



PRESS RELEASE

Mari Kasurinen

Mari Kasurinen (born 1984 in St. Michell, Finland), a visual artist internationally renowned for her "My Little Pop Icons" -series watches popular culture like television, and processes what she sees through pop art. Her work has been featured widely on internet, TV-shows, newspapers and magazines and exhibited in galleries and museums all around the world. Kasurinen is represented by the Swiss art gallery Galerie Gmurzynska. At the moment she lives and works in Helsinki, Finland.

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"Mari Kasurinen's collection of "My Little Pop Icons," is a series of My Little Pony-inspired individual pieces that collectively create a nuanced body of work. Kasurinen's inspiration for the project stems heavily from the digital age obsession with the personal brand, and what it means to translate that brand into a commentary on individualism and consumerism. "

-James Nichols, The Huffington Post

"They're childhood favorites as you've never seen them before - film and TV icons madeover as My Little Pony toys"

-Kat Brown, The London Paper

"The much-loved children's toy, My Little Pony, has undergone an extraordinary transformation. The new collection sees the ponies mimic a variety of characters from cult films like Batman and Alien."

-The Guardian, Guardian.co.uk

"[...]Mari Kasurinen the Michaelangelo of our generation."

-Great White Snark, *GreatWhiteSnark.com*

"My Little Ponies in elaborate media drag"

-Cory Doctorow, *boingboing.net*

"Best artist EVER!"

-Polly Hudson, *Mirror.co.uk*

"My Little Phoney toys are a hit."

-Bella Battle, *The Sun*

"We want one!"

-Coco Perez, *cocoperez.com*

"Popkulttuuriin hurautanut suomalainen taiteilija Mari Kasurinen oli jo aikaansa edellä ennen tätä äärilleen mennyttä ponibuumia. [...] Kasurisen omintakeinen ote huomioitiin jo vuonna 2009 ulkomaisissakin medioissa"

-Katri Koskinen, *mtv3.fi*

About the "My Little Pop Icons" -series and the importance of icons
by Mari Kasurinen

"I did my very first "My Little Pop Icon" sculpture back in 2008, when I was still in art school. I was looking for a way to express myself concerning today's materialism and individualism. I was very interested in the whole customization phenomenon; how you can get anything done just for you. What does it tell about people's identity today if even your credit card can't look like your neighbors one? When we surround ourselves with things that are and look just the way we want them to, what does it mean? Do we think that by that we can somehow exist more? To be what we individually are, even more?"

It felt as if a new competition had started; you had to know who you are and what you want. And you had to do it better, bigger and faster than anyone else. The consumer society, our very visual culture and the social media demand us to make our identities and personas tangible - to give them a material form. Something you can see and even touch. Our external appearance has to and will represent our inner qualities. It even seemed to be a new way to use power and control over other people because features which were not approved by the media such as ugliness, overweight or abnormality were forbidden and would be comforted with aggressiveness or even total denial.

I experienced that the actual guidelines and rules concerning this specific phenomenon were condensed and represented most prominently in the popular culture among celebrities and pop icons. These famous icons were presented to us as examples, ideals, even as authorities. I wanted to combine this great urge which we have about our own private identity with the identities of pop icons, who are more of an phenomenon than real, private persons. I wanted to study the cult of personality.

I chose to use toys as a base because play is children's way to explore and understand the world around us. Through play and especially imitation they learn how to live and act in it as individuals. I experienced that the boundary between children and adults had vanished within the scope of the phenomenon which I was studying. I chose the well-known, plain and gender free My Little Pony toy because it fulfilled my requirements. Nowadays Hasbro manufactures Generation 4 My Little Ponies so the look of the pony toy has gone through some major changes since Hasbro started to manufacture them in the 1980s. The look and design of the pony has always described and represented the beauty ideals of it's own time.

Soon after making my first "My Little Pop Icons" I discovered the intoxicating and complex world of personal branding. Nowadays with my "My Little Pop Icons" series I mostly concentrate on studying the personal brand; the ensemble of image and fame. The identity of a personal brand is an ensemble of associations, which have been carefully selected to promote the desired outcome. The inevitable maintenance is being done by brand management. The brand identity usually consists of different associations, which are divided between the core identity and the extended identity. Such associations can be originality, a particular area of expertise, reliability, exceptional talent, physical attractiveness, fashion consciousness and prosperity.

A brand failure can easily damage and lower the value of a personal brand during the compilation or the maintenance period. A brand failure is at conflict with one or several of the associations which form the personal brand itself. Brand failures can be fixed with brand management if the outcome is considered economically profitable.

Brand management causes carefully designed brand failures if the personal brand in question can benefit from them. Celebrity entertainment provides the perfect surroundings.

I've constructed the personal brand of every pop authority in the "My Little Pop Icons" -series one association at a time, using only visual elements. The systematic design and carefully considered sleek behind the personal brand of a pop icon can be seen after the sculpture is finished - the sculpture has transformed into someone recognizable while the My Little Pony toy lost its own personal brand."

"It is important to have icons in general. Especially within communities which have to confront and deal with discrimination, prejudice, or even racism, hostility and violence. But when we put matters or people on pedestals, the outcome can be rather unpredictable.

Especially if those people are from the entertainment industry and are expected to represent primarily their personal brand.

In an ideal situation icons give a positive effect in people's lives with their existence, example and actions. They are people who inspire, empower, give courage or help us to widen our perspective. The popular culture and especially the celebrity entertainment offers the perfect surroundings for the personality cult phenomenon. It's a double-edged sword, which can also cause a lot of damage. A healthy admiration - which has an empowering effect on your own identity, can turn into an obsession which starts to take things away and cause harmful side effects, for example a distorted body image, eating disorders, drug use or even racism or violence. The admiration towards that person becomes so strong and intense that you lose yourself and become willing to alter your own persona and identity in order to fulfill the requirements directed at you through the personality cult. Nowadays pop icons very easily get chosen to represent minorities by the popular culture. To be their voice, so to speak. The personal branding phenomenon takes a huge advantage of this and in most cases it directs to a desired, controlled consumer behavior instead of benefitting the supposedly represented minority."

- Mari Kasurinen