Public Art PLAYGROUND

New York is a city filled with visual juxtapositions, but the site-specific public art installations of local artist Tom Otterness prove to be one of the more delightful and thought provoking to encounter. Since 1992, visitors to the Rockefeller Park playground, located at the north end of Battery Park City, have taken joy in Otterness's *The Real World*. The composition of miniature bronze sculptures of playful little men in hats and characters from childhood fables interact amid darker narratives of socio-economic hierarchy and the struggle for power. The subversive content of *The Real World* speaks to adults, while the whimsical, disarming characters engage the imagination of children. Even the physicality of the bronze itself alludes to a competition of sorts, as the sculptures that receive the most public interaction and play are polished to a high shine from repeated touches.

Otterness is currently proposing an installation of bronze lions at the New York Public Library's Battery Park City branch. Inspired by Edward Hicks's painting *The Peaceable Kingdom*, the five-foot tall lion and lioness would take a protective stance as they face toward the street, their lion cubs playing in between while chewing on books and bags of money. Otterness's trademark "little men" would also be found climbing on the lion and lioness, while one additional cub looks about from inside the library's window. The grouping of sculptures would sit at the midpoint of the library's North End Avenue windows.

—STACY SEILER

Photographed by Tatum Bair.