

Great creators of the world: Mark Kelso

Known for his awesome replica of the 'Invisible Hand', today Mark Kelso will tell us about his hobby and the strong links it has with his everyday job.

By Hispabrick Magazine

Pictures by Mark Kelso

Hispabrick Magazine: Name?

Mark Kelso

HM: Age?

MK: 41

HM: Nationality?

MK: United States

HM: What do you do normally?

MK: Professional Artist

HM: When did you first start building with LEGO®?

MK: I might have gotten my first set around age 7 or 8. I think I stopped collecting as a kid when I was maybe fourteen or fifteen.

HM: Your first set?

MK: Can't remember the specific number, but it was a small Lear Jet.

HM: And your last set?

MK: Last set before my dark age was 6080 King's Castle. But if you're including my collecting these days, I just recently purchased Medieval Market (Killer set, by the way!)

HM: ¿ Your favorite commercial LEGO building theme?



MK: Boy, that's a tough call... I'd have to say either Star Wars™ or castle. The UCS sets have been fantastic. But I also I love castle work, and I hope to do some larger castle themed MOCs in the future, so that theme is also close to my heart.

HM: ¿And your favorite non-official building theme?

MK: I'm not even sure it's really a theme, but I love seeing good landscape work!

HM: What is your favorite LEGO® element and why?

MK: Again, a tough choice. I suppose most might say the minifigure, but I'm a huge fan of the no-studs look, and without tiles, it would be nearly impossible... so I'm going to have to go with the tile.

HM: Which part would you like LEGO to produce?

MK: In keeping with my thought above, I would give just about anything for Lego to provide us with some wedge tiles. A builder can achieve very similar appearances with either tiles, or the sides of bricks, but when you build as large as I like to build, thousands of bricks really start to create problems due to the weight and clutch strength. Plating seems, in my experience, a bit stronger, and preferring the no-studs look, to have a wedge tile that could cover the studs on a wedge plate... ahhhhhhh, sheer heaven!

HM: How many hours do you spend building with LEGO?

MK: NOT ENOUGH!!!!

HM: What does your family/friends think about this hobby?

MK: My friends absolutely love seeing the MOCs. My wife, however, not so much. To her I think it's still just a child's toy. She knows how much I love the hobby, though, and makes an amazing effort to be supportive. But I can tell inside she's rolling her eyes and thinking "this guy's nuts!"

HM: In real life you work in visual arts. How does that influence you as an AFOL?

MK: Being an artist is much more than just something work related. It's me through and through. It's my way of living and perceiving the world. As a result, I bring the same visions to my LEGO creations that I do to my paintings. I've had formal training, though, and that certainly helps when it comes to building. I'm always thinking about lighting, color, composition, textures, and how fundamental visual elements will play into people's perception of what I'm trying to create. There are also simple things that come into play from my training as an artist as well... measurements and the like, which help with proportions. I suppose the best way to say



it, is that my LEGO creations are my art as much as my paintings. It's just a different medium for expression.

HM: Do you draw or pre-designs before you start building?

MK: Probably not as much as I should, although concept sketches are fairly common. But they're never very specific. For me, when it comes to building, I prefer to just dive right in and work through any problems as they arise. It might be more challenging that way, but I love the hands-on approach to building. Besides, I get enough drawing from my day job!

HM: One of your styles as an artist is photorealism. Do you apply that search for detail to your MOCs?

MK: Absolutely. Again, it gets back to me just being true to my own nature. I'm very detail-oriented, and with LEGO® I'm constantly striving to find better ways to use parts in order to achieve the most believable or realistic effects possible.

HM: In your "Apocalypse" project you mix several LEGO® scenes with painted scenes. How did that project come about?

MK: You're asking for trouble, when you're asking about my Apocalypse project. I could go on and on,

but I'll try to contain myself here...

I wanted a mythological story, and a visual appearance to the whole project that seemed ethereal and somewhat disconnected from reality. As that thought continued, I began to search for a method of presenting the story in a way that would reflect an other-worldly feel. At some point, I realized I could enhance the whole experience by combining mediums (LEGO , writing, music, and computer graphics). Once that notion caught on, I really rolled with it. The toughest part for me is finding the proper balance between the mediums to achieve the desired effect. At this point, I'm about a third of the way through the project, and I'm having more fun with it than anything I've created before (including my professional paintings). The first chapter has been pretty well received, and I'm really looking forward to sharing the story with others, and getting their thoughts, particularly as it progresses and gets to the really good stuff!

HM: How do you go about a project the size of the "Invisible Hand"? How do you choose the scale? How do you manage to stay interested in a project of this scale? And most importantly, where do you find the time?

MK: Oddly enough, those questions are easily answered, and come down to very pragmatic reasons. Size is limited to the width of my door, the



size of my van, and the length of my table at the moment. I'm considering larger projects in the future, though. I'll need to invest in a larger table and start considering models that can be broken down into modular segments for transportation.

Staying interested in long-term projects comes fairly easily to me, because of my detail-oriented personality, but the best way for me to be sure I finish a project is to post a WIP or two on line. Then I know people are expecting to see it finished, and I'm given that extra incentive to see it through.

Where do I find the time? I don't... otherwise you'd see a LOT more work from me! ;). The best I can do is to work mostly in the late evenings. Often after my wife has gone to bed, I'll stay up and build for a while. It's a great way to wind down from the day's stresses and do something creative that isn't influenced by the need to sell it or to finish by a certain deadline (which is ALWAYS the case with my paintings!).

HM: How long does take you to get from the idea to

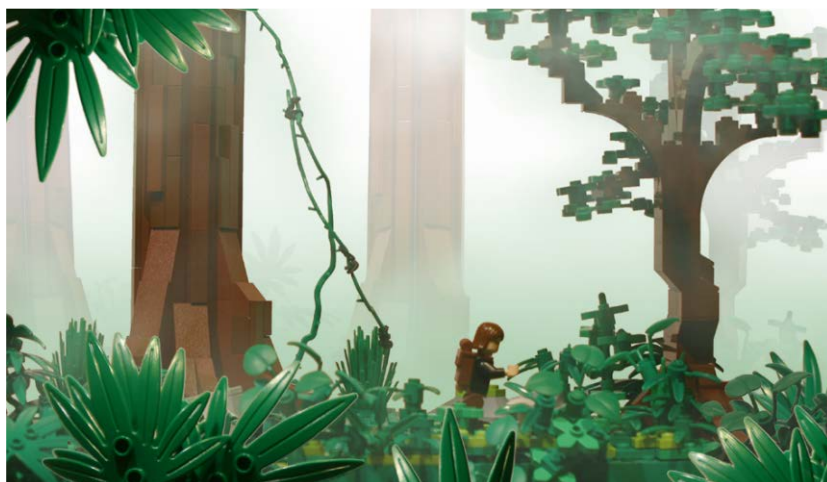
the finished model?

MK: Each project has it's own identity. Some go quickly and smoothly, some are nothing but challenges from beginning to end, taking a good bit longer. Also, I may sit on an idea for a year or two before jumping into building it, and so that aspect alone can differ immensely with each idea.

HM: Why did you select the "Invisible Hand" since it is not one of the mythical ships?

MK: I chose the Hand for a multitude of reasons. I enjoyed the visuals in the third episode, the ship had some color variation, the shape of the ship seemed like it would translate well into LEGO®, there were plenty of reference pictures available on line (as well as numerous shots of it in the movie), and most importantly, I hadn't seen too many of them done at that point.

HM: You have built spaceships from Star Wars™, Galactica™, Star Trek.™... Is Science Fiction a source of inspiration for you?





MK: Very much so. Mystery is where it's at for me. The sci-fi genre is constantly theorizing on the mysteries of life: where we come from, our place in the Universe, other life forms and our relationship to worlds that we have yet to know. Those are the kinds of questions and ideas that I find fascinating.

HM: Are you working on any large scale project right now?

MK: My Apocalypsis story is one project that's in the works, and will be for some time, as I'm probably looking at five or six chapters to reach the story's completion. I'm also hoping to begin work on another SHIP in the next few weeks; either a Venator Destroyer™, or the Spirit of Fire from Halo. (I'm leaning toward the Spirit of Fire since I've not seen a large version of that in LEGO®). And finally, I've been talking with a couple of other builders (Brian Kescenovitz and Keith Goldman, if I can name drop!) about a good sized collaborative piece, along the lines of 4 x 8 feet. So, yeah...nothing BUT large scale projects!

HM: The increase of AFOLs and lines like Star Wars™ create new possibilities not imagined before by LEGO®. What do you think about the old school LEGO and the new LEGO?

MK: I'm absolutely stunned by this world of creativity that has risen out of the original concept of building with LEGO bricks. LEGO has continued to mature and diversify as its early fans have grown from childhood to adulthood. I can't think of anything that compares. Bricks and some plates were enough to satisfy me as a child, but as an adult, my creative visions demand so much more. Yet LEGO has managed to keep pace with those demands by providing a staggering array of diversity in parts, multitudes of themes and building systems, and very importantly, the opportunity for nearly unlimited parts through Pick-A-Brick and Bricklink (I can't stress how significant that is to the hobby). These and countless other aspects of LEGO, and the worldwide circle of builders that work with LEGO, combine to make up a realm that seems to hold endless possibilities as a medium for creative expression... it's a GREAT time to be a fan of LEGO, whether you're a kid or an adult!■