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Gary Taxali

Posted by Jesse Ship, May 4th, 2008



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Oh Oh, I mean, Oh No! It's a bird, it's a plane, no, wait, it's the latest weird release from celebrated illustrator and artist, Gary Taxali. Gary was introduced to the toy scene thanks to a lucky break from Toy2R and the Ox Op Qee project. The design was a huge success and it opened up plenty of new doors for his vinyl medium. However, after a bout of intellectual property battles over his last toy, the Original Toy Monkey, Gary has opted to

go 100% indie with this new release.

“What I like best is that it’s an affordable piece of art. It is a mass run thing, but at the same time, because its designer in nature, there aren’t millions of them. Nobody makes over 1000, even when they do different colourways.”

Format: When did you see vinyl as a possible medium for your art?

Gary Taxali: In 2003 I was asked to do a custom design for a Qee doll, by Toy2R. I didn’t realize what impact it might have. The opening was at Subliminal Projects, Sheppard Fairy’s space in LA. They picked about 30 different artists, accompanied by a catalog. The show traveled around and from there I got requests for different toy designs from all over the place. There were some pretty heavy hitters in there like Kozik, Biskup, Basemen. All of those artists I see as pertinent artists with something to say. So I saw this was clearly an amazing extension for narrative and imagery in the art world.

What I like best is that it’s an affordable piece of art. It is a mass run thing, but at the same time, because its designer in nature, there aren’t millions of them. Nobody makes over 1000, even when they do different colourways.

Format: Being an instructor at The Ontario College of Arts and Design (OCAD), do you see vinyl sculpting being taught in schools? Have you considered it?

Gary Taxali: Wow, never! That’s a great idea! It’s a medium like everything else but the main thing is that I think people are seeing the work jump off the page and come to life in the form of 3D as sculpts, interesting figures, and surprising number of students are really interested in this. More than I ever think.

Format: So are you saying it might happen some day?

Gary Taxali: I don’t have that kind of power in the curriculum, but I think it would be a popular course. One thing though, from a logistic point of view, one thing I’ll tell my students is that, it’s really good to have a game plan and I find that the whole toy thing is a branch off the toy of your art career. To build up a reputation and then do it is more lucrative because, first all, you’re probably at that point going to have people that are going to license a design so you can ride off the back of someone who already does that thing. To do it on your own, without middle man, at the end of the day, advertising, shipping, and production you’re looking at close to \$20,000.



Format: How has production been going with the Oh No’s?

Gary Taxali: It has been a joy. I worked with Klim and Scott from Bigshot Toyworks in North Carolina. They did the sculpt for me and dealt with all the details with the factory. For example, they took my character and worked at the engineering aspects to make the figure stand. It really helped me a lot because there is a good balance to the character. It was also good because I didn’t feel gun shy about the process, being the second time. To be honest with you, the first time I did it with the Monkey, we had a difference of opinion with the intellectual property and it was an 18 month long legal battle that we eventually settled through lawyers, but in the end it was an amicable split, but it made me realize that, there is no rocket science to this stuff, like with the packaging and factory details, and it gave me the confidence because of the success of the figure.

Format: So, indie is the way to go?

Gary Taxali: Yes, indie is the way to go, if you can afford it.

Format: So what was your inspiration for the Oh Oh’s and Oh No’s?

Gary Taxali: Like anything, he’s one of my characters from my work. I think it was just a matter of asking friends what they really liked. I remember reading on the KidRobot message board saying that they would like to see that character turned in to a figure. It didn’t look like anything that anyone had ever produced, so I thought it would be fun to do.

I’m working on my next figure and I hope to have it out before next spring. It’s still a secret but I can say that it’s a character that made a big splash at my last show at Magic Pony. That’s all I can say.



Format: Chump Toys has a cynical undertones to it, are we chumps for buying in to a fad?

Gary Taxali: [Laughs]. I'm a chump, the characters are all chumps; we're all chumps. Chump is a good word, not a bad one! I don't know where the word came from. It's used for all kinds of things, I didn't make it up obviously but, I think that they just kind of look like chumps. I'm just going to stick to that.

Format: Are there any artists out there that you think should be moving in to vinyl?

Gary Taxali: For sure, I have to say Team Macho, Michael Comeau, Christopher Hutsul. Fiona Smith, I think her stuff would be incredible on vinyl figures. Lastly there's a Brooklyn artists called Leah Hayes who does work with Fantagraphics comics, called Holy Moly. She's fantastic; I'd like to see her doing toys too.



Format: Where do you see the future of this medium going?

Gary Taxali: It has made me become a big fan of sculpture. I see the future of this medium becoming, for artists, an extension of their work. Larger characters, bigger characters, lots of artists experimenting with things like felt, porcelain, bronze; Tim Biskup did a chrome one, glass, but for the general public, the main thing about all this is that we are offering some kind of DIY to make something for themselves. Blanks are really popular; I think that people who aren't artists can do something really fun with this kind of canvas. So, I think the medium is going in to the public, to take their favorite characters and whether it be designer characters from niche artists like myself and Basemen, vs. well known characters like Charlie Brown, or Hanna Barbara, which a lot of those companies are starting to do. They're thinking, hey, let's hip up our characters and bring them in to that world. It always starts from the underground and then the big corporations jump in.

More Info: <http://www.garytaxali.com>



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Thats tight work Im actually trying to get into the toy thing myself. What do you recommend for beginners

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