

Toy Art: Artists Incorporate The Objects Of Our Youth

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I have to confess I am easily drawn to works of art that resemble or depict toys and other childhood objects. At face value these works are easy, as all of us have some form of relationship or pre-existing association with the referenced nostalgic icons. In other words, the works naturally engage us and draw us in. However, these works, specifically those featured here, use the familiar imagery to interject layers of conceptual content, moving far beyond catchy into heavier implications, through expert usage of scale, quantity and context.

Context is key in these pieces. Maurizio Cattelan is a conceptual master of context, as demonstrated in his piece *Daddy Daddy*, which features a large drowned figure of Pinocchio floating face down in a pool inside the Guggenheim. The result is ironic, tragic and flawless. As well, the practice of significantly altering scale such as Jeff Koons' balloon animal sculptures, Urs Fischer's *Untitled (Lamp/Bear)* and Yoram Wolberger's life-size sculptures of toy and trophy figurines, allows the objects to become monolithic, dwarf us and alter our sense of reality.

Similarly, the practice of using toys as a material en masse in the creation of a larger installation or sculpture, such as Hans Hemmert has done with balloons (that are naturally allowed to deflate), Hiroshi Fuji has done with truckloads of toys and Joe Black has done with toy soldiers. Jud Bergeron has taken this a step further in his usage of the rubber ducky, by casting it in multiples with sterling silver and other precious metals, as well as using casts of the ducky to create the shape of an atom bomb cloud (recast in rubber) erupting from a vintage toy. Bergeron's works overall are inspired by his experience as a father, informed by the joy and intensity of his children and parenting role, and also serve as a commentary to the state of things in society at large. The concepts and underlying narratives of many of the works by the artists featured here point to war, violence, loss, consumption and commodity. Here the toy becomes catalyst for more than a trip down memory lane- through expert craftsmanship and adept usage of context the toy becomes a vehicle for meaningful dialogue about issues that involve humanity in general. Here the toy becomes larger than life.