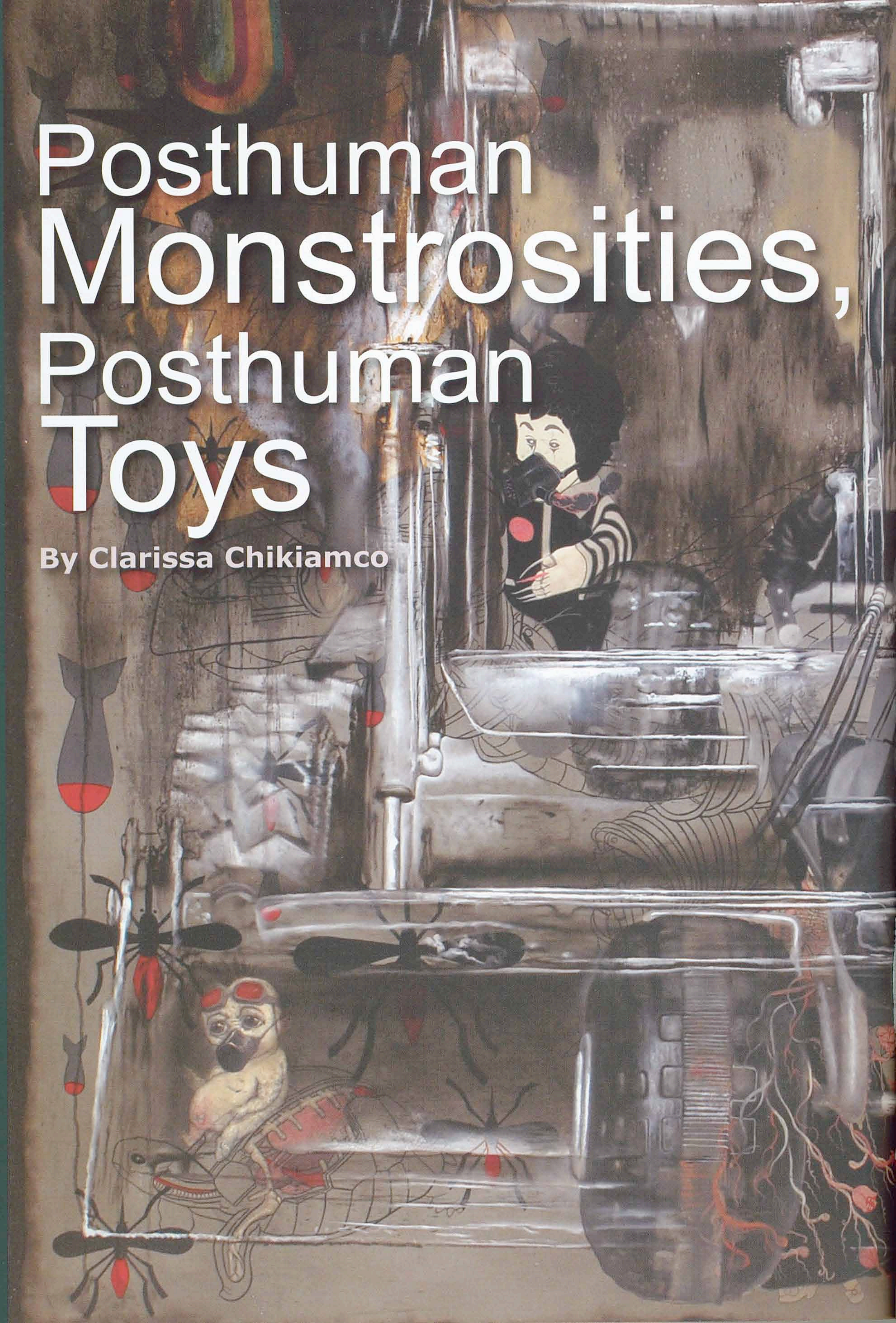
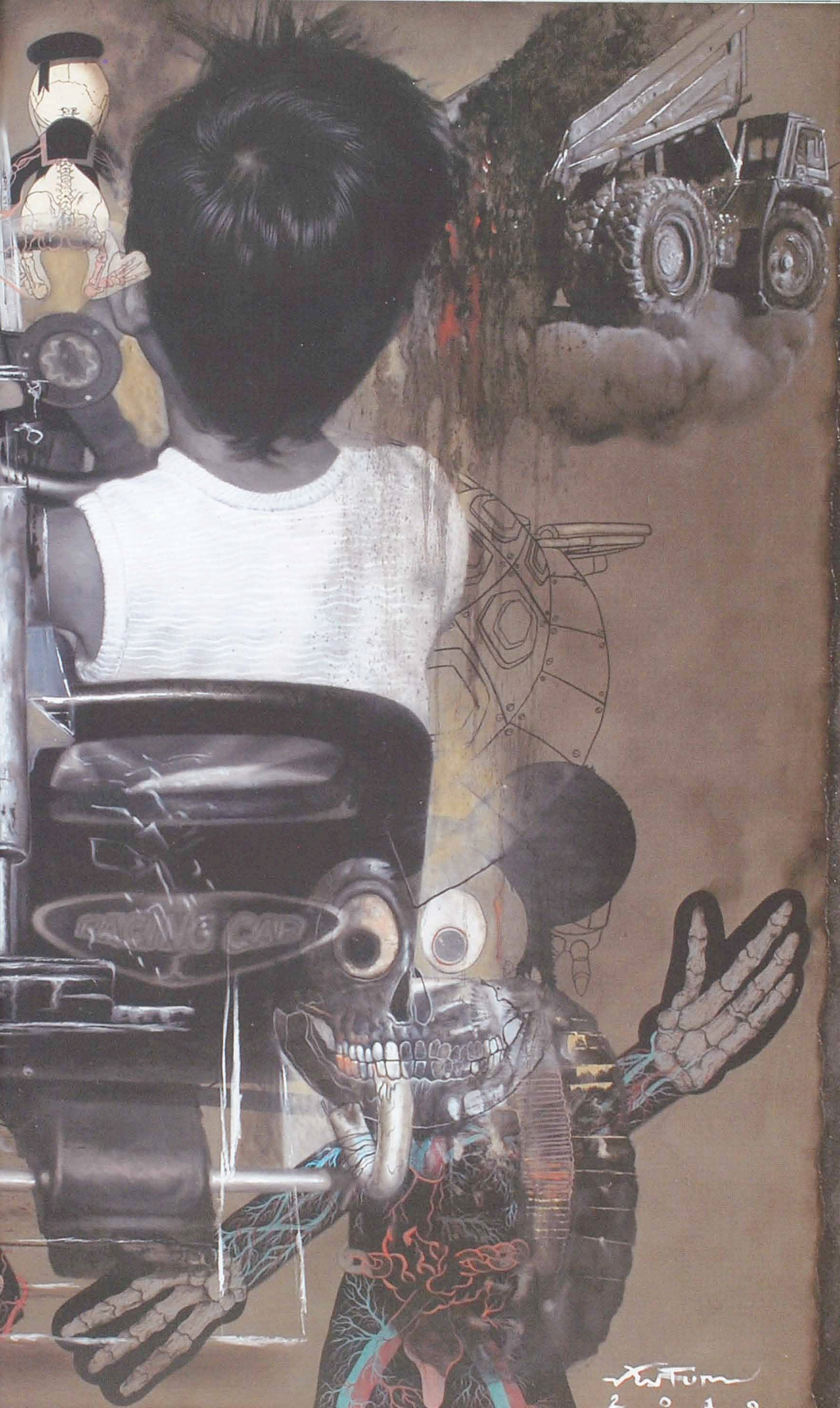


Posthuman Monstrosities, Posthuman Toys

By Clarissa Chikiamco





Collision
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
122cm. X 152.4cm.
2010

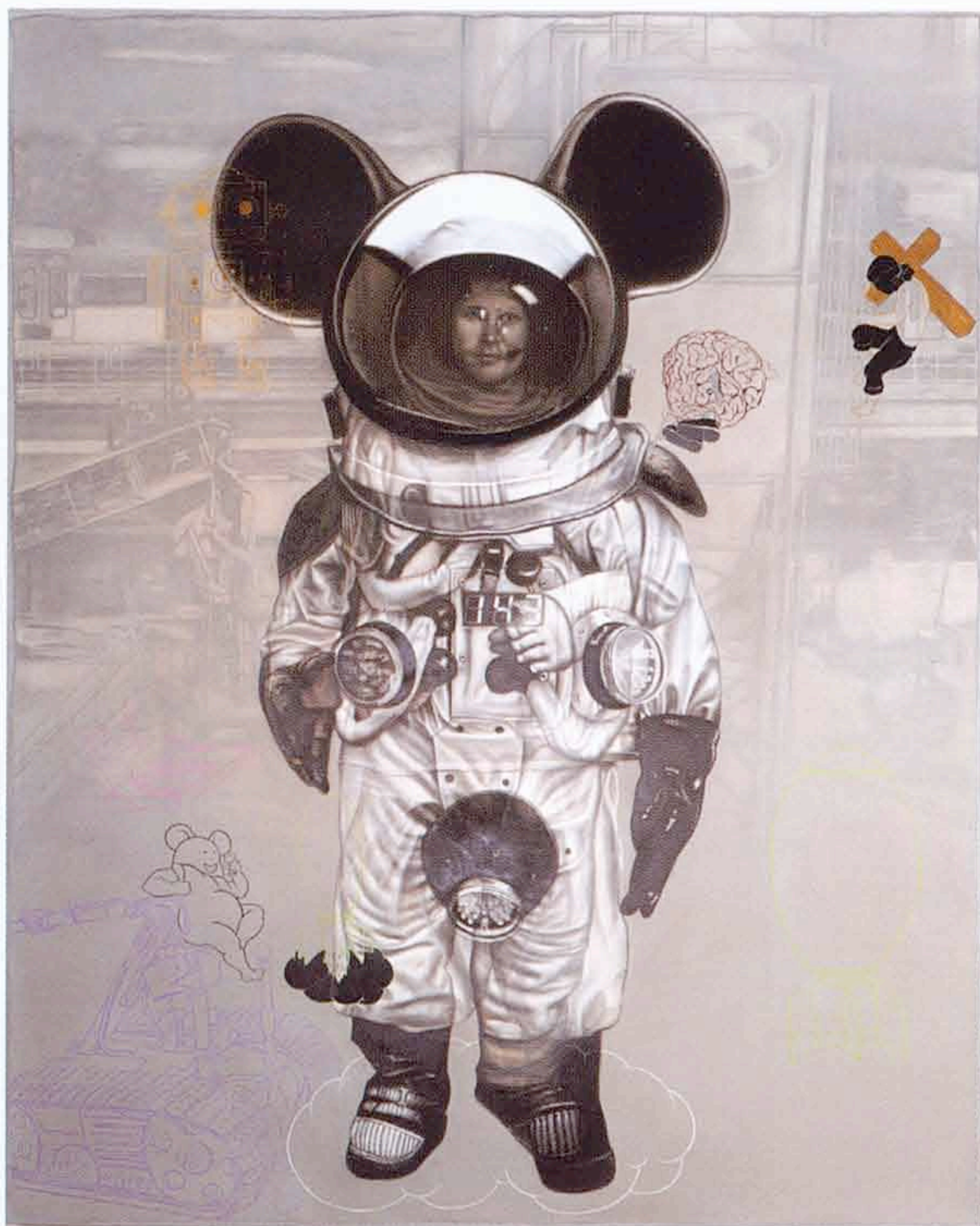


In this exhibition, Ronald Ventura continues his exegesis into the synthesis of commodification and the posthuman, taking seriously and in jest the notion of play. Folding together toys, religious icons, war machines, animal parts, animated/storybook characters and human bodies, Ventura explores 'play' as a part of his oeuvre with particular interest in its relation to art, value and meaning-making.

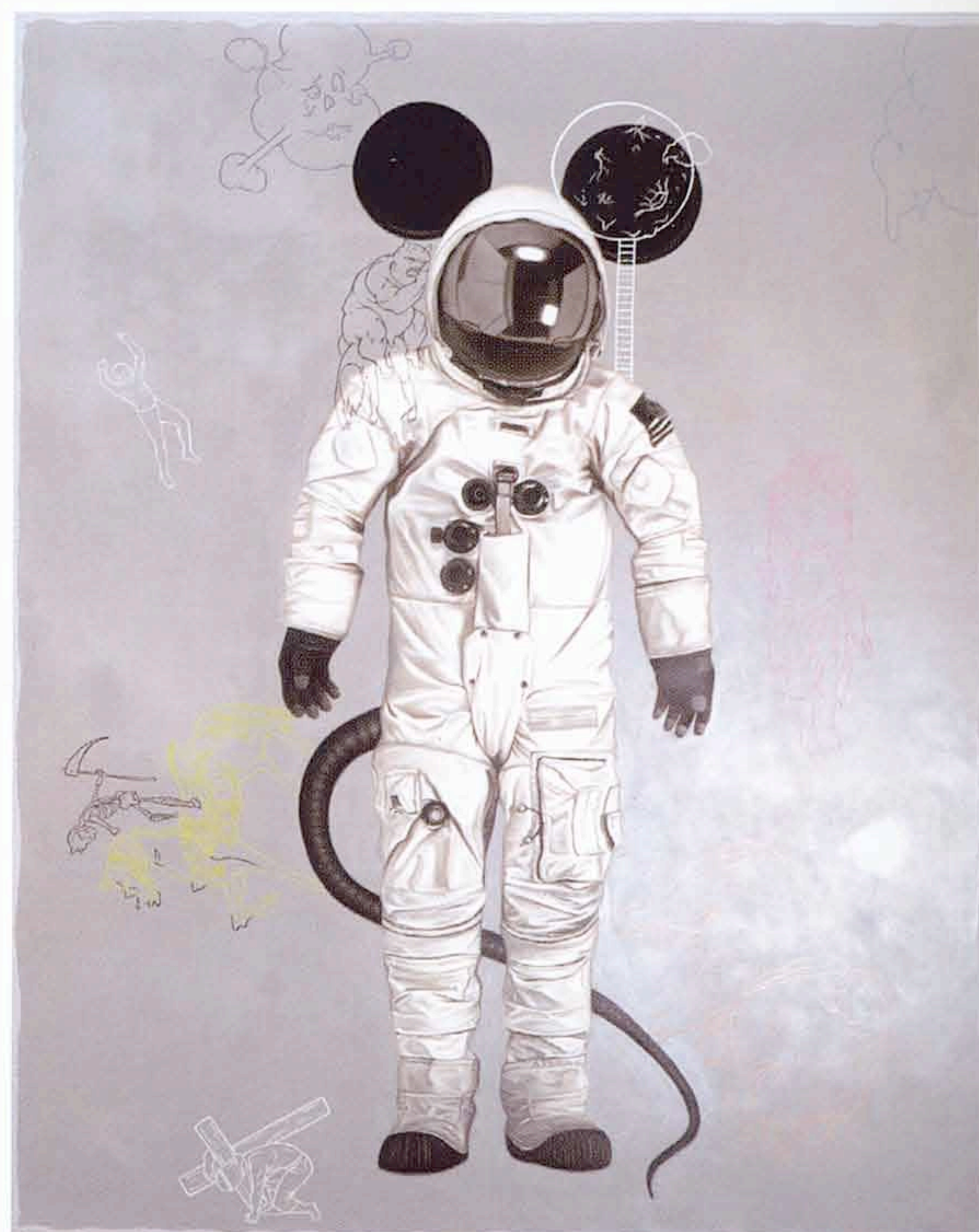
Ventura looks into the paradigm of toys, generational shifts becoming palpable in tracing every so often the current fashionable toys for children. The playthings and characters in vogue vary from season to season, coming in later years to epitomize and define a generation. With it comes a variation of perspective, the artist noting that visual images that would have scared older generations are met with nonchalance, delight, even coos of 'cute' by kids of the twenty-first century. If yesterday's monsters have become today's toys, the artist plays with and conflates this further, turning yesterday's toys into contemporary monsters that are smooth, glossy and, depending on one's perspective certainly, quite chic. An astronaut with a human skull, multiple gun barreled-hands and donkey-headed shoes. The lustrous body from a teddy bear piggybank with the head of a Sto. Nino sprouting little horns. The sizeable red robot with human hands, human organs and, when its robotic head is split open, reveals a human one. A young boy, donning a plastic pair of sunglasses, who grins widely at the images of the skulled Mickey, the anatomically revealed Goofy and the blobs that spit limbs, organs and starred rainbow.

High At Five I
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
122cm. X 152.4cm.
2010





High At Space I
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
122cm. X 152.4cm.
2010



High At Space II
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
122cm. X 152.4cm.
2010



Lunatic: Dog
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
28cm. X 73cm. X 38cm.
2010



Lunatic: Mouse
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
28cm. X 68cm. X 24cm.
2010

Ventura's works and its density of layered images point to something deeper than a customary rite of aging that viewpoints signal. If the amalgamation of elements, if these monstrous bodies as it were have become relatable and indeed buyable, as they are, it is because there is something identifiable in it in current conditions—the condition of the posthuman. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, the editors of the book *Posthuman Bodies*, write, 'posthuman monstrosity and its bodily forms are recognizable because they occupy the overlap between the now and the then, the here and the always... Posthuman bodies...are of the past and future lived as present crisis.'¹ Indeed, in the present and continually unraveling posthuman age, bodies are becoming more and more easily modifiable and as 'mix-and-match' as accessories. Technology, increasingly seen as essential extensions of identity, marches humans into an era of consumer-happy cyborgs. The posthuman is one easily altered—it is a screen, a projected image,² a mirror,³ a window display. Posthuman monstrosities comprehend the body as plaything, packaged in the slick veneer of commodity and technology where the image is both foremost and fleeting. Posthuman monstrosities are posthuman toys—the posthuman itself.⁴

Lunatic: Mouse
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
27cm. X 68cm. X 24cm.
2010



Lunatic: Skull And Guns
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
31cm. X 67cm. X 42cm.
2010



Lunatic: Pig
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
31cm. X 65cm. X 36cm.
2010



2010



Immortal I and II
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
60.96cm. X 91.45cm.
2010

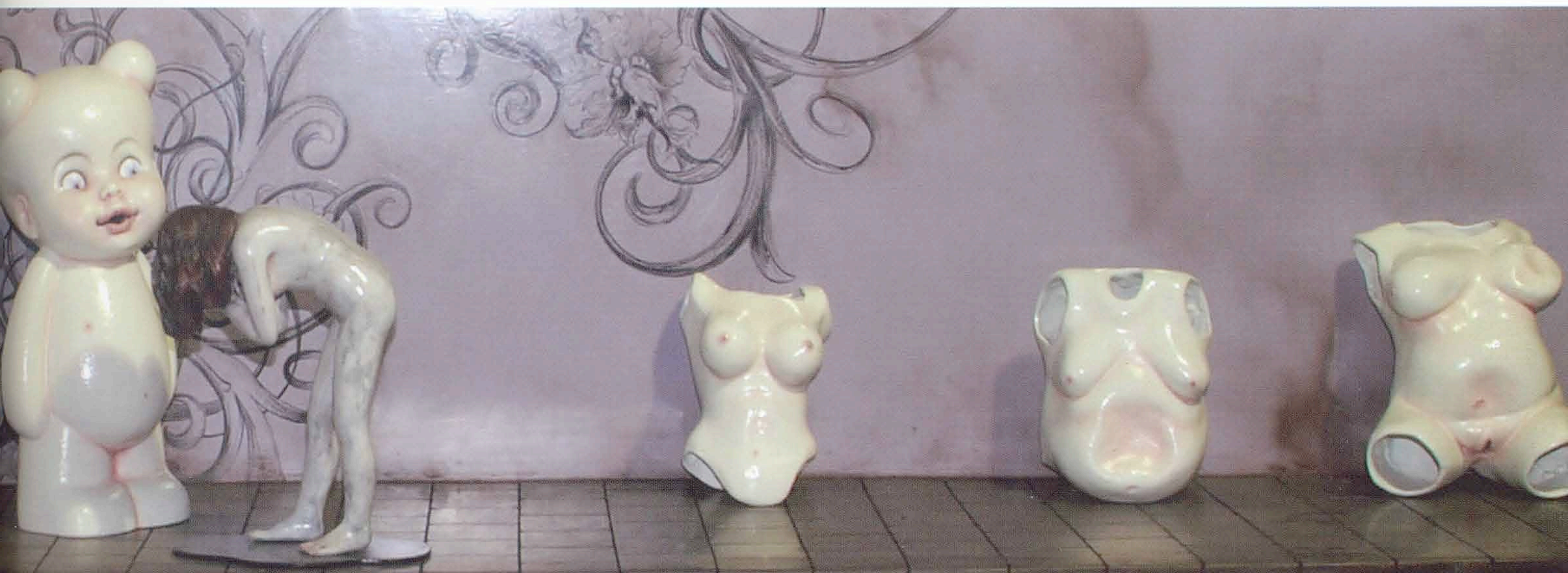
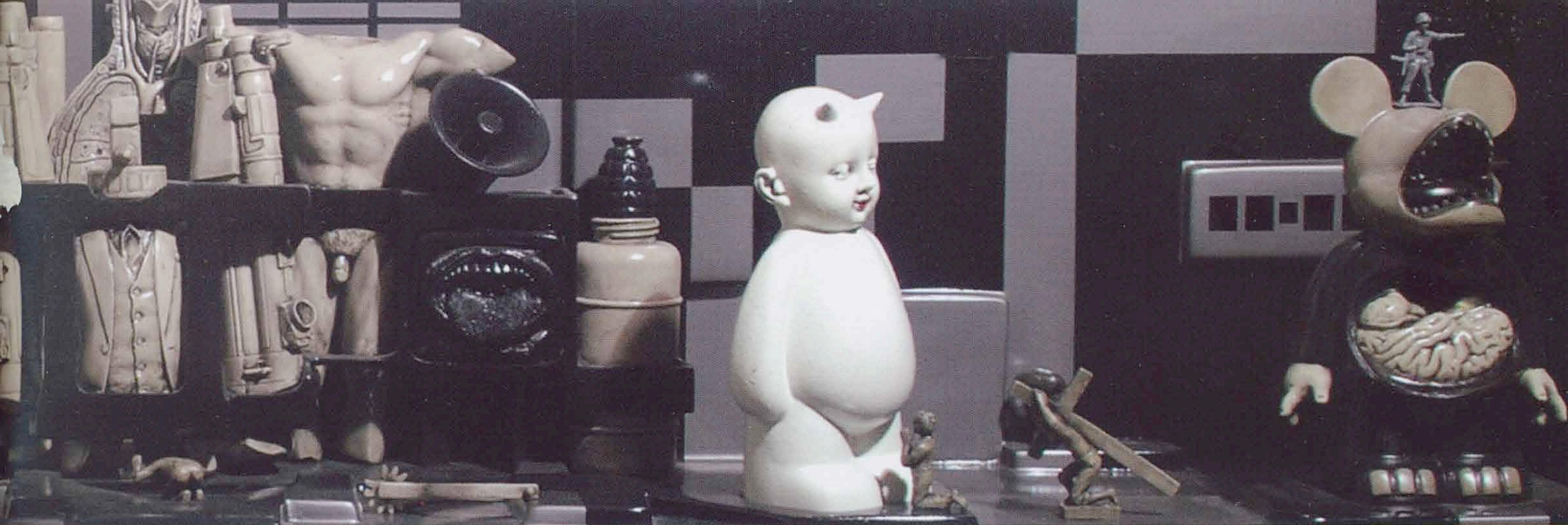
Though the posthuman may be one that is 'played' upon, this should not undermine the significance of this play, play being an essential element of culture.⁵ Ventura, however, teases the longstanding notion of its triviality in connection to the solemnity of art. The jumbled assortments which make their way into Ventura's canvases or bandied together into sculptures in play present the artist's provocation to the system which deifies his objects. Ventura himself questions of the works, 'Are they still toys? Or is it art?' Surely, he is, as many are, highly conscious of his rising status as an artist. Utilizing this to expose the art world as game and one taken in the utmost of seriousness, Ventura questions how value systems operate and how the correlating monetary worths are established. Indicative of his challenge is his displacement of the museum learning showcase, the diorama, into his ahistorical symbiosis of motley elements marked by presence and play. While the play world is not ordinary or real life, neither is art nor its white walled setting. Though one is evidently more valued than the other, the play world of the artist is its combination and exception—an elevated platform, a creative realm beheld in rapture, though one translatable into and desired as merchandise.

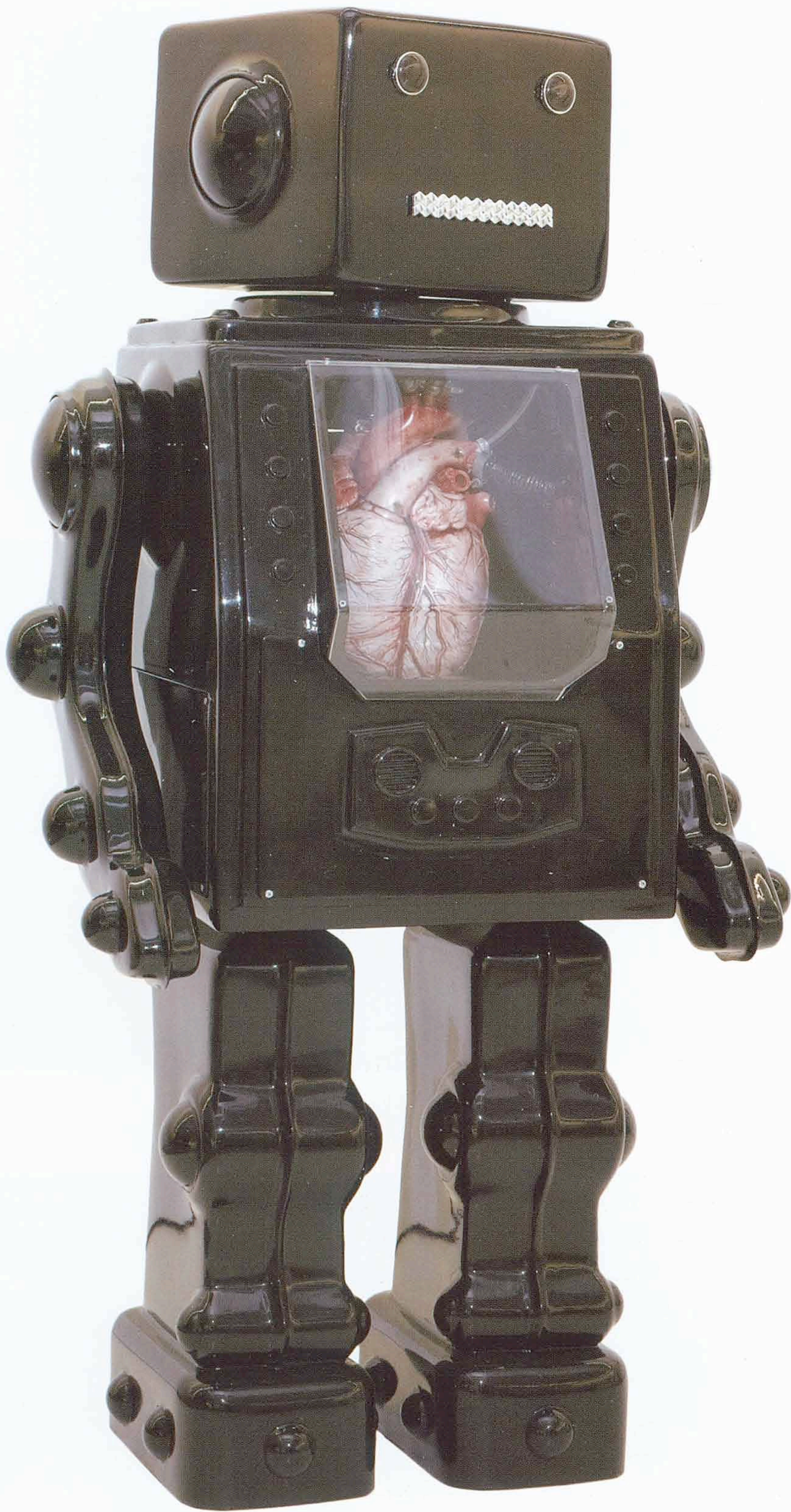
High At Five II
by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas
122cm. X 152.4cm.
2010



Die-O-Drama 1, 2 and 3 by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin, 203cm. X 30.5cm. X 30.5cm.
2010







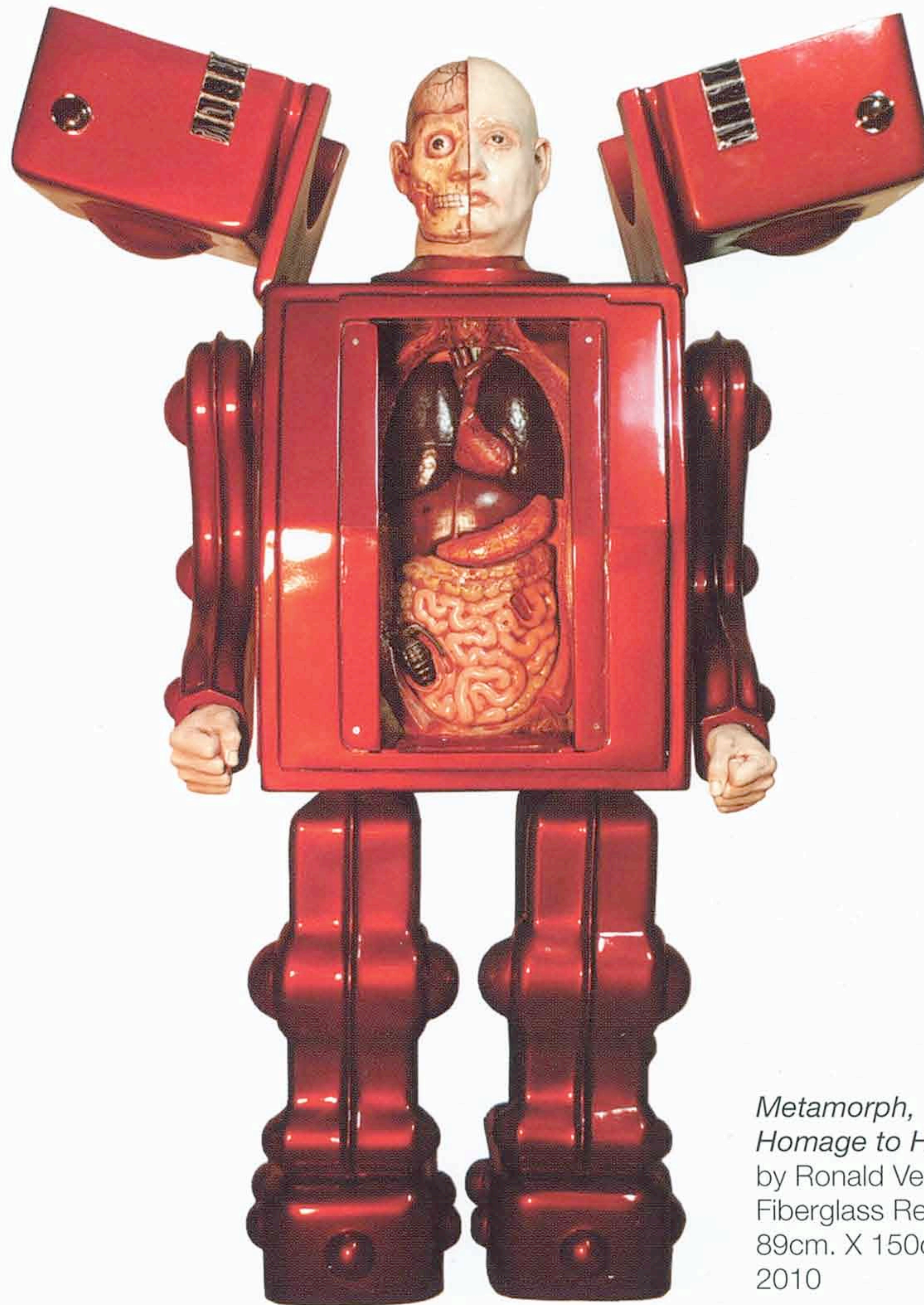
Robot Express by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin, 73cm. X 150cm. X 55cm.
2010



Builder by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin, 52cm. X 90cm. X 73cm.
2010



Power Muscle by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin, 49cm. X 88cm. X 74cm.
2010



*Metamorph,
Homage to Horikawa*
by Ronald Ventura
Fiberglass Resin
89cm. X 150cm. X 52cm.
2010

The artist's interest in commodification eminently suits the approach he uses. It may be said that themes of the posthuman are better engaged in methods that may more deeply broach the issues it presents rather than the use of figures in common sculptural materials and paint on canvas. Yet, what would be more fitting than to package it in the easily consumable, take home-able product, especially one with as striking a visage as Ventura's works? Connecting ideas of art, the body and 'thing', the curator Patrick Flores wrote of Ventura's smoothly pleasing paintings, 'This "retinal ravishment" leads us to think that the fluidity of the body is virtually arrested, trapped as fetish, reified as thing.'⁶ Indeed, even as thing, the posthuman body is revered and, though constantly altered, it is, like much art attempted to be preserved one way or another, inherently indisposable, indispensable. What, after all, could be left? Shedding its shields, breaching boundaries, the posthuman body is a body contaminated, the human 'no longer part of "the family of man" but of a zoo of posthumanities.'⁷



Skyrocket Heights installation by Ronald Ventura

Note: It is also the title the artist uses to refer to his own entire collection that appears in *A Duad in Play*.

Like Ventura's young boy driving his toy racing car into a depthless plane, where the posthuman will go and what it will evolve into is still unclear. The dynamics that will govern future posthuman monstrosities is also as imprecise. Yet, Ventura reminds us that in the posthuman age, the origins begin at the present, a present hypermediated into mirrors, screens and projected images. Recalling his previous exhibition *Metaphysics of Skin*, Ventura's works ask us to probe not what lies beneath the surface but rather to investigate the meanings of the surface itself.

Endnotes:

¹Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, 'Introduction: Posthuman Bodies', *Posthuman Bodies*, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (eds.), Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 3-4.

²*Ibid*, p. 3.

³Jeffrey Deitch, *Post Human*, New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1992, np.

⁴I use 'itself' to refer to the posthuman as it is an entity degendered.

⁵Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

⁶Patrick Flores, 'Thingy', *Mapping the Corporeal*, NUS Museum and Artesan: 2008, np.

⁷Halberstam and Livingston, 1995, p. 3. This line especially recalls Ventura's sculpture series *Zoomanities*.

Clarissa Chikiamco is a Manila-based independent curator and art writer.



High At Five III by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas, 91.5cm. X 122cm.
2010

Ronald C. Ventura

(b. Manila, Philippines, 1973)

"My work is much like an overflow of different realities, a continuing visual commentary, often juxtaposed with other documents or 'evidence' from science, religion, fashion, history etc."
– Ronald Ventura

Many say that since Ronald Ventura opened his first major solo exhibition abroad, entitled *Mapping The Corporeal* (NUS Museum, Singapore, 2008), his career development and reputation has witnessed a truly stunning success. Highly acclaimed for his acute skill and technique in painting, Ventura is able to combine hyper-realism with fantastical creatures, emblems and icons, often resulting in a collection of works with multi-layers of foreboding elements that still manage to evoke childish awe and wonderment from its viewers.

Ventura's latest sculptures, the *Zoomanities* series, also continue to morph and appear in his latest exhibitions, "waging war on preconceived notions of what sculpture is and what sculptures shouldn't be"¹, making it clear that for every chronicle that appears, these mutant assemblages are crucial to his narrative of artistic expression. His three dimensional forms, are a necessity to his stage. His stories are often about aspects of modern man and his present values, playing with revered objects, combined with symbols, and commercial toys posed on a miniature stage, as if part of an re-enactment, and dramatizes a scene.

Ronald Ventura graduated in 1993 with a BFA, Major in Painting, from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, where he also taught later. He was a finalist in the 1999 Taiwan International Biennale Painting and Drawing Competition. In 2002, his work was given the Juror's Choice in the Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards. The following year, he was conferred with the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award, a much coveted honour by the art community in the Philippines. In 2005, the reputable, Ateneo de Manila's Art Museum

inaugurated the Ateneo Artists Awards, bestowed the contemporary art prize to Ventura, who was also awarded the Ateneo Art Gallery Sydney Studio Residency Grant, exhibiting at the Cross Art Projects, Sydney, Australia in November the same year. In 2007, the artist participated as resident artist at Artesan Gallery + Studio in Singapore. That same period, Ronald opened his first solo exhibition at Artesan, entitled *Antipode: The Human Side*. It was during this period when Ventura was invited by the NUS Museum to exhibit, as well as when the idea of *A Duad in Play* was initiated by Artesan. In 2008, Ventura was bestowed the Award of Excellence by the 9th OITA Asian Sculpture Exhibition Open Competition 2008 in Japan.

Since then, Ronald Ventura has not looked back, exhibiting works at the Prague Biennale in early 2009, as well as exhibiting with a strong group of highly reputable Southeast Asian Contemporary Artists entitled *Post-Tsunami-Art: Southeast Blooming*, at Primo Marella Gallery in Milan, Italy.² In late 2009, Ronald opened his first solo exhibition in New York entitled *Metaphysics of Skin* at Tyler Rollins Fine Art. After *A Duad in Play* in Singapore, Ronald will be holding his first solo exhibition in Europe in mid-2010. Ronald Ventura's work can also be found in the Singapore Art Museum collection.

¹*Igan d' Bayan, Adventures in Skinny Dipping, Metaphysics of Skin, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, NY*

²*Post Tsunami Art book, bearing the same title of the exhibit, published by Damiani, Italy, and released October 2009. It features 18 top artists from the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.*

