

Kilkenny Arts Festival

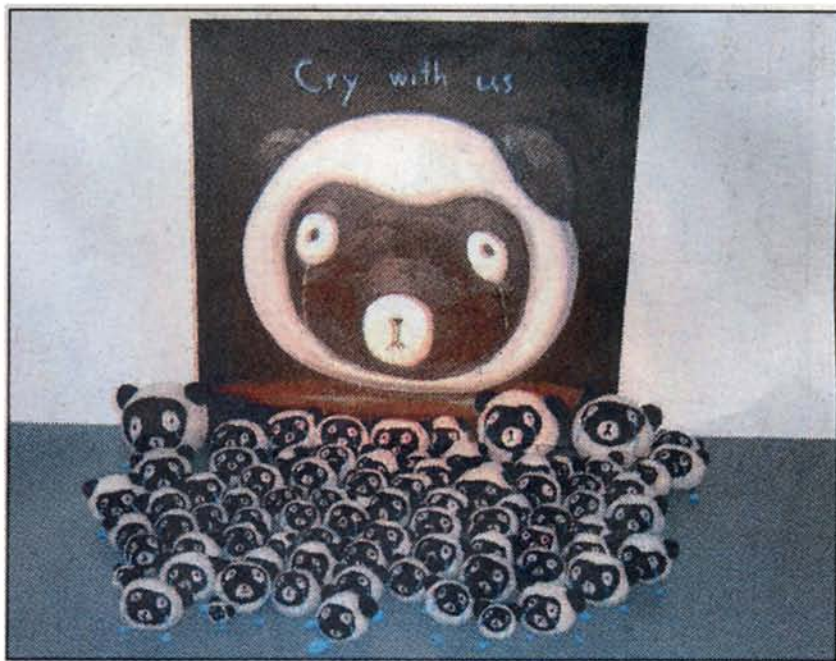


From a Japanese bunny and observations of war, to frenetic installations and brilliant ceramics and jewellery, there was a feast for the eyes and mind at the Kilkenny Arts Festival, writes **Aidan Dunne**

JAPANESE ARTIST Atsushi Kaga has been based in Ireland for several years, during which time his work has developed on the basis of the distinctly Japanese penchant for cartoon characters. His drawings, paintings and animations centre on the misadventures of an alter ego in the shape of an introspective bunny rabbit who has a troubled relationship with his father and is beset by all manner of doubts and anxieties. His father, incidentally, is a panda rather than a rabbit, which may account for some of the miscommunication between the two. But then his mother is a kangaroo. Maybe it would be as well to bear in mind the theory that all art is self-portraiture of one kind or another.

Kaga has a nice, wry sense of humour, but Bunny's world is also shot through with personal melancholy and in a wider context scepticism about the state of the world. The work tends to be small in scale, informal in mode and quirkily oblique in its narrative approach. If there was an outstanding question about it, it was whether the material had enough substance to sustain a large-scale gallery show and the answer, judging by the Butler Gallery's *I want to give love to socially neglected parts of you, that's my mission*, is that it does.

Kaga was apparently considering stand-up comedy before he opted for art, and the exhibition demonstrates that he has not only the observational ability and the jokes, but also a developed sense of pace and timing. The show makes excellent use of the Butler's succession of rooms to spring a series of surprises on us as we make our way through. A packed agglomeration of comic-book sequences, mildly edgy and often scatological, introduce us to Bunny's life and times. But just when we're used to the format, we graduate to larger paintings and then to huge, composite, psychedelically coloured drawings and an installation of short video animations. The prevailing mood is wistfully sad, but also constructive and ultimately affirmative. It's tremendously approachable.



Atsushi Kaga at the Butler Gallery