

# CULTURED

## 30 Under 35 2020: Jeffrey Joyal Harnesses Oppositional Aesthetics

by Audrey Wollen  
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### JEFFREY JOYAL



**IN CONVERSATION, NEW** York-based artist Jeffrey Joyal frequently returns to the word “limp” to describe his sculptures. The phallic connotations are intentional. In his work, silk-screened military blankets blare splattered targets, carnival clown mouths gape in permanent terror, old army cots dangle delicate fringe and taxidermied turkey heads hang like soft-skinned Christmas ornaments. All these found and altered objects (Joyal jokes, “a lot of my practice involves buying things on eBay”) carry an associative masculinity, but it leans retro. They conjure the era that gave us both the archetypal Vietnam soldier, sniffing napalm like it’s morning coffee, and the longhaired draft-dodger, flashing a peace sign. Joyal conflates these once oppositional aesthetics to unravel the question of contemporary protest in a moment when the counter-culture of our parents seems to have permanently transformed into a centrist boomer voting block.

For Joyal, the blurring of the boundaries between truth and conspiracy, military and militia, radical and conservative, is a condition of how we receive and process our own history. “They have a word for this strategy of excess information—it’s called ‘Gish gallop,’ which I love,” he explains. His sculptures are like if Coney Island firstperson shooter games were designed by the Yuppies. But, the post-ironic cynicism of those usually critiquing protest is absent here. Describing the hours it will take to finish his new series of woodcuts, Joyal eagerly implicates himself and his own artmaking in this examination of futility. “There is a genuine attempt to make sense of it, for myself, because what is transgressive?” he asks. “Was it all just aesthetic?” The question is notched into every mark, tracing the surreal shapes of formerly future worlds.