

# Picturing a world of Play

## ART

### Play

Little did he know it but when Dom Joly donned his animal outfits in Channel 4 series *Trigger Happy TV*, he was tapping into a growing trend in visual art.

Marcel Dzama recently collaborated with Spike Jonze in a film featuring a bear costume; Mark Wallinger gained a Turner Prize nomination this year for a film in which he wanders around a gallery wearing another bear suit, and a new exhibition features Japanese-born Toshie Takeuchi stepping through the looking glass as a giant rabbit.

But this *Sesame Street*-ification of art is more than a toddler version of the Young British Artists. It heralds a new spirit of light-heartedness in an often over-stuffy art world; a spirit celebrated in the Bearspace group's show *Play*, which opens with a Halloween party tomorrow night.

'The YBAs brought a tongue-in-cheek attitude to creating their artworks, making fun of the establishment,' says *Play*'s curator Julia Alvarez. 'That paved the way for a more anarchic view of art production, which is interesting given the current state of the market.'

According to Alvarez, the exhibition was inspired by that contrast between a resurgence in playfulness and the controlled commercialism of art fairs, such as *Frieze*. 'This aspect of play seems to be growing stronger in reaction to collectors and dealers wanting to pin down artists,' she says. 'But, in turn, it's something that the market and larger galleries seem to embrace.'



Keep on pumping: Toshie Takeuchi's endless pumpkin machine

Alvarez has pulled together established and emerging names to illustrate the recent re-emergence of play. The YBAs themselves are present, with a piece from the *Disasters Of War* series by Jake and Dinos Chapman giving a Goyaesque twist to toy soldiers.

Childhood materials inevitably feature, although any Blue Peter tendencies are tempered by darker, adult visions of the world. Paul

Caton references the *Fuzzy Felt* of pre-school craft, with felt images placing delinquent youths against classical landscapes. The Yorkshire-born artist creates scenes of hoodies with BB guns in the former mining community where he grew up, linking its economic decay to the urban culture of Eminem.

Peter Harrap also reflects disillusionment by painting teenagers against walls sprayed with the graffiti

of phrases taken from poets. And Takeuchi's rabbit doesn't just represent innocent wonder: an earlier triptych by Takeuchi showed children from the Islington council estate where she lived in bunny costumes, contrasting their vulnerability with a dreamlike vision of a disused city park.

But it's not all a sinister subversion of childhood: Neil Zakiewicz's sculptures carved out of sofa stuffing, Bob & Roberta Smith's vegetable

braille and Max Hymes's kitsch pineapples all raise a smile, as well as challenging the 'look, don't touch' ethos of the traditional gallery.

Fiona Macdonald

Tomorrow until Sun, Cello Factory, 33-34 Cornwall Road SE1, tomorrow 6pm to 8pm (party 8pm to midnight), Thu to Sun 12.30pm to 5pm (then until Nov 16 by appointment), free. Tel: 020 8694 8097. Tube: Waterloo