



## Toys as Tesseræ: Eugenio Rivas' Just Animals

By Marcelo de Melo



Eugenio Rivas  
lives and works in  
Málaga (Espagne)  
Graduate of Fine Arts,  
University of Granada,  
2012  
he teaches Fine Arts  
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[www.eugeniorivas.com](http://www.eugeniorivas.com)

*Be Happy*  
2014  
120 x 120 cm  
plastic toy animals

The human condition and the idea that we are nothing more than animals are concepts that take centre stage in the work of Spanish artist and researcher Eugenio Rivas. His prolific output comprises paintings, sculptures, and more recently installation work. Ice cream and dogs feature prominently in his oeuvre that is underlined by the juxtaposition of cultural and natural imagery. Rivas imbues his postmodernist discourse with absurdity and irony. Although most critics are concerned with what Rivas' work might mean, the formal aspects of his practice deserve attention as well.

In order to create his narrative, Rivas makes use of large quantities of mass-produced toy animals. Designed for children, they still serve the purpose of educating youngsters through play. Rivas takes this didactic aspect and spins it further by placing these toys within the context of an art gallery. This gesture further asserts the transfunctionality (see *Mosaïque Magazine* n°12 page 50) of these toys, strengthening their meaningful-meaningless condition, reemphasising the quintessentially (post)modernist question "what is art"? This point alone is not necessarily new or groundbreaking, but the fact that his series *Just Animals* can be associated with mosaic making is. Why? The work *Pig Love* (2014) for instance, is made of assorted animal toys carefully placed side by side, forming the silhouette of a pig. The word LOVE is created by the spaces in-between these toys. Love here is interstitial and the toys are used as tesserae. They are serialised and with great interchangeable potential between themselves. Of course, the artist did not actually make these units.

However, this should not disqualify them as tesserae. In this case, it is good to note that mass production and the availability of serialised goods have enabled mosaic elements to flourish within fine art, within traditions not necessarily associated with mosaic making. In a sense, the advent of the Duchampian ready-made and the influx of mass-produced objects in art, as well as their availability and seriality, evidences the return of methodological and formal concerns related to mosaic making. Rivas' *Be Happy* (2014) is another good example of these "new" mosaics that have found their way into contemporary art galleries. The postmodernist discourse that has been used to address Rivas' work does not take into account the mosaic trajectory, a narrative that seemed to have been lost within the interstices of history. Rivas' other works in this series such as *I want you to be happy* (2013), *Now I wanna be your dog* (2014) and *Take it easy* (2014) can also be understood as mosaic works. They do not create silhouettes of ani-



*I Want You to be Happy*, 2013, 70 x 250 cm , plastic toy animals



*Take it easy*  
2014  
35 x 250 x 12 cm  
plastic toy animals

*Pig Love*  
2014  
140 x 85 x 12 cm  
plastic toy animals

mals or geometric shapes like *Pig Love* and *Be Happy*. However, they create images of thought and manage to articulate the fine line between sculptural and pictorial concerns through the use of portable, serialised units placed side by side. Through this method of working with repetition, fragmentation and modulation of units, Eugenio Rivas has managed to create a compelling and still meaningful series without even having the notion that he was tapping into a mosaic way of making, through the use of an additive method of construction and composition. His practice though, is not unique in the use of mosaic elements. There are plenty of examples out there to be re-evaluated and reconsidered within the tradition of mosaic art. ■

