

## Ed Fornieles

ARSENAL CONTEMPORARY

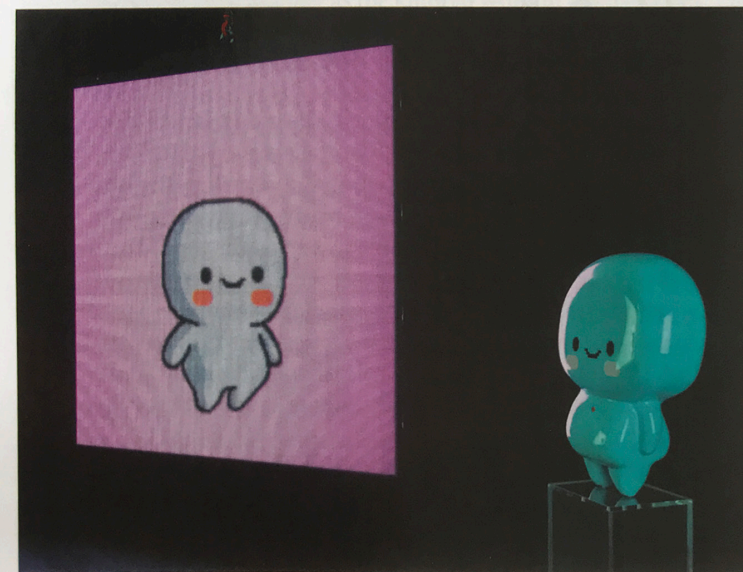
The Finiliars are awfully cute. Genderless, possessed of pastel-hued Teletubby bodies and gumbdrop heads, they live in a verdant valley where they adorably play soccer, blow bubbles, and roll about in the grass. They also carry out more mundane (but still adorable) tasks, such as cooking breakfast and performing morning stretches.

However anodyne their affect, the Finiliars, created by the artist Ed Fornieles, do not exist in a void but are tied to real, if abstract, things: Each one represents a world currency, and its behavior is determined by calculations that analyze the value of the currency and its long-term prospects and then translate those values into identifiable human emotions. On three respective LED screens in a recent presentation, three currencies (the British pound sterling, the Canadian dollar, and the cryptocurrency Ethereum) emoted in real time. They ran and danced in place, swayed dejectedly, paced and kicked at the ground. According to the gallery's staff, the Ethereum was almost perpetually buoyant throughout the exhibition's run, bouncing and seeming to chortle like a toddler adjusting to its legs; the pound sterling was sobbing much of the time. Fornieles also depicted the three Finiliars in ink-jet prints and sculpted them in fiberglass, placing the effigies on pedestals among the screens—each one large, plump, shiny, candy-like, and just a bit imposing.

The artist conceived the Finiliars as tools for those of us not conversant in economics. As the market goes, so goes a Finiliar's mood, and we are meant to empathetically follow. Of course, empathy and its failures can explain all matter of social concerns, and one didn't have to delve very far into the show's interpretive web to find empathy for currency an absurd notion. World markets, after all, are amoral, and empathy is a social good meant to move us to right thought and right action. Also vexing was the way in which the show kept us from doing anything about a Finiliar's illness or distress. Were we complicit? So, too, were questions of cui bono flattened by the simple equivalence of value and mood: When a Finiliar celebrates, who has profited? Who has lost? What abuses might we be willing to ignore to make an appealing little figure happy again?

The exhibition also featured *Tulip Fever*, 2017, an animated short video that ran with three different soundtracks. One was instrumental; another advertised the Finiliars in the stagy, condescending narration of a children's program; and the last provided—in the flat, nearly uninflected tones of a flight attendant explaining emergency procedures—a fairly penetrating critique of the whole premise, thus preempting, or at least helping to formulate, any objections we might have had and giving us an out. Finally, on the way out of the gallery, if you looked over the receptionist's desk, you found a distinctly unsweet monitor showing the unceasing data and calculations that determine the Finiliars' behavior. We were reminded, yet again, that the flows of capital are not cute.

—Emily Hall



View of "Ed Fornieles,"  
2017. From left:  
*Radoll (Canadian  
Dollar, \$)*, 2016;  
*Radoll (Canadian  
Dollar, \$)*, 2016.  
Photo: Greg Carideo.