

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Embracing the Imagery  
Of ChildhoodA Show Plays on the Themes  
Of Innocence, and the Loss of It

BY BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

First there was the simple collage. Ever since Pablo Picasso thought it might be cool to stick a piece of newspaper onto a painting, artists have been appropriating all kinds of materials, objects and mass-media imagery for their artworks, challenging in the process our ideas and assumptions about art.

## ART REVIEW

"Inner Child: Good and Evil in the Garden of Memories" at the Huxton Museum of Art explores a more recent if related phenomenon — the enthusiasm for appropriated childhood imagery in contemporary art. To this end, Krista Accola, the curator, has assembled nearly 50 pretty-colored, fantasy-oriented artworks incorporating toys, cartoons, comics, children's films and book illustrations and other kids' stuff.

The motivations for the current embrace of this imagery are not easy to pinpoint. No doubt they include a reaction to calamities like wars, poverty and natural disasters; perhaps they also reflect the loss of mystery and wonder in everyday life, as science continues to explain the inner workings of everything.

At the same time, this theme is not exactly new to art. In the 1960s, Andy Warhol made paintings using diagrams from children's paint-by-numbers kits projected onto the canvas. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, Jeff Koons created an international sensation with a huge doll-like sculpture of a cuddly puppy made of flowers. Though the work was senti-

mental and kitschy, the art world fawned over the puppy as if it were a newborn baby.

Some artists selected for the show in Huxton also play on sentimentality, using childhood imagery to express a longing for a time of innocence, simplicity and purity. Work of this kind tends to dominate the first-floor gallery, where among other things you will find paintings of little girls by Seena Hong; toy assemblages by Bruce Wall; and an army of new little toys created by an artist known only as Sorokin.

The same qualities pervade Cindy Kane's painting "Treasures" (2005), depicting a collection of imaginary stuffed animals, toys and other things that are often a part of the fantasy life of children. There is no sense of irony, conflict or anxiety here, only an expression of love and admiration for purity and play.

Other artists work with decorative

**CHILDREN'S VIEW**  
Clockwise from top right, "The Chosen One" (2006) by Timothy Cummings; "Treasures" (2005) by Cindy Kane; and "Yesterday Is Never Again, Today Is Still Forever" (2006) by Enrique Chagoya.



Works ranging  
from the fantastic  
to the provocative.

that makes aspects of the exhibition feel, well, grown-up. This is especially apparent in the displays upstairs, where you will find artists using childhood imagery to address serious themes, or at least combining adult ideas and childhood imagery. You could say they depict a world of innocence lost.

Roy Caesar's "Samsara" (2006) is a computer-altered image of a girl with pink rabbit ears and an inscrutable look on her face. She is scary, for in addition to her appearance she is holding a giant fishhook and looking up at the sky wistfully. Has she just killed someone? Is it

more horror-movie still than art photograph.

The visual language of childhood is also appropriated and manipulated for dark purposes in paintings by Enrique Chagoya, Timothy Cummings, Tim Evans and Rene Lynch. For instance, Mr. Chagoya uses cartoon figures to criticize the current administration's policies on illegal immigration, while Mr. Lynch relies on symbolism to navigate the thorny, provocative subject of teenage sexuality.

Then there is Megan Mackay, who paints broken and discarded toys piled up as if on a giant rubbish heap. Her paintings embody some of the more serious issues raised by this show, like consumerism, wastefulness and a reliance on cheap imports. They suggest that while we were all playing with our new toys, our society was the worse for it.

"Inner Child: Good and Evil in the Garden of Memories," Huxton Museum of Art, 7 Lower Center Street, Clinton, through Jan. 6; (908) 785-8415 or [www.huxtonmuseuma.com](http://www.huxtonmuseuma.com).