



Rona Green:  
Prints and Poppets  
2000 – 2010



**Rona Green:  
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*animist*  
2006 mixed media 26.2 x 21.3 x 6.3 cm  
Deakin University Art Collection

## Introduction

Rona Green held her first solo exhibition at the Australian Print Workshop (APW), Fitzroy in 1997. After finishing her graduate diploma at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1998 she worked at the APW as a print technician until 2001. Around the corner at Port Jackson Press her artworks were peppering the windows and the walls of the gallery. It was during these years that I became familiar with Rona Green's prints in the busy little intersection running from Gertrude and Smith streets, home to several other commercial galleries, art suppliers and artist-run initiatives.

Rona Green's prints were then, and still are today, characterised by bold black outline, segmented colour and a clearly delineated graphic sense that emulate the 'print' or engraving tradition that is often a subject, rather than the medium of her artistry; tattooing. Green has turned her hand to many forms of printmaking and her subjects flaunt simultaneously their tribal and individual markings of identity. Green's prints are equally known for the mixtures (variety and anatomical make up) of monsters, pets and 'inhumans' that inhabit them. However any assumption of stasis over the past 10 years would be incorrect. Not afraid to experiment with technologies, the artist, prints and inhabitants continue to grow in confidence and have garnered her many awards and accolades.

Another development is her lesser known three dimensional objects, called 'poppets'; a playful reconnaissance into soft sculpture that began to appear in about 2002. The simple wrap-around dolls (printed on material, sewn and filled with stuffing) are a logical step away from printmaking, but maintain a flat illustrated backdrop on which they are placed, much as one would expect to find in a puppetry show or animation cell. Green's poppets share the precision of the printmaking process; everything carefully aligned and nothing left to chance. The poppets manage to defy categorisation as any specific cultural artefact but hint at many; voodoo dolls, votive statues, soft toys, finger puppets. All of Green's works are a curious blend of cult and kitsch. All affectionately embrace the riff-raff of real and imaginary worlds.

This survey of works from the past decade parallels a 10-year teaching position at the Centre for Creative Industries at Box Hill Institute. In 2005 Rona Green received the institute's Teacher of the Year Award. Since 2007 she has held an additional appointment, lecturing in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University. She is currently a candidate for a Masters in Fine Arts, Gippsland Centre of Art and Design, Monash University.

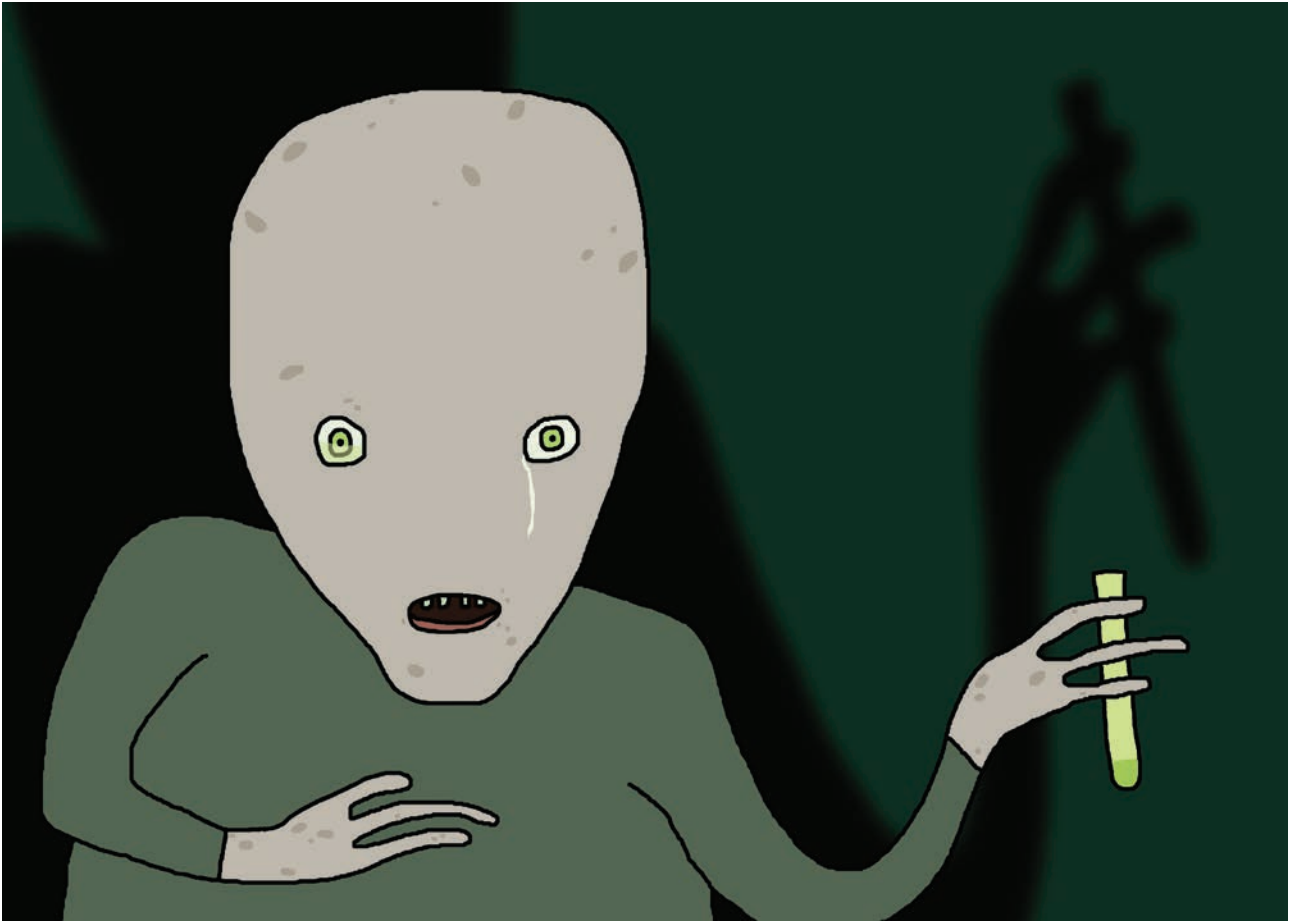
Deakin University is proud to announce the recent acquisition of two hand-coloured linocut prints by Rona Green, the companion pieces *Vernon* (2009) and *Dutch* (2009), both on display in this survey. I would like to thank the artist for generously gifting an additional two poppet works, *animist* (2006) and *kucing* (2006), to the Deakin University Art Collection and for her assistance in presenting this significant exhibition.

We are most grateful to Aaron McLoughlin for designing the exhibition catalogue and to Jazmina Cininas for her contribution to this project as essay writer and for formally opening Rona Green: Prints and Poppets 2000 – 2010.

Victor Griss  
Exhibition Curator



*kucing*  
2006 mixed media 26.2 x 21.3 x 6.3 cm  
Deakin University Art Collection




*the antidote*  
2001 digital print 12.7 x 17.8 cm edition 6


## Gang Green

Rona Green keeps a quote by her 'one true art love'<sup>1</sup>, Jean Dubuffet, pinned to her studio wall. It reads:

For a very long time I was ... lacking in confidence and composure; and I suffered cruelly because of this, appearing in my own eyes to be nothing more than the most abject dogturd. It was only at a late stage ... that it dawned on me that everyone else was also a dogturd.<sup>2</sup>

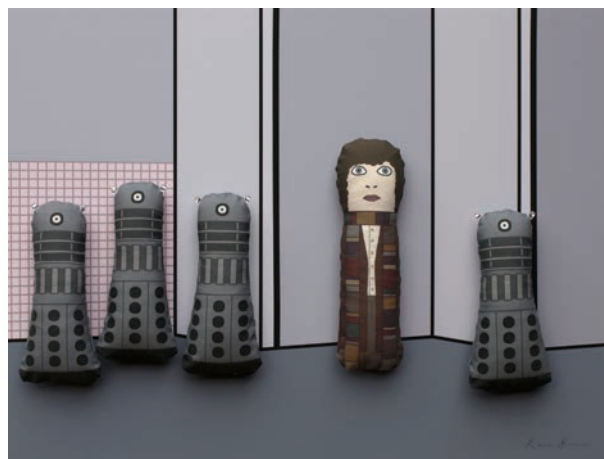
 It's a sentiment that resonates with Green's anthropomorphic menagerie of misfits, outcasts, ghouls, freaks, nerds and hooligans – the various 'doo-doo's' of human society whom the artist rescues from the biological hazard bins to celebrate with affectionate humour. Like her other muses - Diane Arbus, Nan Goldin and poet Charles Bukowski - Green is unapologetic in her indulgence of the low-brow, refusing to recognise established hierarchies of 'taste' and 'culture.' Egyptian gods with animal profiles are reincarnated as unruly pets and misshapen mongrels, more inclined to upset the garbage and leave steaming calling cards in the front yard than rule the forces of nature. Green's bold graphics and restrained palette owe as much to the iconoclastic tattoos of Sailor Jerry Collins<sup>3</sup>, as they do to John Brack's monochromatic suburban vistas and Peter Blake's Pop collages. Dutch guild portraits by Rembrandt and Frans Hals are reinterpreted as masked android enthusiasts in *Secret Robot Society* (2002)<sup>4</sup> and coffin dwelling aristocrats with Eastern European accents in *Treacherous Boys With Charisma* (2003). Narratives are drawn from George Orwell and Kurt Vonnegut, only to be interwoven with urban legends, conspiracy theories, and 'crap' reality television plot lines.

Having grown up in Geelong and obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Bendigo, another regional centre, the currently Melbourne-based Green has witnessed her comfortable relationship with the periphery take her, ironically, to a central position in contemporary Australian printmaking. Rona Green: Prints and Poppets 2000 – 2010 is the artist's 15th solo exhibition since graduating from La Trobe University in 1995, and surveys the past decade of her forays into various printmaking mediums including linocuts, screenprints, monotypes, etchings, digital prints and soft sculptures of Mr Hankey<sup>5</sup> proportions, which the artist calls 'poppets'. In that time, Green's belligerent bunnies and suspect canines have bagged a swag of awards, including the 2006 Silk Cut Award for linocut prints and the 2004 Swan Hill Print Acquisitive Award. They've taken up residence in more than 40 public collections as far afield as Darwin, Thailand, China, Glasgow, Colorado, and Belfast. Green's affinity with outsiders and subcultures has led her to the red light district of Amsterdam, the island of Borneo, the castles of Romania, the prisons of Russia and various tattoo parlours in between. Curators, arts writers and graphic designers have proved willing champions of her underdogs, placing Green's images among the most recognisable, most collected, and most acclaimed prints being produced in Australia today.

 Whilst best known for her impeccable graphics and satirical humour, a surprising degree of pathos infuses many of Green's images. Anaemic fingertips (from the last of a dying race, perhaps?) reach longingly towards the solitary cosmonaut in *starmen* (2001), casting a tentative shadow on the earthman's sleeve that acknowledges a (literally) universal need for contact with another being. A line-up of poppet Dr Who regenerations and B-grade monsters inhabit custom-



*Treacherous Boys With Charisma*  
2003 linocut and watercolour 49.0 x 70.0 cm edition 13



*The Doctor - IV: Genesis*  
2007 mixed media 30.0 x 39.0 x 5.0 cm



*Greasy Rhys*  
2008 linocut, ink and watercolour 38.0 x 28.0 cm edition 13



made dioramas, like the mint action figures prized by nerd collectors with equally intact virginity. The liver-spotted geek in *the antidote* (2001) - his startled gasp ambiguously poised between astonishment and horror - clutches a potential cure for his loneliness yet the looming shadow threatens catastrophic, if unintentional, side effects.



Green eschews the cheap one-liner in favour of a comradely in-joke, delivered with a secret handshake and a friendly wink from beneath a (preferably fur or leather) mask. The eyes of many of the artist's shape-shifting alter egos share an uncanny resemblance to her own or those of her partner, Boog<sup>6</sup>, while *Tattooed Pets* (2000-2005) find their real life models from within the ranks of Green's companion animals and those of her family and friends. (I'm proud to count my own hooligan hound, *Trouble*, among them). The anthropomorphism that dominates the artist's imagery acknowledges the blurred social hierarchies and pack dynamics between humans and the domestic animals that share our back yards and living rooms, while tattoos operate as a codified language, disclosing allegiances, aspirations and histories to the initiated. Panthers are a favoured talisman of the military services, for example, while butterflies promise transformation and spider webs may symbolise the entrapment of addiction.

The itinerant sailor type occupies an especial soft spot in Green's affections, taking centre stage in *Greasy Rhys* (2008). The pin-eyed seagull with a sinking ship branded on his chest and fag in place of hot chip, plays homage to the opportunistic flocks that plagued the artist's childhood takeaway dinners on the Geelong sea shore. In *Class and Taste* (2000), the nautical flavour to the tattoos suggests a former naval career for these trans-Atlantic misfits gone A.W.O.L., the regimented demands of life in the services proving incompatible with their ambivalent regard of routine and authority. Temporary sweethearts, ports of call, lost bets and reminders of life's fleetingness are ironically inscribed on torsos, biceps and foreheads in patchworks of indelible ink.



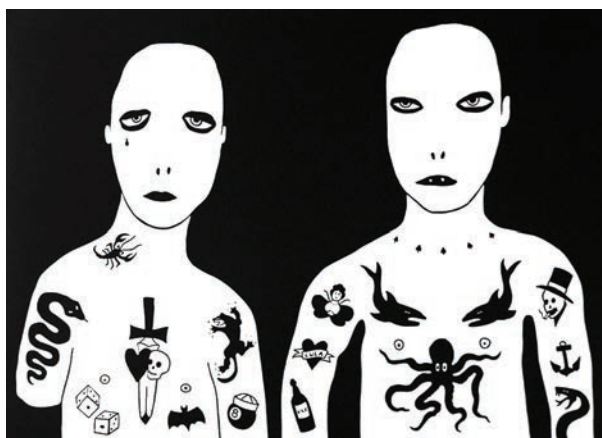
Green's sailors are not alone in their fatalistic acknowledgment of mortality. The Iban tattoos and beads decorating the artist's nonsense Dalmatian, *Dally-boy* (2006) and poppet pussy, *kucing* (2006), brand them as headhunters from the jungles of Borneo. The canine cannibal's black and white pelt reflects Green's first-hand impressions of an indigenous population seemingly willing to embrace the myriad cultures that have passed through this island trading post, even if the British, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Indians and Philippines may have paid a higher price for the international 'cuisine' than they bargained for. The totemic feline takes her name from Borneo's most populous city, Kuching, which celebrates the cat in countless statues and a dedicated Cat Museum. Journeying north to cooler climes, thieving felines with Slavic monikers such as *Sergey*<sup>7</sup> and *Pajari* (both 2008) have their criminal curriculum vitae inscribed on their prison-hardened torsos in a strictly coded lexicon of motifs. At times bordering on whimsical, at others brutally confrontational, the visually encrypted code of (dis)honour of the Soviet robber castes is so inventive it fills three volumes of the *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia*.<sup>8</sup>



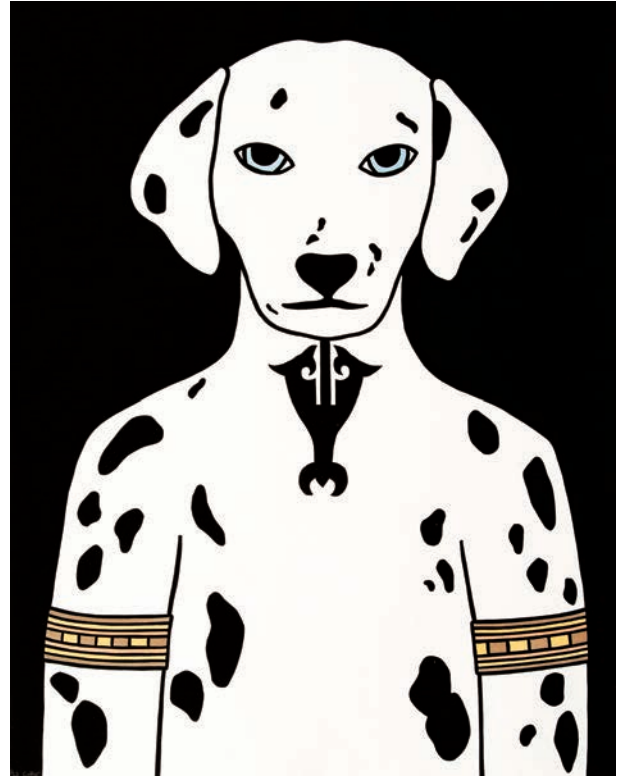
There's a new confidence in Green's latest works, not just in the artist's increasingly elegant drawing and handling of mediums, but also in the figures themselves. The artist's earlier adolescents, with their bad breath and fondness for Nintendo, have ditched their braces and begun working out. Lean, charismatic loners, self-assured in their taut skins and nonchalantly indifferent to public opinion, present intoxicating alter egos willing to walk on the wild side. *Vernon* (2009) is not a bunny to be messed with. His confident smirk, raised



**Boog and The Gooch**  
2003 mixed media 15.6 x 20.8 x 4.0 cm edition 2



**Class and Taste**  
2000 linocut 70.0 x 100.0 cm edition 13



*Dally-boy and Cutter*  
2006 linocuts and watercolour 69.0 x 54.0 cm each edition 23

eyebrow and grinning skull tattoos advertise his readiness to take on all comers. With more than a hint of Clockwork Orange to his blackened orbits, we can expect no Easter eggs from this lagomorph.

A different bunny cliché, of the Hugh Heffner variety, has made a distinctly feminine incursion into the artist's (up until now) overwhelmingly masculine domain. The voluptuous sexuality of *flash: belly dancer bunny* and *flash: hula bunny* (both 2009) draws from the girly stereotypes one finds amongst 'flash' - the tattoo parlour's *prêt à porter* range. These trans-species seductresses and sirens titillate the viewer, luring one into uncomfortable 'furvert' underworlds of bestiality and plushophilia. In stark contrast to the majority of Green's work, in which the animal serves as an asexual filter for our baser urges and inclinations, these non-detachable Playboy bunny ears instead *amplify* human perversions and the darker desires we'd rather not acknowledge.



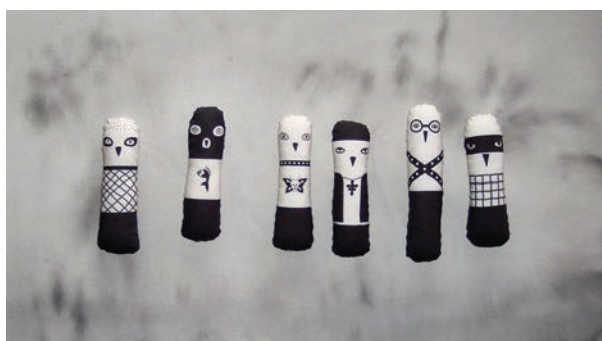
Green's bestiary of animal personas creates a level playing field in the artist's critique of (anti)social identity, alluding to shared natures and common vulnerabilities. The freaks and geeks, loners and misfits allow us to indulge our inner nerds or offer vicarious membership to clubs, gangs and societies we'd never dare to join. Underworld hoodlums with soft underbellies speak of universal needs for membership and fraternity - even amongst the most hardened non-conformists - or simply expose the absurdity of human conceits. We are all animals, after all, with the same need to belong to a pack and the same secret yearning to sleep on the bed. Green cites another of Dubuffet's declarations, 'Art should always make us laugh a little, and be frightened a little'<sup>9</sup> as key to her work. A famous anthem by the infamously flawed Paul Francis Gadd, better known as Gary Glitter, is equally fitting:

D'you wanna be in my gang, my gang, my gang? D'you wanna be in my gang? Oh yeah!<sup>10</sup>

Jazmina Cininas  
Artist and Lecturer in Fine Art Printmaking, RMIT University  
April 2010



**Pajari**  
2008 screenprint 38.0 x 57.0 cm edition 23  
printed by Rebecca Mayo



**Leather Street Birds**  
2004 mixed media 36.2 x 63.4 x 6.0 cm



**The Krolik Boys: Niki**  
2004 digital print 44.0 x 66.0 cm edition 13

- 1 Rona Green, email correspondence with the author.
- 2 Jean Dubuffet. Truncated version of quote supplied by Green to the author.
- 3 Norman "Sailor Jerry" Collins was a prominent and influential tattoo artist, based in Hawaii from the late 1920s to the 1960s.
- 4 Not on show in this exhibition.
- 5 Mr Hankey, an animated human poo, is a character from the irreverent television series *South Park*.
- 6 Not Aaron's real name.
- 7 Not on show in this exhibition.
- 8 Danzig Baldaev, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia* Volumes I, II & III, Fuel Publishing, 2010.
- 9 Quote by Jean Dubuffet, introduction to a public lecture on painting, 1946, supplied to the author by Green.
- 10 Gary Glitter and Mike Leander, "I'm the Leader of the Gang (I Am)", produced by Leander, UK, 1973. Glitter achieved stardom as a Glam Rocker in the 1970s, and notoriety for addictions and criminal convictions in the 1980s and 1990s.



*starman*  
2001 digital print 12.7 x 17.8 cm edition 6

## Catalogue of works in the exhibition

Dimensions for prints are image size height x width

Dimensions for poppets are object size height x width x depth

All works printed by the artist except where otherwise noted

All works are from the collection of the artist except where otherwise noted

### ***Class and Taste***

2000  
linocut  
70.0 x 100.0 cm  
edition number 4/13

### ***starman***

2001  
digital print  
12.7 x 17.8 cm  
edition number 2/6

### ***the antidote***

2001  
digital print  
12.7 x 17.8 cm  
edition number 3/6

### ***Vladimir and Dmitry***

2001  
digital print  
12.7 x 17.8 cm  
edition number 3/6

### ***zombies***

2001  
digital print  
12.7 x 17.8 cm  
edition number 6/6

### ***Who did you dream of last night?***

2002  
mixed media  
34.8 x 65.5 x 4.5 cm  
McVeltre Collection

### ***Voon***

2002  
linocut  
35.0 x 25.0 cm  
edition number 3/9

### ***Fattie***

2003  
linocut  
35.0 x 25.0 cm  
artists proof from edition of 9

### ***Thug***

2003  
linocut  
35.0 x 25.0 cm  
artists proof from edition of 9

### ***Trouble***

2004  
linocut  
35.0 x 25.0 cm  
artists proof from edition of 9

### ***Boog and The Gooch***

2003  
mixed media  
15.6 x 20.8 x 4.0 cm  
edition number 1/2

### ***Francy and Ron*** (detail bottom right)

2003  
mixed media  
15.6 x 11.8 x 4.0 cm  
edition number 1/2

### ***Freddie and Bert***

2003  
mixed media  
17.9 x 13.0 x 4.0 cm  
edition number 1/2

### ***Treacherous Boys With Charisma***

2003  
linocut and watercolour  
49.0 x 70.0 cm  
edition number 3/13

### ***Leather Street Birds***

2004  
mixed media  
36.2 x 63.4 x 6.0 cm

### ***Sine Supremus***

2004  
linocut  
76.0 x 57.0 cm  
edition number 8/13

### ***The Krolik Boys: Niki, Boris and Valentyn***

2004  
digital prints  
triptych, each part 44.0 x 66.0 cm  
edition number 6/13

### ***Slim***

2005  
linocut and watercolour  
76.0 x 43.0 cm  
artists proof from edition of 40

### ***animist***

2006  
mixed media  
26.2 x 21.3 x 6.3 cm  
Deakin University Art Collection

### ***kucing***

2006  
mixed media  
26.2 x 21.3 x 6.3 cm  
Deakin University Art Collection

### ***Cutter***

2006  
linocut and watercolour  
69.0 x 54.0 cm  
edition number 16/23

### ***Dally-boy***

2006  
linocut and watercolour  
69.0 x 54.0 cm  
edition number 22/23

### ***The Doctor -***

***I: Vortis, II: Telos, III: Axios, IV: Genesis, V: TARDIS***  
2007–2010  
mixed media  
pentptych, each part  
30.0 x 39.0 x 5.0 cm

### ***Chips***

2008  
linocut, ink and watercolour  
112.0 x 76.0 cm  
bon à tirer from edition of 13

### ***Greasy Rhys***

2008  
linocut, ink and watercolour  
38.0 x 28.0 cm  
edition number 12/13

### ***Pajari***

2008  
screenprint  
38.0 x 57.0 cm  
edition number 7/23  
printed by Rebecca Mayo

### ***flash: cat in web***

2008  
monotype  
23.0 x 22.0 cm

### ***flash: belly dancer bunny***

2009  
monotype  
32.0 x 17.0 cm

### ***flash: hula bunny***

2009  
monotype  
32.0 x 17.0 cm

### ***Dutch***

2009  
linocut, ink and watercolour  
45.0 x 38.0 cm  
edition number 4/13  
Deakin University Art Collection

### ***Vernon***

2009  
linocut, ink and watercolour  
45.0 x 38.0 cm  
edition number 4/13  
Deakin University Art Collection

### ***Blats***

2010  
mixed media  
diptych, each part  
26.0 x 26.0 x 6.3 cm

### ***Tomas***

2010  
linocut, ink and watercolour  
66.0 x 56.0 cm  
edition number 1/13



## Rona Green: Prints and Poppets 2000 – 2010

2 June – 10 July 2010  
Deakin University Art Gallery

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Rona Green is represented by Australian Galleries.

[www.ronagreen.com](http://www.ronagreen.com)



Rona Green and lagomorph  
photography: Aaron McLoughlin

### front cover

#### **Vernon**

2009 linocut, ink and watercolour 45.0 x 38.0 cm edition 13  
Deakin University Art Collection

### inside front cover

#### **The Krolik Boys: Valentyn** (detail)

2004 digital print 44.0 x 66.0 cm edition 13

### back cover

#### **Dutch**

2009 linocut, ink and watercolour 45.0 x 38.0 cm edition 13  
Deakin University Art Collection

### inside back cover

#### **The Krolik Boys: Boris** (detail)

2004 digital print 44.0 x 66.0 cm edition 13

