

'Raising a child. It is not a science. It's an art. A mysteriously delicate balance between holding tight and letting go.'<sup>1</sup>

It is not until later in life that one becomes aware the toys we unconsciously connected exciting personal narratives with as children, actually held adult references of an entirely different context. Aware that the actual meaning carried in many objects goes over the heads of most kids, Chris Hargreaves' exhibition, Super Heroes, recalls the sense of mystery in childhood, where objects and toys are connected with all manner of unexpected stories through colourful young imaginations.

There is a case to argue that children these days are often cotton-balled when compared with previous generations.

Imagining oneself as being elsewhere through play and unexpectedly discovering the boundaries of your own corporeality through near misses and occasional accidents is after all a part of growing up. Hargreaves' 'Swings and Roundabouts' (2012), which presents five glass swings at variously staggered heights, is a reminder of what adults are all too aware of when watching kids play, that up to a certain age they are full of ideas but not necessarily endowed with an understanding of cause and effect.

As with super hero characters, objects from childhood bearing war references and recreations of objects designed for violence (such as guns and military vehicle models) can through the imagination of a child, inversely inspire an interest in something more peaceful and sublime than firing bullets in malice. 'Gold Leader', 'To Infinity and Beyond', 'Richard's Drone', and 'Cumulus' (all 2012), are works based on the Lockheed F117 Nighthawk ground attack aircraft. Infamously employed in the 1990-1991 Gulf

War due to having a very small radar signature 0.025 m<sup>2</sup>, Hargreaves' works have received imaginative surface treatments, including imagery of clouds and outer space that play on the creative potential of stealth camouflage.

Some may wonder why many children are drawn to violent iconography, and may question whether an innate capacity for violence is something we are born with. The work of Japanese artist, Yoshitomo Nara, has often courted such discussion. This is understandable in part as his manga-inspired paintings of child characters have often featured nasty expressions and carried small weapons. Nara says 'I kind of see the children among other, bigger, bad people all around them, who are holding bigger knives'.<sup>2</sup> In essence, what it comes down to is that children occupy our world, for better or worse. The magic of childhood is seeing things as fantastical and even out of this world, when they are actually of our world and often more base than we would admit. - Matt Blomeley

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# Chris Hargreaves Super Heroes

