

MISCHIEF & MAYHEM

BY MIRANDA O'BRIEN



"Blown Away", 2015

SOMETIMES LIFE DRIVES YOU IN AN UNEXPECTED DIRECTION, AND SOMETIMES IT DRIVES YOU RIGHT BACK TO YOUR ROOTS. FROM G.I. JOE TO TRANSFORMERS, JOSH MAYHEM'S WORK SERVES AS A REMINDER OF HIS TOY COLLECTING HISTORY. BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD TOYS, HIS ECLECTIC STYLE MASHES SCRAP METAL, WIRES FROM VINTAGE ELECTRONICS, AND WEAPONRY FROM A VARIETY OF FIGURES, WITH SLEEK PAINT APPLICATIONS AND MODERNIST DESIGNER TOY FORMS.

A SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST BASED IN LOS ANGELES, MAYHEM'S WORK, PREDOMINATELY MECHA AND KITBASH THEMED, TOOK A LEFT TURN WHEN HE, ALMOST BY ACCIDENT, STARTED EXPERIMENTING WITH RESIN. HE LITERALLY BLEW US AWAY WITH THIS NEW DIRECTION, AND WE HAVE EXCITEDLY BEEN FOLLOWING HIS PROGRESSION EVER SINCE.

"Ta-Kill-Ya," 2014



IS JOSH MAYHEM YOUR REAL NAME?

No, Mayhem is a moniker. In 2000 I was very into the LA rave scene and I ended up doing stage props for several large events, including Electric Daisy Carnival 2000. The name of the prop company was Visual Mayhem, and I became Josh Mayhem. The company was short lived, but soon after I started DJing and Josh Mayhem became my DJ name. When I retired from DJing, I decided to keep the name as my moniker as it was my art that inspired the name in the first place.

ARE TOYS ART?

Definitely. And just like any other kind of art, there's the good and there's the bad. When I worked at Toy Art Gallery (TAG), I remember people walking in and looking thoroughly confused. They didn't understand why these toys were so expensive. I explained to them that it makes more sense if you looked at them as limited edition miniature sculptures. Then, when I dove more into the details of the origins of the pieces, it all started to make more sense.

Really all toys are miniature sculptures, not just art toys. Whether it was originally sculpted out of clay, wax, or digitally, it was sculpted by some kind of artist at some point, and that makes it art in my opinion.

WHERE DOES YOUR PASSION OF TOYS COME FROM?

I read an article somewhere that some adult toy collectors collect because they couldn't necessarily get all of the cool toys they wanted when they were kids due to financial issues. I think that may be one of the reasons why I'm obsessed with toys today.

I started collecting Transformers when I was very young, as well as Hot Wheels and Micro Machines. When I was a bit older, I started collecting G.I. Joes, hundreds of them, many of which I still have. I've always loved action figures, they're just badass, and I think that translates into my art.

Over the years, I've grown to appreciate and collect a wide variety of different types of toys, though Dunny's initially got me into art toys and I still collect a mixture of production and custom pieces.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START CUSTOMIZING TOYS?

I'd only been collecting "designer toys" for a relatively short time, and I really became fascinated with the customizing side of the scene. The first custom toy designs I created were for a series called The Askew Rangers, an idea I came up with when I saw some dumb online Photoshopped picture of a squirrel flying with jet pack and a machine gun.

I truly wanted to dive head first into the scene, so through a little determination and persistence I was given the opportunity to work at TAG in Hollywood in 2011. During what I considered to be a paid internship at TAG, I learned the ins and outs of the designer toy scene, and was invited to participate in my first custom group show at TAG, entitled *Bellicosity*, based off of Nathan Hamill's Bellicose Bunny toy. My piece sold and soon afterwards my Askew Rangers started to sell. Invites to more shows started coming in, and eventually I started earning commission work as well.

"Fire Mundam," 2013



TELL US MORE ABOUT THE ASKEW RANGERS SERIES?

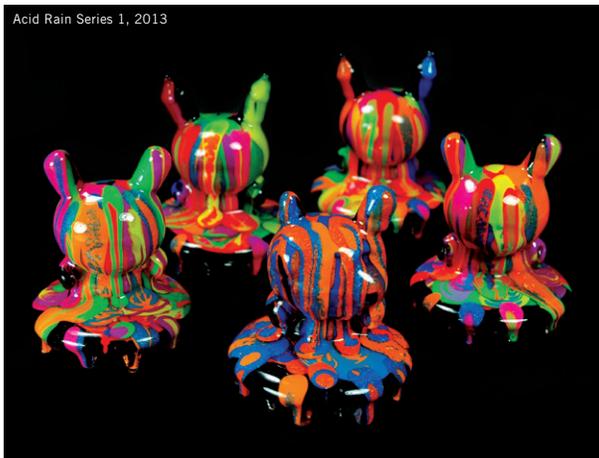
The idea was to have heavily armed creatures from the forest of the future battling for supremacy in a world where survival of the fittest is the only law of the jungle. The series had vibrant colors and crisp lines utilizing simple paint foundations as complimentary backdrops to an overwhelming display of weaponry and accessories.

Every Askew Ranger had some form of a working component to it, including working lights, spring loaded and moveable devices, and removable elements that evoked the versatility of an action figure with the visual aesthetic of a designer toy. I guess the Gunny's were simply the next evolution of this initial concept.

THE GUNNY CONCEPT REALLY TOOK OFF, HOW DID THAT EVOLUTION HAPPEN?

The idea for the Gunny's kind of just fell into my lap. Since my customizing style often has me re-purposing items that would be considered junk, or mashing up other toys, my friends started collecting broken electronics, wires, and old toys to give me to use. I always enjoyed that because my art was inspiring them to look at items that would normally be discarded in a new creative way.

One friend had a table at his work that was kind of like a "free for all" table, meaning that anything that was left there was free and up for grabs to whomever was interested. One day he came upon a box labeled "Transformers" and noticed it was



filled with all kinds of toy robots. He later surprised me with it and it turns out it was filled with a ton of Gundam kit parts, including what I found to be 5 complete kits after putting the pieces together. So that's when I was inspired to incorporate them into my art and the first Gunny Series was created for the Tenacious Toys booth at New York Comic Con 2012. These were actually the first custom Dunny's I had made.

ARE YOU A GUNDAM WING FAN?

I've always been a fan of the Gundam Wing toys because they're just bad ass robots. But, to be honest, I never really watched the show too much prior to the creating the Gunnys. It wasn't until after the popularity of the Gunnys started to take off that I really started to get more into the show and the storyline.

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE BLOWN AWAY SERIES COME FROM?

This is a perfect example of how a commission can evolve into a completely new artistic direction. One of my collectors received a custom piece from another artist, but the resin clear coat on it didn't quite cure correctly, so he commissioned me to fix it. At that time I had never worked with resin so I was unsure of whether or not I could, but I decided to give it a shot. As I poured the resin over the piece, the idea of creating my own piece with multiple layers of resin and paint drips popped into my head. That idea eventually evolved into my Acid Rain series of Munnys and Dunny's.

When I was asked to participate in the Clutter Gallery's *Custom Show*, I wanted to take that idea to the next level and the first Blown Away piece was born.

YOUR ORIGINAL BLOWN AWAY 8" DUNNY RECENTLY SOLD ON THE SECONDARY MARKET FOR WELL ABOVE THE ORIGINAL PRICE. IT'S FANTASTIC TO SEE THAT THERE IS A THRIVING SECONDARY MARKET, BUT HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT COLLECTORS SELLING YOUR PIECES?

I actually have mixed emotions about that. On one hand, as an artist, it's great to see that people are willing to spend that much to own your work and it gives you more confidence to price your pieces higher at gallery shows. On the other hand, you start to ask yourself if maybe the collector grew bored with it, which kind of stings a bit. If the collector needed the money for financial reasons, that's understandable, but when collectors buy pieces with the sole intent of flipping it for profit that bothers me.

When it comes down to it, it's just business and flipping is always going to be a part of any art scene. I try not to take it personally. When I first started customizing, I remember saying to myself that if I ever saw that people were flipping my products it meant that I made it. Now that it's actually happening I do feel a sense of accomplishment, and regardless of how I feel about it personally, I know that it can only mean good things for me going forward.

HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR STYLE HAD

DEVELOPED OVER THE TIME YOU HAVE BEEN CUSTOMIZING?

I think that with every piece I do, my style progresses in one way or another. It's always a learning process. Figuring out new ways to avoid previous mistakes, or working with the irreversible mistakes you do make. These processes essentially allow you to become more efficient and confident moving forward.

I've been drawing and painting my entire life. In my late adolescent and early teenage years I got pretty heavy into comic book art, creating my own stories and characters. I particularly liked Todd McFarlane's art and was heavily influenced by his work; even today, his influence can still be seen in my custom toy art. Later on I became more focused on surrealism, perspective, and fantasy art.

I like to push myself to try to raise my own bar with every piece I do. I find it exciting to step out of my comfort zone and try to push the limits to try to take my art to the next level. I don't want to be pigeon holed and known for one particular style. That's another reason why I love taking commissions, sometimes that new idea will create a whole new direction for me. My steampunk style evolved from a 3" Dunny commission where the collector simply asked if I could do a steampunk style Gunny.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT NEXT FROM YOU?

I'm working on knocking down my commissions list for my extremely patient collectors. Probably going to be a bit more selective when it comes to choosing future shows to participate in, in order to accomplish this. Hopefully I'll have my own booth for the first time at DesignerCon this year.

For my day job, I work at Entertainment Earth selling toys wholesale and have been discussing possibly making my own production toys with them, or helping to design concepts for their line of Bif Bang Pow! licensed products. Really excited about what lies ahead in the future, and I'm looking forward to pushing the boundaries of my art to the next level and beyond.

For more information on Josh Mayhem, please visit: WWW.JOSHMAYHEM.COM

ARE YOU READY FOR MORE?

SUCKLE

SORRY UNFULFILLED COLLECTORS KEEP LOSING EVERYTHING



ALL NEW SERIES COMING SOON!

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