

# Art in America

February 2003



Dominic McGill: *Model for a Death Wish Generation*, 2002, mixed mediums, 86 inches in diameter; at Debs & Co.

## Dominic McGill at Debs & Co.

Titled "Tomorrow," this show was the New York solo debut for English-born New York artist Dominic McGill. Known for humorous, thought-provoking street performances in and around New York during the '90s, McGill, 39, presented five sculptures and two drawings (all 2002), which address humankind's conflicted reliance on "weaponized" scientific technology commingled with religion.

McGill's meticulously crafted assemblages and tableaux draw on a wide array of sources, from cinematic props to scientific data. *Ethics at the Shelter Doorway* features a large open Bible with a gun embedded in its pages. A glistening black stuffed crow is perched on the volume's edge, its splayed wings and claws eerily delineated against the lucent white pages. Encased in a red-velvet-lined vitrine, *Vampire Killing Kit* contains a stake, mirror and crucifix. *Love Is the Only Shelter* (nearly 6 feet high) is an intricate model of a white clapboard New England church; it includes pews, tiny Bibles and a

miniature altar. The structure is placed atop a chunk of dirt from which protrude tiny tree roots and plumbing pipes. A machine gun propped up on sandbags blocking the church's entrance suggests something other than a house of worship. In addition, its basement resembles a bomb shelter; tiny cylinders of canned food and miniature battle plans and maps are visible inside.

Conveying the most forceful message is *Model for a Death Wish Generation*, a full-scale replica of the hydrogen bomb measuring over 7 feet in diameter; it was the show's pièce de résistance. Thick, twisted coils of wire wrap around the corroded surface of the giant pod, which is neatly divided into two sections allowing a view inside. The painted concave interior of the upper hemisphere, suspended 9 inches above the lower half, shows a brilliant blue sky. A translucent plastic surface covers the lower section and displays a mesmerizing three-dimensional panorama of Bikini Island. Flanked by painted coral reefs in a shallow aquamarine lagoon of real water, the idyllic sandy beaches are marred by charred tree trunks and a detonation crater alluding to the devastating nuclear tests from which this island has never recovered. The water is intermittently disturbed by sprays of steam and wave-like patterns caused by the vibrations of rhythmic humming sounds emanating from speakers hidden below the surface.

Completing the exhibition, in a small, dimly lit room behind the bomb was *This Is Tomorrow*, a clear, cast-resin globe suspended from the ceiling. The orb, containing an amorphous form in various shades of green and ocher, suggests either the inchoate beginnings of the world or its remnants. —Sarah S. King