



## Toy Story

So what if they were never real? A Vancouver artist sees fit to honour the imagined personalities from our earliest circle of friends.

HE'S BEEN GONE FOR DECADES NOW. I loved him so much. We never spent even one night apart, and now he's in the Delta landfill. He was my stuffed turquoise donkey. The only thing that conjures him now is the wincingly blue cotton candy I get at the PNE each year. Sigh.

My kids won't have this angst. I have Makiko Kitama. Makiko is a Vancouver artist with a soft spot for stuffed animals. Which is to put it lightly. Her renderings of the Do Not Remove Label Under Penalty of Law set speak of the best of portraiture. Each plush bunny, kitty, horse or bear's portrait imparts the subject's personality precisely. And despite being portraits of dog-eared love sponges, the paintings are dear without being cloying.

I've given a few of Makiko's works as gifts (after smuggling the subjects out of the house), confident that in years to come Peps or Oliver or Mr. Beezer can unabashedly hang in the dining room without >



> awkward explanation. Despite the subject matter this isn't lightweight craft fair stuff; Makiko's works are serious art registering the authentic engagement of her sensibilities and skills. It's art that asks, what do the things we love say about us? And why a duck or a donkey? What about the beleaguered nurture/nature argument: did you love Fluffy because she was lovable, or was Fluffy lovable because you loved her? And why did you cut off Fluffy's ear, leave him in the rain, brush the pile clean off his nonrenewable synthetic hide? Why did you suddenly give him up? What prompted that sudden betrayal? And after all he'd done for you! Why!? Why!?!

For the answer to these and other existential questions, get in touch with Makiko and your tender, callow self. If not for yourself, then for your children, while their Gunds and Steiffs are still able to hold a pose for a few hours.

—Jane Macdougall