and dreadful need—of the idea of apocalypse itself.

—Nico Israel