


# Toy Sculpture

## INTRODUCTION:

### TOYS AS SCULPTURES?

**Do you remember collecting McDonald's Happy Meal toys as a child and visiting the restaurant week after week to complete each set? Some memorable releases in recent years include the Minion toy sets released in 2013 and 2015, which saw both adults and children queueing for them. While Happy Meal toys might not be regarded as art or designer toys, they demonstrate the attraction of toy sculptures and its relevance to people beyond childhood. Typically termed as designer toys, these collectible toy sculptures burst into the scene in the 1990s.**



EVERYTHING  
IS SCULPTURE...  
ANY MATERIAL,  
ANY IDEA  
WITHOUT  
HINDRANCE  
BORN INTO  
SPACE.

ISAMU NOGUCHI

They were figurines that drew on the cultural realm and personality of their creator. Usually released in limited editions, these sculptures are made out of a variety of materials. Plastic and vinyl are more commonly enlisted, which is why the term 'urban vinyl' is sometimes used interchangeably with the term 'designer toys'. Though classified as 'toys,' these figures are rarely played with in the manner that children play with toys. Instead, they function as decorations, a collector's item, or even as a new medium for artists to express themselves with. The main appeal in designer toys lies with its small scale of production and limited distribution. The collection of these toys is an exclusive activity, revolving around a tight circle of toy appreciators and artists.

This phenomenon of the art collector can be dated back to the Rococo movement in the 18th century, where a market for art emerged with the rise of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie prided themselves in their discernment and ability to build private collections (a privilege which had previously been restricted largely to royalty), and their inclination to protect artists. Sculptures were scaled down so that the art collector could display them in the comfort

Staff from Mighty Jaxx examining samples of DEATH, a figure created in collaboration with UK artist Godmachine. Sample figures are thoroughly examined for detailing and flaws before paint work commences.



of their houses as room decorations. In order to ensure that the details of the sculptures were not compromised in their new petite size, artists strove to invent new techniques to achieve such result with less effort and cost. This led to the use of porcelain, bronze, terracotta, and other mediums in the art of sculpting.

The exclusivity of designer toys in production and distribution provides an attractive new medium for artists to express their ideas with. Toy sculpture as

an art form also holds potential as a commercial object to reach out to a wider audience due to the accessibility of the form. Some artists choose to transform their existing sculptures and paintings into art toys that reach out to larger worldwide audiences. The realm of toy sculpture exemplifies how sculptures have evolved to take on various methods of construction and forms in maintaining their relevance in modern society.

## CONCEPT TO PRODUCT:

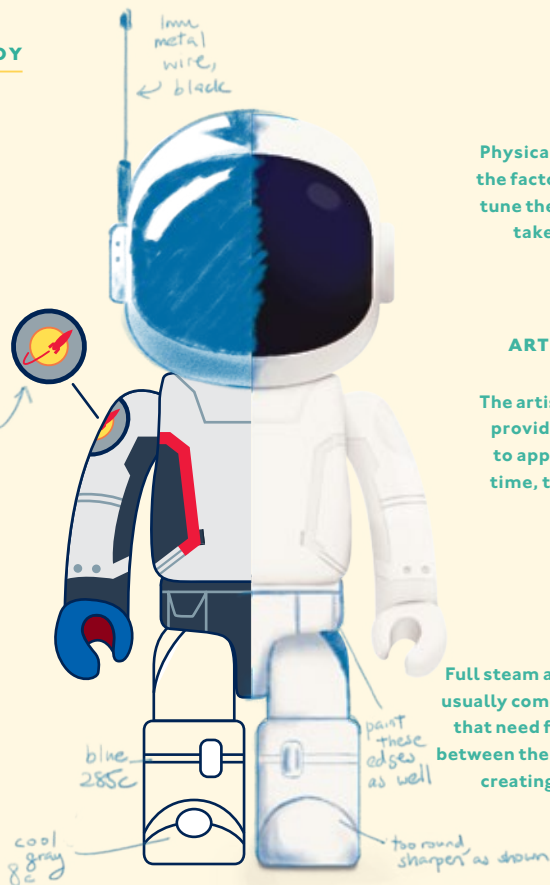
### THE PROCESS OF CREATING A TOY

#### 1 CONCEPT AND SKETCHES

The artist must develop the initial idea through sketches to make sense of the figurine visually.

#### 2 MOCKUPS AND RENDERS

Once the look and feel are pinned down, the artist then creates precise, to-scale diagrams to start preparing for production. Especially important are turn-arounds: drawings that show the figurine from multiple angles.



#### SAMPLES AND MOULDS

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Physical prototypes are produced by the factory, allowing the artist to fine-tune the figurine. This process usually takes several rounds of feedback.

#### ARTWORK AND CORRECTIONS

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The artist must finalise the design and provide artwork files for the factory to apply to the figurine. At the same time, there are constant corrections that need to be made.

#### PRODUCTION

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Full steam ahead! The first production run usually comes with more factory mistakes that need fixing. A concerted team effort between the artist and the factory is key to creating a beautiful, finished product.

## TO-FU OYAKO

### BY DEVILROBOTS

Conceived by creative collective Devilrobots in 2000 as part of a character design competition by Japanese departmental store LOFT, To-Fu Oyako is a story of Mother Tofu (red) and Baby Tofu (blue) looking for his missing father. The toys are distinctive in their square heads and troubled expressions. Since then, there have been many new Tofu friends added to the series, and the characters have been used to develop games and TV shows.

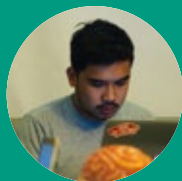


## KAWS

Brian Donnelly, aka Kaws, is an artist who made a name for himself designing limited edition toys. His designs are highly recognizable with the signature X'ed out eyes, as well as the more popular figures of characters whose faces are obscured by their hands. Kaws' art stands between the line of fine art and global commerce, and is an artist who has successfully moved beyond the exclusive toy realm to occupy a global market.



In this issue, we chat with Mr. Jackson Aw, founder of Mighty Jaxx, a local independent studio that focuses on 3D design for art collectibles.



**“SCULPTURE: DESIGNER TOYS AS ART”**

**WITH JACKSON AW**

Jackson Aw will be at Central Public Library on 8 December 2016 (7.30pm) to share insights on creating 3D designs for art collectibles, producing thousands of designer toys to collectors in over 50 countries and the process of collaborating with world renowned artists across the globe. [Find out more at www.nlb.gov.sg/eolibrary.](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/eolibrary)

**For the uninitiated, please introduce yourself and share what you do.**

My name is Jackson and I am the founder of Mighty Jaxx, a creative collectible studio based in Singapore. Our team designs, produces and distributes independent art collectibles and toys that we create with artists worldwide. My main responsibilities are business development and making sure the studio cat is fed.

**How did you get started with Mighty Jaxx?  
Did you come from an art background?**

I had no choice but to take up art as a subject in Secondary 3, which I was terrible at (or great at, I suppose it is really subjective). I had to take tuition classes for art and through that, learned to enjoy the process. While I knew I was no Van Gogh, my increasing interest in the field led me to enrol in Nanyang Polytechnic's Digital Media course.

At that point, I discovered a love for photography, leading to my venture in creating a brand of vintage Russian cameras, which were re-furbished with unique artworks on the camera leather. The





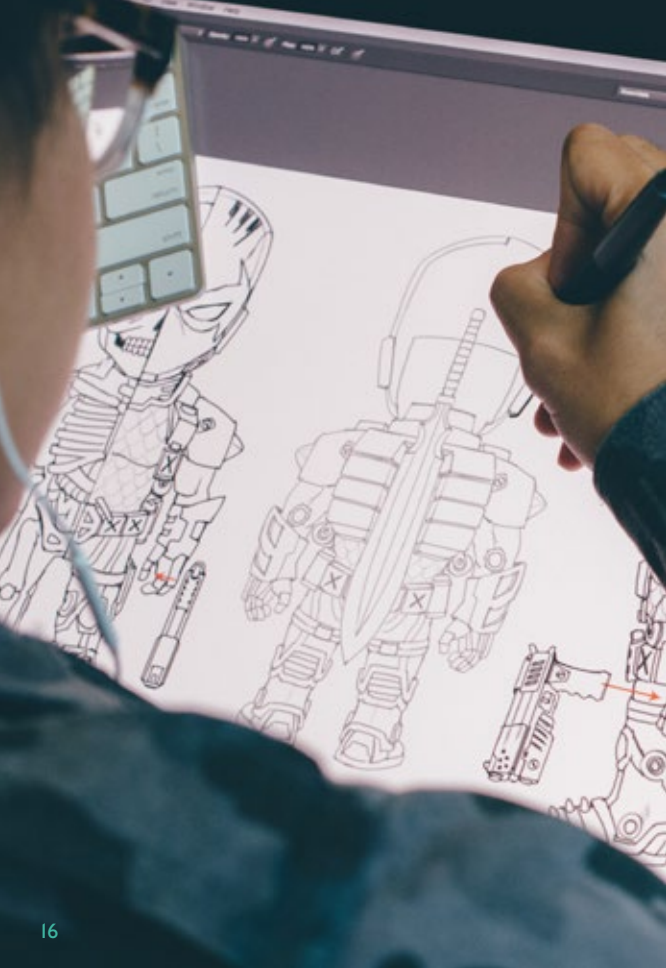
brand was eventually bought out by a local investor in 2012. This was my first taste of success, and naturally, I was hungry for more.

As a designer vinyl toy collector since 2006, I was naturally curious about the manufacturing process. In my mind, I figured that the process would be fairly simple; that it would probably entail having a machine producing and painting the toys. It was only after a mind blowing trip to the factories in China that I understood the intricacies of the industry; I saw rows and rows of people working on these toys by hand.

The experience was amazing and made me want to be part of that movement. But being young and ignorant, I had spent most of my money on useless materialistic goods (if I could time-travel, I would go back and hit my 21 year-old self) so there weren't enough funds to kick-start the vinyl toy project. What I did was to take out a \$20,000 bank loan and the rest, is history.

**Please share on the process of creating your pieces.**

The process begins when the artist sends us their sketch. We turn the sketch into a digital 3D model for print, and after 3D printing, it is sent



for mass production. The entire process takes at least 3 months to complete. We work with various materials, from different type of plastics to metal.

### **What challenges and highlights have you had since starting Mighty Jaxx?**

Initially, the learning curve for production was steep as I had no prior experience, so there were a lot of mistakes that the team made, which we could only learn from through the work. There are far too many to list, but trust me; if this is something you're interested in pursuing — the biggest challenge will be managing human relationships. I had to learn this the hard way.

For me, nothing beats the feeling of going to work and creating new products. Our projects are constantly changing and that's always exciting. It also keeps us all on our feet and compels us to continue pushing boundaries.

### **What is the process like in collaborating with both Singaporean and global artists?**

Artists usually have unique personalities so you have to understand what makes them tick. If you can achieve that, the collaboration will evolve into a friendship.

**Do share with us your thoughts on representing Singapore globally in the realm of art toys. What's it like on the global stage at conventions and shows?**

In this market, there are many niche genres and designer toys are one of them. At conventions, it is very fulfilling to be able to meet with your collectors and understand what they love. We recently worked with DC Comics on licensed products and it's a different ball game by itself. It is eye opening for sure.

**Why do you think people buy toys?**

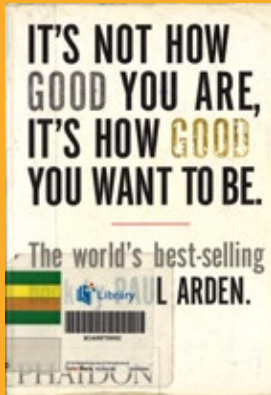
Probably because people love tangible objects. The feeling of owning something physical is highly sought after in this digital age. And since these toys are collectibles, their value will increase with time.

*SKULL GIRL is Mighty Jaxx's first collaboration with the San Francisco based artist/ muralist Lauren YS. The hand crafted figure is based on her distinctive artwork and has previously been released in an exclusive black to clear gradient colour that was limited to 50 pieces.*

**Would you consider Mighty Jaxx creations as accessible modern-day sculpture? Are they works of art?**

They are definitely works of art, but not in the traditional sense. Perhaps in years to come, they will be seen as such. After all, the Museum of Modern Art already has a collection of designer vinyl toys in their permanent collection.





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**It's Not How Good  
You Are, It's How  
Good You Want To Be**

Paul Arden,  
Phaidon Press,  
London, UK, 2003

—  
English I58.I ARD

*“It is everything  
that I believe in  
and practise on  
a daily basis.  
Sometimes  
you just got  
to wing it.”*

— Jackson Aw

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## Full Vinyl: The Subversive Art of Designer Toys



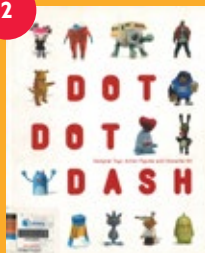
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Ivan Vartanian  
Collins Design,  
New York, USA, 2006

—  
English 688.72 VAR

With a comprehensive selection of designs, this book is great for readers who are interested in knowing more about the urban vinyl movement. The book contains over 400 colour photos of vinyl toys, and fuses these colourful illustrations with thoughtful interviews and essays with selected designers.

2



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## Dot Dot Dash: Designer Toys, Action Figures and Character Art

Robert Klanten  
and Matthias Hübner  
Die Gestalten Verlag,  
Berlin, Germany, 2006

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English 688.72 DOT

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## Sculpture Now

Anna Moszynska  
Thames & Hudson,  
New York, USA, 2013

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English 730.9051 MOS -[ART]

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