

A LEGO necklace by Emiko Oye; Kent Rogowski's mismatched jigsaw pieces



An Te Liu's Title Deed



{ART}

TOY STORY

PLAY with your ART.

TEXT: JOANA LOURENÇO

*t*he art world is downright puzzling these days. Rubik's Cubes, jigsaw puzzles and other toys usually reserved for a rainy Sunday afternoon are being used in multi-dimensional artworks that are anything but child's play.

It's a brilliant tool, since a well-known object can serve as an accessible entry point and draw people into a work—even if the end result is unfamiliar. In the series *Love=Love*, for example, New York-based artist Kent Rogowski deconstructs and reassembles pieces from over 60 different store-bought jigsaw puzzles that (luckily) have interchangeable pieces. Sure, the puzzle pieces fit perfectly, but the hybrid images of ponies and peonies are closer to drug-fuelled dreamscapes than idyllic landscapes.

The simplicity of toys and their unmistakable have-known-it-since-I-was-a-kid meaning make them powerful symbols. In *Title Deed*, Toronto-based artist An Te Liu took a bungalow in Willowdale, Ont., and, by stripping it of any decoration and painting it green, turned it into a life-sized Monopoly house. The home is reduced to a straightforward symbol for property. (Three more and Liu can build a hotel!) It's instantly recognizable, like the found-art readymades of Marcel Duchamp, who was

the first artist to exhibit everyday objects as *objets d'arts*.

There's a sense of nostalgia at play in these works—a nod to the past and our shared cultural history. San Francisco-based artist Emiko Oye uses LEGO in life-sized replicas of famous European jewellery by the likes of Harry Winston and Cartier—suggesting the toy blocks' status as vintage and valuable objects themselves. And the large-scale artwork made entirely of Rubik's Cubes at the Cube Works Gallery in Toronto evokes the saturated colours and playful whimsy of pop art.

It's not all fun and games, though. The use of these playful materials to represent serious subjects can push a work into the provocative. Take Douglas Coupland's *Monument to the War of 1812* in Toronto, which features two large statues of toy soldiers: one an upright British soldier and the other a fallen American figure. In a split second, it's startlingly clear who won the battle.

And isn't that the point? These playthings are so simple, even children can figure them out. At a time when so much art is inaccessible, getting through to the viewer is the name of the game. □

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