

Stuck In Plastic - A creative collective of toy photographers

By Boris Vanrillaer

Pictures by SiP



A creative collective of photographers **stuck in plastic**



We all love our toys. Some of us are collectors, some build amazing creations, and others like to take pictures. Not to document the actual awesomeness of the build, but for the art of taking pictures. They call us toy photographers.

Put simply, toy photographers are people who like to take macro pictures of toys. The best of these photographers enjoy bringing their toys to life, recreating the movies they love or simply telling their own original stories and adventures.

Photographers who use LEGO® minifigures as their primary subject matter are part of a vibrant and much larger toy photography community. You will find these photographers on pretty much every social media platform if you take the time to look: Flickr, Facebook, Google+, 500px, Twitter, DeviantArt and Instagram to name just a few.

Whatever platform you find them on, you'll also find a truly international community with participants from all over the globe. These LEGO® and toy photographers connect regularly with each other via social media and inspire each other. It's not uncommon for someone to first discover this rapidly expanding community and immediately say, "I'm so glad I found you – I thought I was the only one!"

It was within this vibrant creative community of toy photographers that Stuck In Plastic was born. In January 2014, Boris (_Me2_) and Shelly (xxSJC) decided to start this creative collective called Stuck In Plastic to connect, share, celebrate and generally explore all aspects of this wonderful, colorful, funny, silly world of toy photography. The collective would engage in activities going beyond the digital social media world we live in today – from the small screen to real world art exhibitions over multiple days, toy photography meetups (also known as 'safaris') around the world, and printing actual books.

The name Stuck In Plastic refers in the first place to the magical plastic world which photographers are stuck in, each in their own specific way. But it also contains a friendly salute to other great artists, like Andy Warhol and his soup cans and this other great warm-hearted, old school gentleman called Trey Ratcliff who got stuck in landscapes and other customs.

After running the very first successful series 'Why?' – a search for the real creative drive of toy photographers stuck in plastic and a reach out to other toy photographers to find their inner drive – Vesa then joined the team in October of 2014.

Most people know Vesa simply by his online handle 'Avanaut'. His toy photography work has primarily centered around the fictional ice planet Hoth which featured in the Star Wars movie 'The Empire Strikes Back'. Ever since his first photos were posted to Flickr in 2009, accompanied by a behind the scenes peek, he's been a leader in the LEGO® photography field. His work has inspired an entirely new generation of LEGO® photographers and resulted in a beautiful collector's book 'Small Scenes from a Big Galaxy'. To say his photography has had a far reaching influence on LEGO® photography in all its iterations would be an understatement.



Avanaut LEGO® Sub 1 by Vesa

The creative collective went on to realize their first fine art exhibition at Seattle's Bryan Ohno Gallery in March 2015 as part of their creative goal to take toy photography beyond the digital screen and onto real walls.

The collective continued to grow with other great toy photographers including Mike (Balakov) and Kristina (kalexanderson).

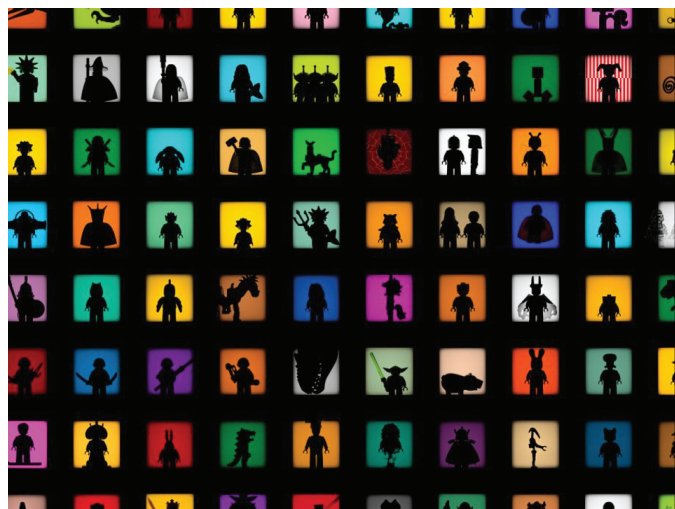
Mike was instrumental in helping to promote LEGO® photography in the early days. In 2008 his series of images recreating iconic photos using LEGO® minifigures caught the eye of both The Telegraph and then The Guardian, which helped LEGO® photography reach a global audience. His image 'Lunch Atop a Skyscraper' is his most recognizable image and remains an icon in LEGO® photography. Mike was also one of the early adopters that began to humanize those ubiquitous stormtroopers from the Star Wars



Mike's latest creative project included LEGO® robots.

universe by photographing them in everyday situations. In this alternative world created by Mike, you can see stormtroopers engaging in everyday activities, such as playing with a cat, waiting for the rain to stop, or folding a paper airplane.

Mike and Vesa are not the only ones to have adopted the stormtrooper as a muse. Kristina embarked on a 365 project (i.e. posting one photo a day for a year on social media – a popular creative challenge amongst toy photographers) in 2011 that featured a family of stormtroopers and this got quite some attention in the press. Her plastic 'family' consisted of a traditional stormtrooper action figure paired with a smaller LEGO® stormtrooper engaging in regular family activities. The amount of emotion that she's able to project with two little pieces of plastic is really what toy photography is all about: the ability to engage with an audience and provoke an emotional response.



100 Shadows Extract by Ballou34

Following another successful fine art exhibition in Seattle in late 2015, the collective was recognized in 2016 by the LEGO® Group as an active contributor to promoting LEGO® toy photography and received the RLFM status (Recognized LEGO® Fan Media). Being recognized by the LEGO® group in this way triggered for the collective the question of creative independency, and the second half of 2016 has been a turbulent one for the collective with some members leaving to explore their own artistic path and other new members joining. So at the beginning of 2017 Stuck In Plastic decided to go acoustic.



Planet Spring by Me2



The Fellowship by Me2



Buzz by Me2



Rey's Speeder by Ballou34



London by Reiterlied



Alien by Me2



The Morning After



To The Lofoten Islands and Back Again by Reiterlied



Panda Love by Ballou34

Explore the artistic journey.
Go slow, and play acoustic.

No more daily posts, and a much slower weekly rhythm and a theme with twelve words that will take the collective a year to complete.

Whenever the members of the collective are not exploring new creative ways of being stuck in plastic through monthly challenges on their blog, they have a pretty packed agenda. This includes creative photography reviews of new LEGO® sets, organizing real life toy photography meetups, and creating new exhibitions around the world to name just a few.

Still a pretty packed agenda for being acoustic.

Stuck In Plastic is a continually evolving creative experiment to take LEGO® toy photography to the next level.

The current active creative crew consists of Boris, Julien (Ballou34), Maelick (Reiterlied) and Stefan (HerrSM), with Mike and Vesa hanging out in the green room.

Join us in our plastic journey at www.stuckinplastic.com or on social media @stuckinplastic.



After Work by HerrSM

Some creative highlights:

January 2014 – Stuck In Plastic was born.

August 2014 – The start of the [Why series](#): a creative exploration of why people take pictures of toys, involving both new and old toy photographers.

December 2014 – The first Significant Twelve Book Exchange.

March 2015 – Fine art exhibition in Bryan Ohno Gallery, Seattle WA, USA

March 2015 – Toy Photography Meetup, Seattle, USA.

July 2015 – [Toy Photography Meetup, Stockholm, Sweden.](#)

December 2015 – Second Significant Twelve Book Exchange

February 2016 – Stuck in Plastic becomes a RLFM

September 2016 – Toy Photography Meetup, Hamburg, Germany.

January 2017 – [Stuck in Plastic goes acoustic.](#)

Upcoming events:

September 2017 – [Toy Photography Meetup, Edinburgh, Scotland](#)

Early 2018 – Paris Exhibition and much more in the pipeline.

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Do you want to join us in Scotland? It is free and great fun!



Kimono girl at sunrise by Ballou34