

Margaret Salmon

‘Guns Trilogy’  
2008

16mm film transferred to DVD  
9 minutes, 30 seconds



Margaret Salmon’s work ‘Guns Trilogy’ (2008) consists of three films played simultaneously. Each film takes the form of a story told by a man that circles around the use of a gun at some point in his life. Each film might be understood as an individual portrait but the way they merge with one another suggests something larger.

The work opens with the sound of wind chimes and it closes with a volley of gunfire. Initially it is difficult to pick

out the voices of each individual. The multiplicity disguises each speaker, a motif reflected by each man being partly obscured, whether through lighting, a face scarf or the angle of the camera. However, with time, each voice and each face becomes distinct and we hear three stories - one from a soldier who served in Vietnam, another from a hunter and a third from a policeman.

‘Forget everything you learned, it’s not going to help you here’ is one of the first phrases that is clearly audible after the initial polyphony. Each man tells a story that is about actions taken and not taken, from whether to shoot a child bearing what might be a grenade through to waiting for one’s quarry in the woods. Each story meditates on the decisions made and the decisions not made. The gun becomes a symbol for this process of decisions, actions and consequences that structure each protagonist’s life. This isn’t about what you learn in libraries, but what is learnt through doing, and not doing. The re-telling of these stories becomes an act of ownership by each man of their actions and of their lives.

Death hovers through the film - as an inevitable but largely unspoken consequence to the use of guns - in the wind chimes that open the work and the gunfire at the end, the austerity of the bed underneath a simple cross, in the stories of war and hunting. And yet, other moments through the work; the war veteran dancing with his wife, the policeman putting on his everyday working clothes, the incongruous sound of a child crying, the hunter reflecting on a second chance to live after a heart operation, point in a different direction: onwards.

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