

DESIGN LIFE NOW

NATIONAL DESIGN TRIENNIAL 2006

Podcast Transcript: Paul Budnitz

I'm Paul Budnitz. I'm the founder and Creative Director of Kid Robot. I'm a toy designer, clothing designer, store designer, a database programmer, and entrepreneur, and a lot of other things at the same time.

Dunny is a rabbit-shaped toy that was created by illustrator Tristan Eaton and myself. It was inspired in some ways by Japanese pop culture, Japanese pop toys, also American toys. And Dunny was created as a blank canvas, so Dunny in essence is really a shape, an unpainted toy. We've given this toy to hundreds of different artists and those artists customize the toy and then Kid Robot produces a limited-edition version of different artists' toys.

We've made Dunnys with everyone from fashion designers to graffiti artists to illustrators: everyone from Paul Smith to Gary Baseman, Frank Kozik, really well-known artists from around the world. An art toy is a toy that is created by an artist. What we're doing is using the means of production that was really devised for making mass-market toys to make very small limited editions. The toys will come in runs of anywhere from 50 to 1,000 pieces. And they're collected a little bit like limited edition prints, photographs and other fine art. But at the same time they're just toys, so children end up buying them and playing with them as well.

Kid Robot is really best known for our toys. At the same time, we are designing clothing. I just designed a nightclub in Toronto. We're doing cartoons. We released our clothing line about a week ago, and we had people waiting in line at 9:00 in the morning. The clothing wasn't available until 7:00 at night, and by the end of the evening we had about 1,000 people trying to buy about 200 sweatshirts from us. All the sweatshirts we make, very much like the toys we make, are numbered. So literally there's a number embroidered into the sweatshirt telling you what number, let's say out of only 200 made. And that's very similar to how we release our toys.

I have a really hard time with questions of what is design or what is art or are the toys you make design or are the toys you make art. I don't think that there is much of a real-world distinction between what really is art and what really is design.