

## Wendy Walgate: Statement

An examination of the culture of acquisition, accumulation and display of possessions underlies this new work. The history of ceramics is crowded with the production of figurines and animals made specifically for the collector. Ceramic mementoes and souvenirs can be found on countless fireplace mantles, in china cabinets, on display shelves and in store windows. Often there is a compelling, emotional attachment to these items. They can carry surprisingly strong meanings, whether it is through personal remembrance, imagination or perceived worth. Everyone has some kind of collection of things that we carry from place to place with us, whether it is a series of shoes, CDs, jewellery, clothing or antiques. These gatherings or assemblages of objects gain more significance and value when they are displayed together. What is the result of amassing all these possessions? Usually after a limited period of appreciation for a collection, interest wanes and the objects are sold, discarded or destroyed. This work speaks of obsessive-compulsive tendencies, the need to accumulate and stockpile “stuff”, in case of some unforeseen emotional or physical disaster or shortage.

Along with the central theme of accumulation, there is a conscious animal welfare subtext which comments on the care, use and detainment of animals. Collections or masses of animals occurring outside of a natural setting are usually grouped for the purpose of the meat industry, breeding, on public view at zoos or as pets. At first glance, the work appears to be light-hearted and whimsical. These arrangements are filled with big-eyed dogs and cats, stylized pigs, cows and chickens that might be found in a child’s toy room. With their comic expressions and “Disneyfication” of their animal traits, many of these characters could conceivably be found for sale on the shelves of a Disney store. At closer look, other objects such as vegetables, fruit, shells, “cupie” dolls and even a gun nestle beside the animals. The majority of the elements are purposefully taken from anonymous commercial moulds. This process offers a narrative of production and similarity that speaks about the commodification of animals. The objects are housed in containers such suitcases, boxes and wagons which suggest movement and confinement. Animals captured together inside glass vitrines also convey imprisonment and display. Mounded together, climbing upward on top of each other, the animals and objects settle into precarious harmony, looking out at the viewer.

The intentionally vivid colour palette evokes a child’s sensibilities and also references commercially made animal figurines. The use of mottoes and phrases from past centuries echo many current day attitudes towards animal care. Finally, the function of the children’s cast off containers and toys, which house the objects, is to question the source of children’s attitudes towards animals. Often pets are given as birthday or Christmas presents and become unwanted when their care becomes a burden. A child’s approach to animal care is based on observation of how adults interact with animals, along with biased information taken from fairy tales, television and computer games.