

# The Boston Globe

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## Cutesy aesthetic

There's something cloying and self-consciously childlike about the work of Misaki Kawai, who has several paintings, collages, and sculptures up at LaMontagne Gallery. Naively drawn animals and people hover over lushly painted, bright backgrounds; she does have a hand with paint. She's part of a trend: Many Japanese artists have pursued a cutesy aesthetic in recent years. Kawai had an ambitious if ultimately fey sculptural installation, "Space House," at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 2006.

Still, the show isn't completely saccharine. Kawai's painting "Orange Forest" shows a bear clad in green underwear walking hand in hand with two small children against a neon yellow-and-orange background. A whisper of oddness and threat carries the painting beyond the artist's seeming desire to just play and please into darker, more interesting waters.

Andrew Mowbray has a wittier show in the back room at LaMontagne, considering how museums fetishize objects to the point at which their original use and meaning is nearly erased. He reproduces objects and their display cases or pedestals in white plastic. The most dramatic, "Morris Chair," he pairs with a quote from its designer, Gustav Stickley, about people using the chairs in their homes. The objects, white and brightly lit, seem like calcified ghosts.