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Art & Arms

by *Karen Johanne Bruhn* | Jun 7, 2008



Controversial and highly provocative Danish artist [Kristian von Hornsleth](#) has established a new artistic and capitalistic project, Hornsleth Arms Invest Corporation, HAIC, which challenges the border between art and reality; it sells weapon shares as artwork and donates half of the profit to a charity fund. The shares are priced \$4,000 each and by making a purchase, you will not only be a co-owner of HAIC, but also be kept responsible for begging children with amputated limbs, brainwashed young men holding Kalashnikovs, and subsequently contributing to creating a charity fund based on blood money.

Each share is decorated with fighter planes, cluster bombs, nuclear arms, vultures, naked ladies, and carry the inscription *Per Ruinam ad Humanitatem* (“via ruin to humanity”), which is also the title of his exhibition on view at [Gallery Poulsen Copenhagen](#) until June 18th. The project focuses on one of the free market economy’s moral dilemmas and Hornsleth says that the idea indeed originates from a fascination of how the stock market works, and how this market shares mechanisms with the art world. The project succeeds in turning our morality upside down and the interesting thing is not whether it’s actual art, but whether it’s interesting *as art*. And although I’m very ambivalent as to what to make of the weapon shares, I think the project is interesting, as Hornsleth touches on one of the big moral dilemmas of the free market economy. In an impudent and cynic way, HAIC points at connections between war and profit and between charity and profit, which we tend to keep separate. I do, however, also locate a fundamental problem in the project in case Hornsleth’s project adds to the actual weapon sale.

Hornsleth was in the public eye a few years ago when, as a part of another artistic project entitled *We want to help you – but we want to own you*, he offered local citizens in Uganda a goat or a pig if they obtained a change of name to Hornsleth, a happening that made the headlines the world over.



However controversial and innovative the project is, Hornsleth has a precursor when it comes to combining war and art. In 2002, Danish-Icelandic artist, [Jakob S. Boeskov](#), currently living in New York, accomplished a trenchant and courageous happening entitled “Empire North Project.” Boeskov attended an international weapons fare in China and sparked commercial interest in his fictive weapon, The ID Sniper. But instead of placing the intervention in the general public and thereby risking the lives of innocent people, Boeskov intervened in the weapons industry’s own environment.

Jakob S. Boeskov has also experimented with politics and art before, not least through his documentary series from 2004, *Danes for Bush*, where he traveled around the US pretending to be a dedicated Bush supporter.