

Plustastic!

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Back in the late-70s, there was a stuffed animal factory on Western Avenue just down the street from where I lived. One evening, the factory went up in flames. For a 4-year-old, seeing plushy poodles and elephants burnt to a crisp was quite the traumatic event.

After the fire was put out, the kids in the neighborhood emerged to survey the damage. Walking among the debris, salvageable neon green dogs, brown buffalos with flapping red tongues, and orange cats were plucked, taken home, washed and given a new lease on life in on beds, dressers, living rooms. Never mind that kids were rummaging through burnt detritus and adults didn't give it a second thought, or that each stuffed animal still emitted the sweet stink of sulfur and singed fabric. What mattered was that we had new friends to keep us company.

While the '70s plush stuffed animal has fallen a bit along the wayside, the new Rotofugi Gallery and Designer Toy Store exhibit *Plushtastrophe: The Art of Plush* brings them all back and then some. Rather than being displayed in a more traditional "look, but don't touch" art gallery setting, Rotofugi's inviting show encourages you to touch all the pieces, and what great pieces they are.

Bwana Spoon's *Gray Squid* with its gossamer tentacles and seemingly floating head gives an almost ethereal feel to felt. Mikas Mogo's *The Humms* are a tiny family each member made of different colored fabrics and material. This means they can be Everyman and not the just blonde blue-eyed families that have been the commercial norm. Carolyn Hwang's *Grrr* pays tribute to Mori Chack's Gloomy Bear with its bare fangs and dark humor. Who says all teddy bears must be cuddly?

Want to playfully torture a vegan friend or pretend you are Henry VIII? Purchase Sok Mungke's *Meat Friends Chicken Leg*, a felt drumstick with a resplendent grin that just screams, "eat me." There are pieces to appeal to all tastes. Gonzo's *LV* may be the most affordable and original "Vuitton" purchase you can make this year.

Some of the pieces are esoteric, funny, or nostalgic and some are quite striking. Jill Bliss' understated birds *Karen*, *Jen*, and *Lauren* have a beautiful line to them and come in soothing pastel fabrics that remind you of a quiet spring morning. Jing's *Lolly Poplita* is part Riding Hood/part Mark Ryder in a black cape and plaid dress. She could have easily been made of porcelain rather than fabric.

These works are far more than just toys. The craftsmanship and stitching, the thought behind each design shows that the items at Rotofugi are indeed works of art. Sure your kids will be delighted with the exhibit, but go to this one for yourself. You know your inner '70s child wants you to.