The Fire Fly has landed! On November 10, “Randy Regier: H. Maxwell Fisher’s Underground Toy Emporium and Spaceship Parking” opened at Jim Kempner Fine Art, 501 West 23rd Street, NYC, where it remains on view through December 23.

According to the gallery’s press release, “Jim Kempner Fine Art, in collaboration with Mr. Fisher’s eldest son, H. Maxwell Fisher II, is pleased to announce the estate sale of the toy store’s entire remaining – and for that matter, what was indeed the store’s opening day – stock.” Apparently, the basement of the building the gallery currently occupies was, many years ago, the site of Fisher’s stillborn toy store.

Visitors to the Chelsea gallery are greeted by Regier’s candy-apple green spaceship, the Fisher Fire Fly, which appears to have crash-landed in the middle of the gallery’s outdoor sculpture garden, an enclosed courtyard at the corner of 23rd Street and 10th Avenue. Boing Boing readers might remember Regier’s Fisher Fire Fly model kit, which appeared on these pages earlier this year and is described on the toy’s label as an “authentic scale model of the American Dream Technical Institute’s real Fisher Fire Fly.” This is your chance
to see the “real Fisher Fire Fly,” a 6 x 13 x 6 ft., 1,800 lbs. gleaming monument to American ingenuity and shattered dreams. According to the story, the Fire Fly was a project of “visionary toy shopkeeper and pioneer amateur space aeronaut” H. Maxwell Fisher. The craft’s present location, we are told, is “the ill-fated landing site of Mr. Fisher senior’s last flight.” After passing through the crash site/sculpture garden and entering the gallery proper, visitors are directed down a short flight of stairs and into H. Maxwell Fisher’s Underground Toy Emporium, where Regier has stocked the shelves full.

Unlike Regier’s recent NuPenny installations, where the store never opens and one can only experience the wares through the window, visitors to the Underground Toy Emporium are invited, even encouraged, to fondle the merchandise. Like most of the artist’s creations, the toys on view here speak to the rampant misrepresentation of products marketed for children and the ways in which they often fail to deliver on the promises of their alluring packaging, leaving instead a wake of disappointment, confusion, anger, and even physical harm.

Among the inventory is Regier’s gasoline-fueled Blazing Model Sun, a shiny yellow steel ball with nipple-like protuberances covering the surface out of which flames will shoot after the child fills it with gas and sets it afire. The front of the box proclaims “FUN TO DO.” The label on the side lists “HERE’S WHAT YOU GET: WORKING MODEL SUN, ALL STEEL, EDUCATIONAL, TO SCALE, USES REGULAR GASOLINE.” Below are several paragraphs of fine-printed legalese.

The Electric Man Waiting for a Train Set is another admonishment to read the fine print. The label on the toy’s box reads “Electric Train Set” in large letters. Nestled between “Electric” and “Train Set” the text “man waiting for a” appears in fine print.
When operated, a figure seated in front of the mid-century modern depot periodically turns his head to peer down the empty track.

Regier’s Municipal-Pro Electric Golf game pays homage to what has to be among the most ill-conceived toys of the Twentieth Century, vibrating electric football. And there is more.

On its face, Regier’s Underground Toy Emporium is a clever caricature of a toy store.

As such, there is much to recommend to the casual viewer, for whom the artist’s astonishing craftsmanship, clever wordplay, and general wittiness will provide considerable pleasure.

But there’s more. So much more.

At its core, Regier’s practice is an ongoing and sophisticated critique of the American variant of capitalism and an exposition of the often unsavory values and methods at work in American consumer culture.

For Regier, fiction provides the most direct route to truth.
In this way, his work finds precedent in that of American literary figures like William Faulkner and Hunter S. Thompson.

In the case of Regier’s toys, the fiction is so powerful and convincing that their status as works of art is called into question.

It is at this turgid and murky confluence of fact, fiction, and truth that the real power of Regier’s art resides.