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Original:

<http://www.hs.fi/ihmiset/Suomalaista+My+Little+Pony+-taidetta+myyd%C3%A4%C3%A4n+Picasson+ja+Warholin+rinnalla/a1404449148318?jako=a43bac4dd002dd43af906034320dda5f&ref=fb-share&sivu=1>

Finnish My Little Pony art sold alongside that of Picasso and Warhol

(Picture)

Caption: Mari Kasurinen's newest pony creations are modelled after artist Marina Abramovic, singer Miley Cyrus and Dr. Frank-n-Furter from Rocky Horror Picture Show (depicted).

Basel Convention Center, Switzerland, June 2013. 90 000 people have gathered here for Art Basel, the most important art convention in Europe, to view and buy works from the most famous artists of the world.

There, between the works of Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, one of artist Mari Kasurinen's customized pony figurines can be found.

The pony doesn't exactly look like the favourite girls' toy from the 80s. Kasurinen has changed it to look like Elisabeth I, queen of the UK. The mane has been stylized into a dome haircut(?), and the figurine is wearing a white dress and a starched collar. It is still clearly a My Little Pony. What is it doing at an art convention, and why would someone pay thousands of euros for it?

In 2008, Kasurinen made a Batman pony figurine in her second year at Lahti Institute of Art (now a part of Lahti University of Applied Sciences).

Customizing toys is not a new phenomenon, but the two icons of pop culture made for a fun combination. The pony looks hilarious in its little Bat cowl, cape and Batman cutie mark.

Kasurinen made another couple of customized ponies and uploaded pictures of them on the Internet. She started selling pony figurines for hundreds of euros but they weren't bought as toys, but as collector's items.

Kasurinen drew inspiration from RPGs and pop culture. Ponies transformed into Spock, Edward Scissorhands, princess Leia and He-Man.

"It all went so fast" Kasurinen reminisces in the summer of 2009. Her ponies were suddenly everywhere.

Photos of the customized toys sprang up in Chinese style blogs, Maaseudun Tulevaisuus (a mostly-rural Finnish newspaper) and American TV. From her home in Lahti, Kasurinen could follow how her ponies appeared in newspapers like the Guardian, Daily Mail, Marie Claire, Elle, Cosmopolitan and Esquire.

Reporters and readers were stunned. They didn't know if pony Darth Vader and pony Cthulhu were art, crafts, fan culture or just gags. For the artist herself, there's no debate: she had studied the culture of individuality through ponies from the beginning.

"Nowadays I don't have to explain it as often, thankfully," Kasurinen says.

She didn't have to explain to Galerie Gmurzynska, a Swiss art gallery. It contacted her in 2012 and offered her a deal.

"They had seen my work on Time's website and said that they'd been following my career. I got a huge order of 20 ponies. If our cooperation went smoothly, we would seal the deal."

The deal meant that the gallery started marketing Kasurinen's work to international art collectors. Kasurinen had made it. The same gallery handled works by Yves Klein, Kazimir Malevich and Joan Mirón. Oh, and Picasso and Warhol as well.

When 4 of the batch of 20 ponies had been delivered the Swiss were certain. Kasurinen was accepted into the ranks of the world's most known artists.

(Picture: Pony Miley Cyrus)

The gallery handled sales and orders for the ponies. At the same time, Kasurinen moved up into the big league of the art business.

"There was a huge price increase. The demographic changed and got smaller. Now my works are sold to art museums and international collectors", Kasurinen says. The latest pony was brought by the Museum of Modern Art in Rome.

The ponies now cost thousands of euros. They were bought especially in Russia and Switzerland. Before that the buyers were mostly young Americans who had grown up with the TV series. Nowadays the ponies are delivered to buyers of all ages, but art collectors are mostly middle-aged or older.

"They're probably enjoying them differently," Kasurinen speculates.

Many famous people have ordered a pony lookalike of themselves. Designer Karl Lagerfeld and modern artist Damien Hirst own ponified versions of themselves. Lady Gaga's head choreographer wanted a pony version of their employer, the news of which made it onto Perez

Hilton's website. "They've become status symbols. It's great to own a pony that looks like oneself," Kasurinen says.

The newest creation is a commission for Helsingin Sanomat (the largest newspaper in Finland) of the new Prime Minister of Finland, Alexander Stubb, and more Finnish ponies are coming this fall. Nowadays Kasurinen creates pony versions mostly of real people and studies personal branding through them.

The gallery offers its artists PR and image consulting services. What has been done for Kasurinen's image?

"The consultant looked at me for three seconds and said that they had nothing to add. Lucky for me!"

Her image better be good for her debut(?) exhibit, which the gallery will hold next year. It's a little bit like the debutantes' ball, where young artists are formally presented to the art world. Kasurinen is excited.

"There's been talk of arranging it in the Art Museum of Moscow. It's not a mere gallery, it's a real, big museum."

Kasurinen has also been producing graphics and paintings, but they have fallen to the wayside as her ponies have become famous. How long will the ponies be interesting to the public, buyers and Kasurinen herself?

"I'm probably not making these when I'm 70. But I still think I'll do it for a long time."