

Matthias Noggler
The Uselessness of Defense
July 25 – August 30, 2026

With the motif of the pistol in *The Uselessness of Defense*, Matthias Noggler addresses an almost overdetermined subject: a tangible symbol of violence and power, but also a popular cultural trope in films and video games. We are well acquainted with pistols through media imagery and are also familiar with their toy versions. Even though they are standardized industrial products, their function as potential instruments of killing is always present. In his series of large-scale paintings, however, Noggler depicts the pistol—so striking in its symbolic clarity—in various states of deformation. Through repeated variation, the violent connotations of the motif are gradually neutralized. Schematically abstracted, larger than life, and more grotesque than monstrous, the weapon is reduced to only a few defining features—cylinder, barrel, grip. Rendered in a style informed by Pop Art and commercial graphic design, it becomes increasingly difficult to interpret as the emotionally charged symbol anchored in our collective memory. It loses its metallic hardness, becomes cartoonishly distorted, and ultimately collapses as a stable form, dissolving into a pictorial space of colorful abstraction. The concrete gives way to the abstract, yet visible traces of its deconstruction and reconfiguration remain ever present.

Set against an ochre background in bright primary colors, the pistol takes on an almost surreal life of its own despite the flattened spatial depth. It twists, compresses, stretches, and confronts us with a provocative gaze. Through the serial repetition of its form in various phases of dissolution, it comes to resemble an active, almost animate being. Isolated against monochrome backgrounds, its presentation space also becomes a crucial context that fundamentally shapes its reception. The fact that this setting is sacred intensifies the parallel Noggler draws with Orthodox icon painting, which strips figures of their corporeality and transforms them into symbolically charged signs. Hints of modern church art—murals, mosaics, and stained-glass windows with their simplified Cubist visual language—also seem to resonate in these deconstructions of the pistol: prismatically fractured forms, segmented planes set sharply against one another, and a striking use of color that assumes an almost dramatic function. Even commercial art and so-called “supergraphics”—a form of mural painting with strong architectural ties that animates and visually expands space through perspectival lines—find a distant echo in *The Uselessness of Defense*.

Noggler is interested in a modernist aesthetic whose formal vocabulary has long since extended beyond the realm of fine art into the applied and decorative arts. Pop Art, icon painting, and modern church art meet on the same plane and merge together. It is only through their presentation as a series that the individual works enter into a dialogue with each other. Meaning is derived

less from any single image than from the variation of the motif itself. At the same time, the pistol seems less like a symbol with a fixed—albeit plural—meaning and more like an image: the result of a painterly process. In its distorted state, it explores its place on the canvas with curiosity rather than aggression. Ultimately, Nogglar shifts the focus away from the meaning of the motif and its subjective interpretation to the process through which it becomes an image.

– Vanessa Joan Müller