

Joachim Froese *The Last Supper* 2005
gelatin silver prints 50 x 160cm

J[esus is PORTRAYED BY
A TOY FIEL[mouse]

joachim froese

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Robyn Daw

Joachim Froese's recent series of works takes on one of the great dramatic narratives of western art, the passion of Christ. This series is part of a larger body of work with the collective title of *Species*, a medieval term for the divine rays of light that emanate from God to create life on earth. They have a more secular analogy in the attempt by artists to render visible that which is intangible. While biblical stories provide the narrative source, it is the paintings of 14th- and 15th-century Italian masters such as Giotto, Duccio, Leonardo da Vinci and Piero della Francesca that provide the visual inspiration. In their time, these artists challenged their audience by representing familiar Christian stories in innovative visual forms, giving rise to questions about what constituted artifice or, indeed, reality.

Froese has appropriated the compositions of such paintings to recreate well-known events, but with the distinct difference that here he employs his daughter's discarded toys to perform the principle roles and sets the scene with buildings constructed from sugar cubes. This lends a comic air to what is manifestly a serious subject. Throughout the series Jesus is portrayed by a toy field mouse (recognisable by his cocktail-umbrella halo), God by a rhinoceros, and Pilate by a hippopotamus in a frock. The resulting photographs are both endearing and disturbing.

Paralleling late medieval approaches to narrative painting, several photographs, such as *Christ before Pilate* (2005) and *The Betrayal of Christ* (2005), bring multiple scenes into a single composition, and the story unfolds rather like a comic strip set in an ethereal, luminous non-space. Froese's fine black and white prints typically show a

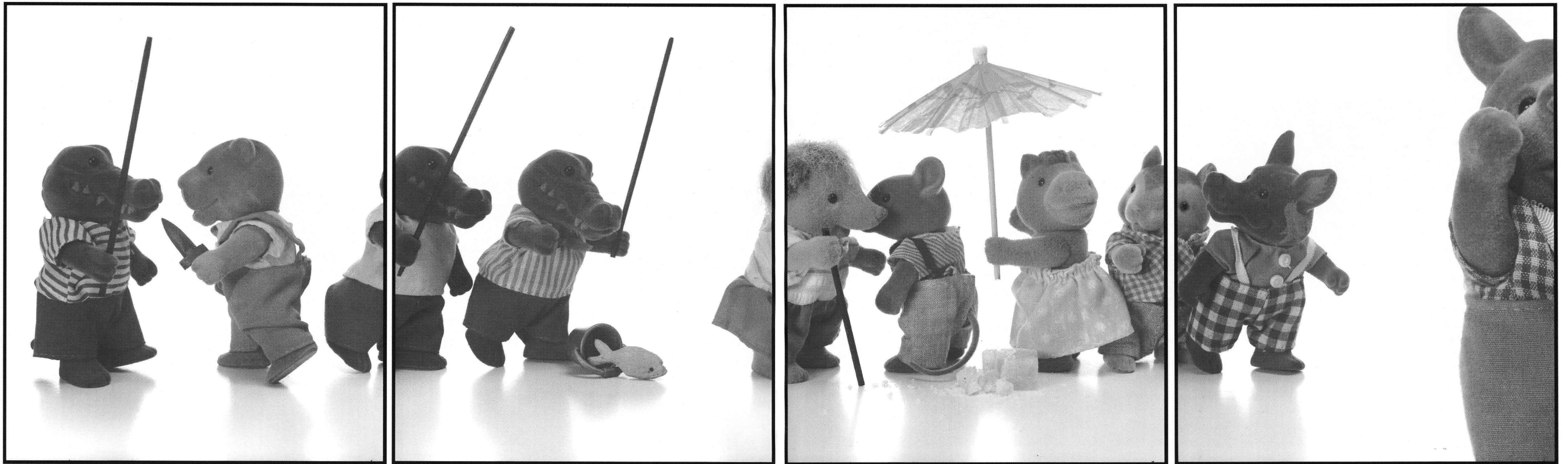
meticulous attention to detail. As in his previous work, each photograph in a multi-panel work is constructed and shot separately, allowing Froese to regroup and recompose each frame. This gives photographs such as *The Last Supper* (2005) an uncanny feel, as elements from one frame – such as the sugar lumps making up the table – appear repeated or mirrored in other parts of the overall image.

Froese's approach demands that we oscillate between humour and pathos, belief and disbelief, process and imagination. His use of black and white photography suggests a certain documentary authenticity, recalling an eye-witness account or, more significantly today, contrived realism. Yet the subjects appear playful, courtesy of the 'cuteness' factor inherent in the toys. Such comfort is quickly undercut when one recalls the savageness that can enter children's play, where bitter scenes from adult life are re-enacted.

In their inanimate innocence, the acts in which the toys engage become more hilarious, and yet more poignant, as Froese depicts some of the most archetypal moments of betrayal, loss and cruelty. In the final *The Resurrection of Christ* (2005) – the same painting by Piero that inspired Bill Viola's *Emergence* (2002) – we are left with a sense that redemption is possible, if only in play.

Robyn Daw is a partner in ArtBunker visual art, craft and design projects, Brisbane

Joachim Froese will be showing new work at Jan Manton Art, Brisbane (29 May – 23 June), exhibiting and conducting workshops at 12th Dom Fotografie Summer Photoschool, Liptovsky Mikulas, Slovakia (5 July – 15 July) and will show at Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash (12 September – 9 November 2008). For more information on his work go to: www.joachimfroese.com



... HUMOUR AND PATHOS, BELIEF AND DISBELIEF,
PROFESS AND IMAGINATION ...

Joachim Froese *The Judas Kiss* 2005
gelatin silver prints 50 x 160cm

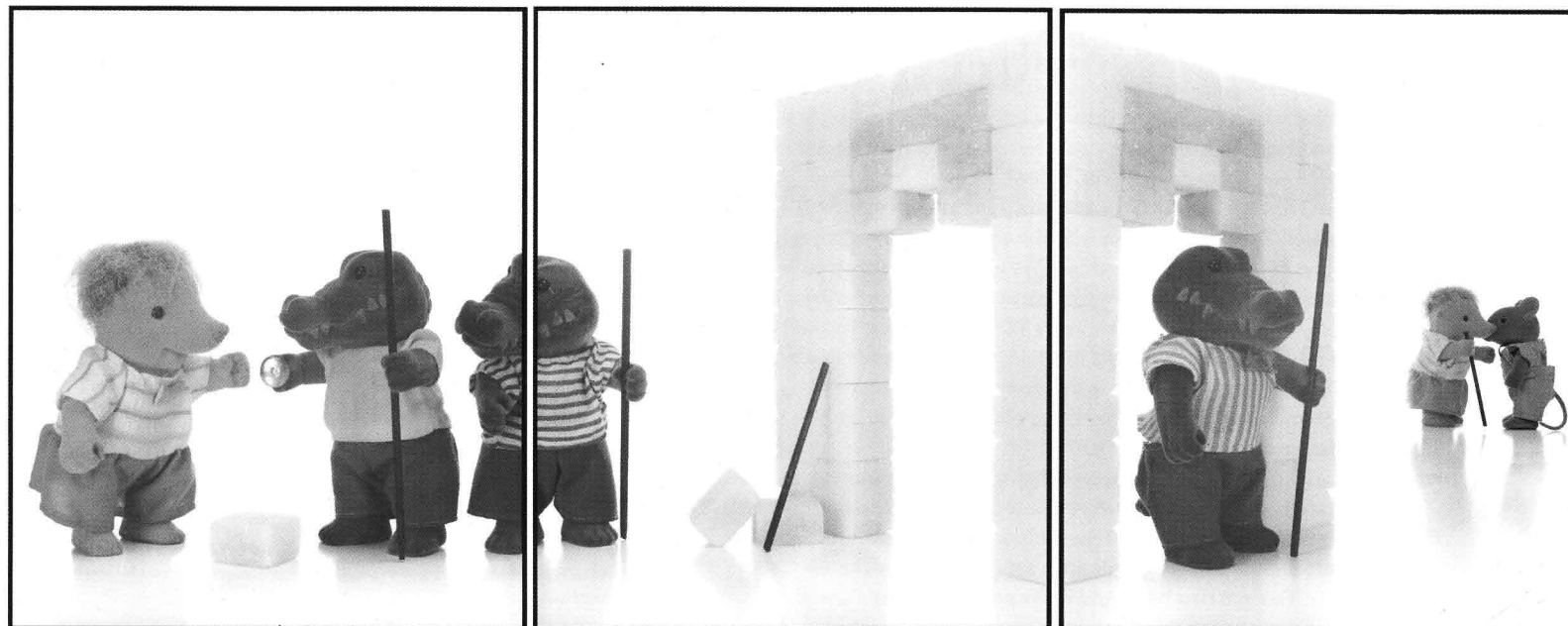


Duccio di Buoninsegna *Christ Taken Prisoner*
1308-11 Tempera on wood 51 x 76cm
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena



Giotto di Bondone *The Betrayal of Judas*
1304-06 Fresco 150 x 140cm
Cappella Scrovegni, Padua

Joachim Froese *The Betrayal of Christ* 2005
gelatin silver prints 50 x 120cm



Joachim Froese *Christ before Pilate*
2005 gelatin silver prints 50 x 160cm

