

ARTnews

May 2005

Elena Sisto at Littlejohn Contemporary
By Lilly Wei

Toys 'r' not necessarily us, but Elena Sisto makes a strong case for them being so. Sisto has long peered at childhood's cherished yet conflicted memories from the psychologized environs of adulthood and mimed its fantasies.

Her newest project consisted of ten intimately scaled and dreamily colored oil paintings, inspired by black-and-white casein drawings, also on view, or her daughter's toys, begun right after September 11, 2001. Her babes in toyland are a retro lot, with marquee star Betty Boop looking wide-eyed, innocent, and sexy. Most of the figurines made repeat appearances – Porky Pig, a Royal Canadian Mountie, Freud, a white bunny, a man in a hat and suit – and all were cast in discomfiting narratives, as in *Fidelius* (2004), in which the suited man is shown twice, once tiny, and then larger, approaching a baby bigger than he is and a dog. The toys are arranged as if by a child at play: their positions are seemingly arbitrary; their secret relationships are reflected in shifts of scale; and the point of view is generally floor level.

Sisto is a remarkably gifted painter as well, the less subjective, more formal pleasures of the exhibition were in her handling of paint. Two of the most reductive works, *Boop* (2004) and *Bunny's Brother* (2004), were also the most alluring. With their built-up, near monochromatic expanses – ice cream-colored pale raspberry and mint green, respectively – they are luscious enough to make one's mouth water.