

soft animators

Jas Hugonnet, Curator/Exhibition Manager

soft animators came about after sensing a movement in the field of textiles that involved the abstraction and creation of comical versions of the physical world. I was particularly interested in artists who were creating entities, characterisations in textiles, resulting in soft characters. I saw this as an opportunity to comment on the creative process itself and to examine how artists bring into the world that which was previously non-existent. Sarah crowEST, Alan Jones, CUPCO, Ghostpatrol and Cat Rabbit were invited to show together following on from conversations with other artists, (in particular Ellis Hutch) and from visuals I had spotted in various media.

The exhibition aimed to highlight the notion of macro structures in textile practice in contrast to the micro structure often found in weaving, knitting and spinning. The works in **soft animators** have an inbuilt structure and their three dimensionalities house levels of micro structure achieved through crafted textile methods. Jones' work combines a range of materials including single threads, faux fur, canvas, his own clothing as well as manufactured items such as chain, castors and plywood. His range of materials conveys a sense of structural order that appears to have been sketched in 3D via the sewing machine. crowEST's characters are manipulated blobs that are both soft and hard. The squeezing of these forms produces an apparent neckline creating a structure to which identifiable appendages are attached such as ears, legs, mouths and eyes. Ghostpatrol and Cat Rabbit's collective installation acts as a structure that houses a shrine like setting where human characters morph with animals to create dreamlike tableaux. Each work in the installation seems to be dreaming of the other in collective silence. CUPCO's signature work is a unique design that has the potential for multiple variations. Upon his base model he crafts with multi coloured felts, printing and iron on transfers and presents his work as a mass grouping akin to a family gathering. A shared structural technique of all the artists is that of stuffing and stitching.



While a major premise of the exhibition was to examine the act of bringing something into being that was previously non-existent, the show proposes the question; can artists create an entity without instilling themselves into the work? Undoubtedly the forms presented are unique character manifestations but it is interesting to note the obvious and not so obvious references to the artists throughout the show. Jones' six limb alien character is poised on the floor of the gallery with a decapitated head on a chain leash. It wears Jones' shoes and refurbished old jeans. CUPCO places a doll of himself at the centre of his creations, along with one of his partner. crowEST uses her creatures to investigate and expose human anxiety and evoke pity and compassion. It is through dealing with human traits that the viewer absorbs those feelings as if coming from her. The same could be said of Ghostpatrol's closed eyed characters and Cat Rabbit's owl like entities with eyes wide open. The dreamscape they have created

is inspired from unique and personal visions appearing to capture their dreams in 3D. So while the works appear to present to audiences characters that are somewhat alien, the impetus for creating these works is coloured by the artists that made them.

Abstraction in soft characters solicits a range of emotions including fear, shock, surprise, anger, calm and humour. In **soft animators** it is achieved through form and scale and the manipulation of textiles. As a subject, soft characters allow an artist creative freedom from the confines of realism. A soft character can be anything; there is no right or wrong way to represent one.

A common element in the works is that they all have eyes and through this feature the works start to occupy and command the space in front of them. The use of eyes throughout the exhibition also suggests that our understanding of a character or entity involves mutual vision. Similar to reality, when we lock eyes with these soft characters there appears to be a connection through the space in between us and the work we are looking at. With this feature also comes stillness as the works appear to have the potential to move but remain poised in their set positions. While animation generally alludes to the illusion of movement, in **soft animators** what is presented is a kind of suspended animation where the potential for movement seems possible at any moment.

An interesting aspect of all the artists involved is their capacity to work across media. Jones is primarily a painter, crowEST a sculptor and film maker, Ghostpatrol and Cat Rabbit work across a range of media as does CUPCO. All of the artists are prolific online publishers of their work and activities. Each has a philosophy that translates to their signature style of work. The works they have produced under this curatorial banner highlight a connection between illustration, painting, film, blogging and the soft object. Via the internet, **soft animators** has been promoted through the five artist's websites to multiple networks. It now takes its place as a link in the chain that connects artists to artists and ideas to ideas.

soft animators always set out to be a lot of fun while looking at a side of textile art practice that involved three dimensions. The reaction from audiences suggests that there is an innate appeal in the work being shown. There is something about the soft character that evokes humour and empathy, not surprising since our association with soft characters begins at birth.

Images (previous page, top right): **Alan Jones**, *That's the Way it Is*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable; **Ghostpatrol and Cat Rabbit**, installation view, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. (previous page, bottom left, top to bottom): **Sarah crowEST**, *The Last Batch*, 2005-2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. (this page): works by **CUPCO**, *Child Soldier*, *Xenu*, *Corporate Ganesha*, *Fear Demon*, *Goloplis*, *Mara Snake*, *Sheik*, *Kevin Rudd*, *Lucas and Mayumi Temby*, 2009, mixed media, dimensions variable. All Photos: Creative Image Photography.



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