

## **Cade Roster**

b.1972, Honolulu, Hawai'i, lives in Honolulu, O'ahu  
exhibited in *Biennial VIII*

*Caretaker*, 2011

3-D digital animation

director, conceptual artist: Cade Roster

animation artists; Ric Bolosan, Aaron Chinen, Steven

Dearinger, Matthew High, Daniel Miyasato, Eugene Na, Melissa

Romano, Cade Roster, Xiaowu Shi,

running time 5 minutes 24 seconds

## CADE ROSTER

*Born in 1972 in Honolulu, Hawai'i  
Lives and works in Honolulu, O'ahu*

When we are in it, we often cannot wait to leave it. When it is behind us, we often long to return to it. Such is the nature of childhood—fraught with terrors and delights—and the way it tethers us to the rest of our life. For Cade Roster, both the experiences and the feeling-states of childhood bear closer scrutiny, and may also serve as metaphors for the ways in which, even as adults, we must face a world beyond our ken and our control.

As an artist who is still young enough to remember his own childhood and the legacy it carries, Roster nevertheless has also faced the challenge of developing his own independent voice. With parents who were both artists, Roster grew up in a highly creative ambience. His mother (Laila Twigg-Smith, now deceased, was instrumental in creating a home for contemporary art in the islands) encouraged an inclination for risk-taking. His father (Fred Roster, noted sculptor and Art faculty member at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa) advised him never to make work he did not believe in—advice Cade Roster has taken to heart. Together, these directives have allowed him to navigate the exploration of a number of different media and modes of expression. Roster earned his BFA from

the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1995, with a double major in animation and printmaking. While both media may be seen to inform his subsequent work, he also acknowledges that "...there are too many possibilities, and I want to get more ideas out." This quest led him initially to produce a body of work that not only served to reintroduce him to the local community but to establish him as part of a new generation of island artists.

Acknowledging that "...what I do doesn't have to be medium-specific. I work with whatever I can get my hands on..." Roster worked on a miniature scale to create complex narrative dioramas or tableaux, combining set design and the creation of sculpted and costumed characters, set up and then photographed in color. The storyline, seemingly set in medieval time and place, hinted at episodes in an ongoing war and a failed attempt to end it by treaty. The presence of a youthful protagonist suggested that the conflict might be as much generational as historical. A similar approach was used in the creation of the *Manticore* series, which centered on encounters with and struggles against this mythic beast.

During the period in which Roster was developing these series of staged photographs, he also continued to draw, often as a means of preparing for or documenting the photographic work. But drawings and mixed-media works also flourished on their own, as was evident in *Bait and Tackle*, a father-and-son exhibition of 2004. Taking on the mantle of naturalist, Roster developed new and definitely fanciful species of flora and fauna that, like his earlier work, seemed to inhabit another alternative universe.

As Roster's repertoire evolved, and regardless of medium, several aspects emerged as hallmarks—an interest in narrative that has existential significance, the deployment of characters who invoke that special combination of innocence and experience so particular to youth, a capacity to visualize in detail what is drawn from the realm of the fantastic. And despite the frequently dark nature of the worlds Roster envisions, he also considers that the aspect of humor plays an important role. A humorous undercurrent often helps to put a "weird spin on things," particularly if it evokes a spontaneous and unanticipated response as if to say, "Where did that come from?!?" Such humor, wry and ironic rather than malevolent or hurtful, also

## ROSTER (continued)

reinforces a sense of cosmic absurdity with which much of Roster's work is infused.

From the comic to the cosmic and back again—another important context within which Roster works is the culture of visual storytelling, of the graphic novel, of the comic-book form for which Japanese *manga* and *anime* serve as quintessential examples. In contemporary parlance, *manga* connotes a form equivalent to American comic books, but with a broader range of both audience and subject matter, ranging from futuristic adventure and romance to the comedic and explicitly sexual. *Anime* refers to products that involve filmic animation, but may also involve *manga*-style illustration. Roster appreciates the fact that these forms have come into their own, and have been received with greater acceptance than they were even ten years ago. While he has been aware of the need to develop his own style, he is also aware of the impact of important prototypes, from the "cute things with round eyes" to the mechanistic but anthropoid characters like *Kikaider*. The global popularity of *manga* and *anime*, which are so contemporary but in fact have roots in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, has provided Roster and other artists of his generation a rich source of reference.

Roster's current installation incorporates three manifestations of the narrative arc of the story he continues to tell. The first is a series of large graphite drawings that depict scenes of conflict. One, reminiscent of the lost boys of Neverland, or the castaways in *Lord of the Flies*, puts the viewer in the thick of a struggle, with fists raised, hair pulled, an arm bitten, a knife raised. And who is that other-than-human, hand-less creature in the corner? One thing we become aware of is that this is very much a boy's world. In another drawing, poised in the rubble of a ruined city, with a wide-eyed bear-like creature looking on, a young space cadet prepares to take on a towering metallic monster. Roster's bristling vignettes of worlds on the brink of chaos offer a glimpse of what can only be a dark future.

A second group of works consists of small sculpture in the *Plush Gaiden* series. "Plush" connotes the benign beings of stuffed animals; "*gaiden*" is a term that means a side-story, perhaps a spin-off, a parallel perspective. Each of these creatures, standing a diminutive thirteen inches high, is initially cast from the same mold, then given indi-

vidual features and details. *Danny Rumor* has all the makings of a red-headed trouble-maker—but still clings to his own small teddy-bear. The pink-cheeked wide-eyed little guy from *8<sup>th</sup> Grade* sprouts a castle turret from his forehead, like an escaping dream. These and their compatriots—*Kikaikuma* and *Willard* among others—stand like an advance guard, perhaps contemplating with some anxiety the darkly drawn world that awaits them.

A third component of Roster's installation also juxtaposes figure and drawing, touched with a bit of irony. Making use of the Japanese garden tucked between two wings of the museum, the artist has placed another sculpted figure, who gazes across the garden and into the window, beyond which on the parallel wall is a large drawing of a seascape with shipwreck. In this juxtaposition, Roster is able to invoke the yearning for things unattainable, the conflicting perspectives of feeling inside and outside, and the contradictory aspects of nature—benign garden, violent ocean. In Roster's work, it is evident that both a child's play and an artist's work are, in the end, best informed by an unfettered imagination.