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## Art Becomes Weaponised

Joanna Rajkowska's Painkillers at L'Etrangere Gallery ★★★★★

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Installation view of Joanna Rajkowska's Painkillers II. (Photo courtesy L'Etrangere Gallery.)

London-based Polish artist Joanna Rajkowska's latest exhibition at L'Etrangere Gallery is small, but intensely striking – a series of weapons: guns, bullet shells, hand grenades, missiles, latex gloves and even a folded wool blanket are meticulously cast from white resin and powdered analgesics and displayed on stark architectural plinths like disturbing clinical offerings.

The effect is discomfiting and yet also strangely neutral, as if these objects are on display in a museum. The sculptural beauty of the weapons is made apparent, in spite of their sinister capabilities of inflicting harm – whether through a bullet being fired or the more insidious death caused by biological warfare.

Separated from these strangely sinister, stark white weapons by a wall is a large, cavernous crystal formation embedded in concrete. This work, titled *Soon Everything Will Change*, is a 'portable chakra' and its natural form provides a stark contrast with the sleek, manufactured look inherent in the weapons. In a drawer at the back of the gallery are several intricate technical drawings showing the forensics of bullet wounds surrounded by more crystalline forms.

Rajkowska's work explores the interrelationships of warfare, industrial processes and healing systems, drawing on research into the weapons industry, Western medical practices and healing. Her work embodies the contrast between killing and relief of pain, and questions Western medicine and the military-industrial complex: the convoluted interrelationships between life preservation and life destruction. She was inspired to create the work following research into the Cold War, after discovering that Soviet biological weapons were often made in the same laboratories as pharmaceuticals.

The exhibition is powerful, and the stark forms of the weapons are beautiful in their sleekness and technical perfection. It is a pity that the drawings have been tucked away in a drawer rather than displayed alongside the sculptural works, as they would have served to compliment and, in their technical perfection, increased the impact of the ideas. A high-impact show not to be missed.

*Joanna Rajkowska's Painkillers continues at [L'Etrangere](#), 44a Charlotte Road EC2A 3PD, until 24 October.*