

# Plaything

11<sup>th</sup> October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November

Opening: Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 6.00 – 8.00

Artist talk: Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 5.00 – 6.30

**Denise de Cordova**  
**James Fisher**

Curated by Katrina Blannin



“All children talk to their toys; the toys become actors in the great drama of life, reduced in size by the *camera obscura* of their little brains.”<sup>1</sup>

The artists Denise de Cordova and James Fisher are auteurs; they are at once theatrical director, set designer, toy-maker, mistress of ceremonies and costume designer, but also, one assumes, players in their own stories taking the protagonist’s role, in the form of alter-egos or nom de plumes – one senses that there are imaginary friends...

Trains of thought become short stories, which in their interconnectedness create a wider matrix of narratives. Imagery in the form of toys as objects, objects as toys, children’s book motifs and strange landscapes, suggestive of folk-lore and myth, are the dénouements of an uncanny dream-life; closer examination reveals an exploration into sexual identity and the human condition. Taking these signals, the viewer is invited to participate in a private excursion, or perhaps, instead, to investigate further the artists’ own sub-textual interrogations.

In his essay *A Philosophy of Toys*, Charles Baudelaire relays how he was discouraged by his mother from choosing ‘the most beautiful’, the most expensive, the most showy, the newest, the most unusual toy’ from a vast collection; where he had been invited to take anything he desired by the ‘Toy Fairy’ – a benevolent family friend - insisting it would have been impertinent to do so. Mourning the loss of such a fantastic plaything (he had to be content with something ‘ordinary’) he cannot pass a toy shop without remembering the event:



“I have moreover retained a lasting affection and a reasoned admiration for that strange and statuary art which, with its lustrous neatness, its blinding flashes of colour, its violence in gesture and decision of contour, represents so well childhood’s idea about beauty. There is an extraordinary gaiety in a great toyshop which makes it preferable to a fine bourgeois apartment.”<sup>2</sup>

**Opening Times:** Monday – Sunday, 9am - 9pm

**Address:** Blyth Gallery, Level 5, Sherfield Building, Imperial College, South Kensington Campus,  
Exhibition Rd, London SW7 2AZ [gallery@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:gallery@imperial.ac.uk), 0207 594 9354

<sup>1</sup> Baudelaire, Charles, *A Philosophy of Toys* (c.1845): *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays (Arts and Letters)*, Introduction: Thom Mayne, published by Phaidon, 1995

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*