

REVIEW

IT MAY BE FUN, BUT IS IT ART? **CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN** GETS ROPED INTO PLAYING CHILDREN'S GAMES IN A GALLERY, WHILE **SARA LOVERIDGE** TRIES TO GET COMFORTABLE ON A CURIOUSLY NOISY BED

A ROOM full of screaming, giggling, running, playing children. Could this really be the latest art exhibition at one of London's cutting-edge galleries?

Apparently so. It is a maniacal scene of what break time used to look like in the playground. Arms flail, eyes dart and yelps of delight burst into the air as the sea of children, all seven to nine, bounce around enjoying themselves.

But what next? Can you talk to the kids? Where do the boundaries lie?

Those are the questions that London-born artist Tino Sehgal, 31, wants you to ask at the Institute of Contemporary Art in The Mall.

Unsure, I take a seat on the floor. The children don't take much notice and carry on dragging each other round the room and playing their games. "Can I play?" I say, mustering the courage to talk a circle of girls sitting on the floor. "Sure. We're playing Wink Murder."

We fall to the ground, resurrect, and murder each other until the circle suddenly bursts into a frenetic game of It.

Panting for breath and out-foxed by a swarm of little girls, it's soon time to retire to a group of calm looking boys playing Rock, Paper, Scissors in the corner.

"Can I play?" And another adventure begins – this one ending with me confessing my love to gallery assistant Claudia, 22, after choosing a 'dare' in our next game, Truth or Dare.

Three girls then approach me and in an endearing chorus say: "I have decided the title of this exhibition is, 'This is Success.'"

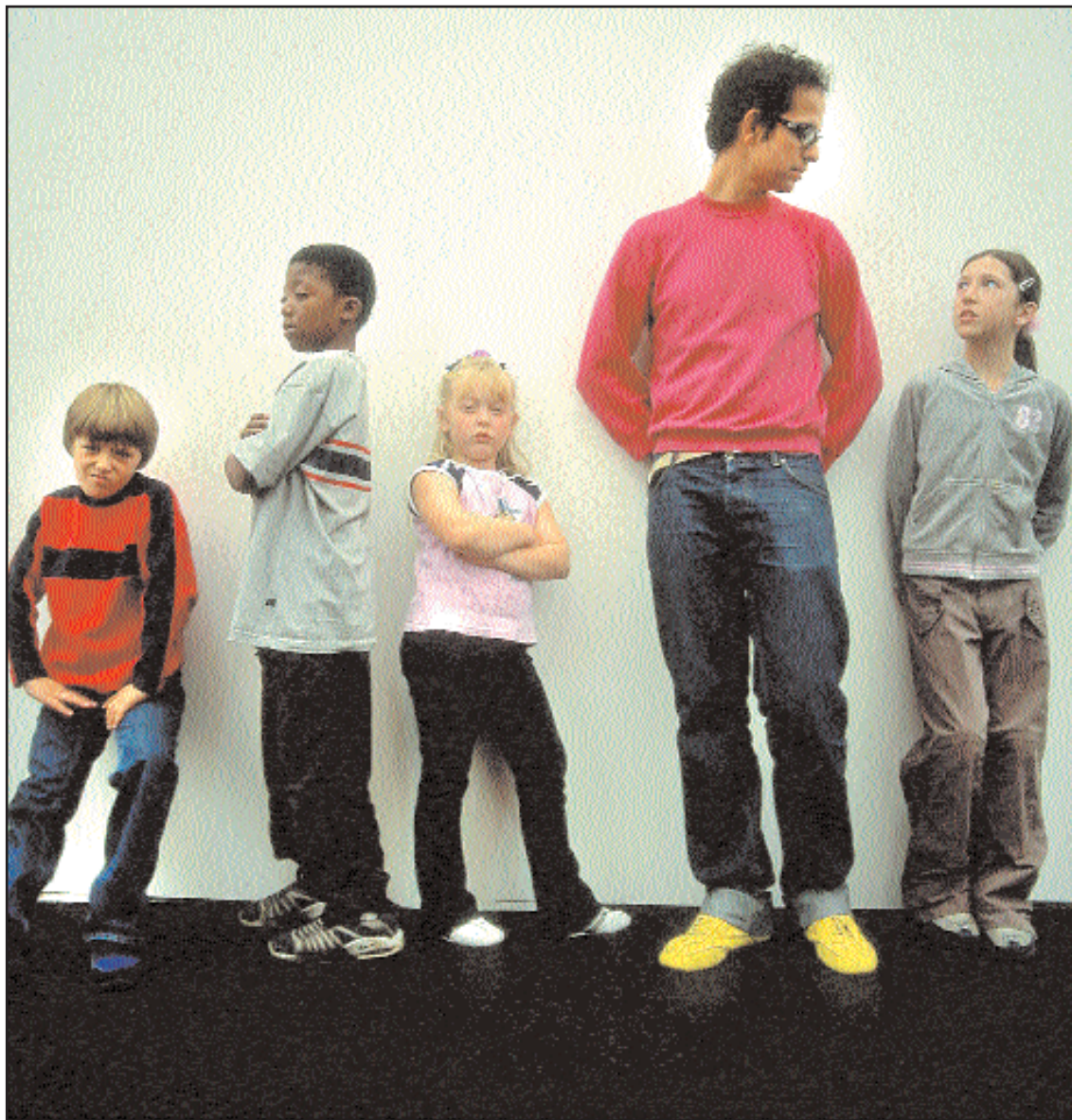
"Why is it a success?" I ask, picking on one of the shy girls. After a minute of eye-rolling, foot-wiggling and puffing her chest, she gathers the courage to write in my book: "Because it is fun." Fun indeed, until one of the kids steals my pen, and another nicks my book.

Trying to chase them back down, my sweater is then swiped from behind me. Next it's my scarf, and finally my coat goes running away, slumped on the back of an eight-year-old boy.

All of my belongings are being passed about the room, the children taunting me to come and rescue them.

There are three choices: cry in the corner, go tell the teacher, or play the game.

Roaring like a lion,



WILD: Tino Sehgal with his unruly kids and (below, inset) fellow artist Kaffe Matthews, Sonic Bed creator

ADULTS GET LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE



I charge the mob. The scream they let out is deafening, and after a few minutes of play-fighting, I manage, with the help of a teacher, to retrieve all my stuff.

The ice firmly broken between children and adults, other visitors then join in for wall to wall running around, playing British Bull Dog and then Stuck in the Mud. Sweat-stained, and a

little flustered, it seems the right time to take a time-out and talk to the artist who organised this slice of madness.

"The idea began because I wanted to do something that countered the obsession we have with objects such as paintings and sculpture," Sehgal explained. "Art today, and the artists that produce it, are so highly regarded in our society, but I don't believe this focus on our relationship with objects to be a very contemporary approach to art."

Instead, Sehgal has totally altered the museum dynamic. There are no

'I MANAGE WITH THE HELP OF A TEACHER TO RETRIEVE ALL MY STUFF'

'be quiet' or 'no running' signs here. Children rule the roost, and if you want to be a part of it then you'll have to speak up.

It is a mind-bending experience, that urges you to regress, then communicate with the kids. "I want to celebrate the way we interact, especially through the notion of the game," Sehgal added.

"We give the kids the freedom to do what they want, but we don't give them any objects to play with. We ask them to introduce themselves to visitors in one of two ways.

"If they are enjoying themselves then they introduce themselves to people saying, 'I have decided the title of this exhibition is This is Success', and if they're not they say, 'I have decided the title of this exhibition is This is Failure'.

"The exhibition officially has two

titles, because my work can fail or succeed. If the kids have fun, it is a success."

So far, so good – the kids only spoke of success the whole afternoon.

Meanwhile, more than 50 schools are taking part, with two schools per day in the gallery. The two groups alternate between 45 minutes playing in the gallery room and 45 minutes in behind-the-scenes workshops.

In the workshops, the children reflect on their experiences, craft the evolution of their game-playing and are encouraged to discuss the notion of art. "We want the children to invent new games, because games are a practical way of interacting.

"During our last run in Austria, the children blocked off the exit and forced visitors who wanted to leave to dance the Viennese," Sehgal said, laughing.

But what about the safety of the kids? Sarah O'Mahoney, a teacher from one of the participating schools, Berkshire's Cookham Rise Primary School, says: "There are two teachers, two gallery assistants and two invigilators on call to make sure everything stays under control and no one gets hurt."

But as Sehgal says, and true to my experience, "If anyone is likely to be victimised here, it is the visitor, not the child."

So if you're in mood for fun and you've got the guts for some truly interactive games, then the ICA is the only place to be.

SONIC SLUMBER

ARTIST Kaffe Matthews played violin as a child but stopped playing music until her early 20s when she became the drummer and bassist in a band called The Fabulous Dirt Sisters.

When the band split in 1989 she got a job working in a recording studio. That's where she discovered a whole new world of mixing desks, electronics and samplers. And then she created a sonic bed.

"I had done nothing with samplers, or computers with music at all," she said. "It was the beginning of the acid house scene and our studio was very involved with that so I was thrown in at the deep end."

Walking into the darkened gallery and stepping into a giant bed, especially in public, felt just a little bit strange at first, but once I had laid down and closed my eyes I started to relax.

Kaffe explained how it works. "It's 12 channels of sound. I record each one separately. Sitting in the bed, I draw it around the bed," she said.

The wonderful thing about the bed is that anyone can have a go. "I made two sonic chairs, the first in 1997, for a couple of installations in London and Glasgow.

"For example, I would make a piece of music out of the recording of the inside of an aeroplane flying back from New York, and mix and process that through filters, so that it would spin and move around you as you sat in the chair, and you know, old women and kids were queuing to have a ride in this chair!"

While it may not make converts to experimental modern music or art overnight, the Sonic Bed will surely help the public understand and experience music in a new way.

● Tino Sehgal's *This Is Success or This Is Failure* runs at the ICA to March 4. Details: www.ica.org.uk

● The *Sonic Bed* is open daily, noon-9pm, at Watermans, 40 High Street, Brentford to February 28. Admission is free. Inquiries: 020 8232 1010. For details see: www.musicforbodies.net or www.annetetworks.com.