
THE RENDON GALLERY

The Casspir Project – Artist's Statement

The Casspir Project is named for the Casspir, a 13-ton police assault vehicle which takes center stage in this exhibit. Ralph Ziman's aim was to own the Casspir, to reclaim it and to Africanize it, to turn this beast of war into a symbol of peace.

During the Apartheid era in South Africa, Casspirs were used extensively against black civilian populations. Widely despised and feared, they became synonymous with violence, police intimidation, and institutional oppression. Post-Apartheid many Casspirs were decommissioned, their hulls left to rust, a relic of the past better forgotten. With the end of Apartheid, the arms boycott was lifted and South Africa was free to export the Casspirs to the rest of the world. The United States found use for them during the second Gulf War as a patrol vehicle. With America's withdrawal from Iraq, many of these vehicles were brought back to the United States, re-branded the MRAP (mine-resistant ambush protected) and loaned out to local police forces under the Pentagon's 1033 program. Ziman's sculpture and installation work challenges the viewer to confront how cultural memory, often entangled in violence, may bear upon the contemporary.

The transformed Casspir is covered in elaborate, brightly-colored panels of complex glass beadwork made in traditional patterns and completed by artisans from Zimbabwe and the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. With *The Casspir Project*, which also includes photography, film, beaded sculptures, tapestries, and handmade costumes, Ziman repurposes symbols of violence and subjugation into vibrant, culturally significant works of art. The collaborative pieces have created income for African craftspeople, while raising awareness of oppressive governments and the over-militarization of police around the world.

The Casspir, along with some of Ziman's photography, have previously been exhibited at the National Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa; Everard Read Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa; and Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, New York, during the 1-54 Art Fair. The exhibit at The Rendon Gallery in Los Angeles is the first time *The Casspir Project* is being shown as a complete body of work.