

Soft Animators. Curator Jas Huggonet; Gallery One, Craft ACT, May 14-June 20.
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Craft ACT's new shop opened on Saturday to cheers from an enthusiastic crowd. The welcoming space is filled with the kinds of jewelled pleasures, clever forms and ingenuity which exemplify the range of work this organization promotes.

The two gallery exhibitions amplify this sense of diversity. Gallery Two houses *Books to Hold or Let Go*, a display of 23 bindings by different artists of an eponymous book of poems by Rosemary Dobson. Like saplings in a forest of ideas, the books quietly await our detailed attention.

Compared to this, Gallery One is bright and brash, a mix of giant and small soft sculptures, straddling or spilling out into space, clinging to or splayed along the walls. Curator Jas Huggonet has collated the work of 5 artists using textile crafts to create animations.

The room is full of eyes, ears, noses, coats, 4-legged jeans, boots and ragged hairstyles. Owls float above, child dolls sit and cuddle, a huge red devil glares from the wall. In Sarah CrowEST's work, amorphous, vaguely humanoid shapes [like Telly Tubbies, but with more glitz] cluster along one wall. Fluff and buttons, sequins and dark hairy things, soft-serve cornucopias: this is a grown-up's half-dream of her childhood [where did things go wrong?]. By contrast, along another wall, Ghostpatrol has pasted a splash of cartoon skulls.

One becomes aware that the dialogue in this exhibition is not just between the objects in this room. As Huggonet explains, via the internet, *soft animators* connects the five artists to multiple networks. The exhibition takes its place as a link in the chain that "connects artists to artists and ideas to ideas" in the big hairy world beyond the gallery walls.

CUPCO [www.cupco.net] links to a network of artists high on street-cred. CUPCO internationally distributes a doll template that is decorated and returned to be put up on internet display. The dolls' generic, virtually homogenous form takes contemporary insouciance about as far as it can go [what really means more than anything else?]. The wall display at Craft ACT creates a sea of famous and infamous [Kevin Rudd, Che Guevara, many generic 'others' in between] gathered as if for a protest, a rock concert...or nothing much at all. CUPCO's suicide bomber doll, however, complete with detachable bomb sachet, does carry a more critical edge.

Insouciance is also a characteristic of the work of Alan Jones. He self-deprecatingly titles two pieces "That's the way it is"—a gesture to the cynicism and supposed power of his radio personality namesake. A 4-legged man is the 'keeper' of an oversized, chained head. But who leads whom? Does size mean power, or does the chain control? Jones, better known for his painted portraiture, teases aspects of his own earlier works, mixing frayed edges with fine stitching and an aggressively effective use of 3-dimensional space.

Finally, who are these creatures within an enchanted landscape of animals, pioneers, Indians, gorilla-creatures, famous scientists, tiny toys? The installation of soft sculptures by Cat Rabbit based on drawings by Ghostpatrol is beautiful, detailed, fresh. These too are soft toys liberated way beyond the playroom. An internet search folds open onto other thoughts and past displays, from “cotton-based armies” to exhibitions resurrecting old skateboards. Ironically, the pieces in this exhibition and their web-linked universes go ‘beyond’, but finally return to what children have always known: in the imagination. toys always hold an enormous world.