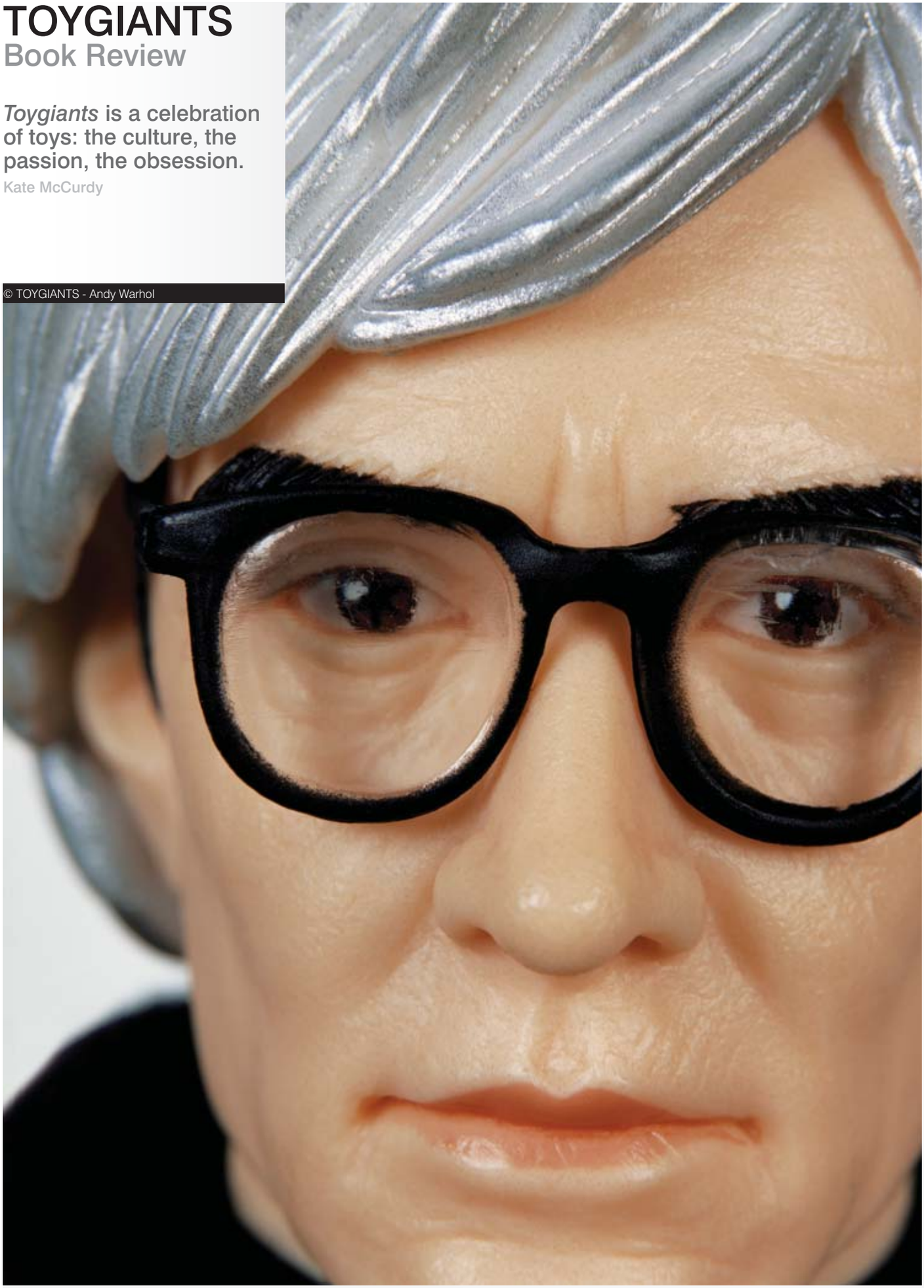
TOYGIANTS
Book Review

Toygiants is a celebration of toys: the culture, the passion, the obsession.

Kate McCurdy



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While the *Toygiants* project has taken more than four years to complete, the content is the result of a lifetime of meticulous collecting. Selim Varol is the owner of one the largest toy collections in Europe, and perhaps the world, with more than 10,000 individual pieces to his name. After happening upon a shop window which displayed a number of the pieces from the collection, photographers Daniel and Geo Fuchs had to know more about Selim's obsession for toys.

What followed was the start of a strong friendship between the Fuchs and Selim, one which Selim says has 'greatly impacted the development and direction of [his] collection'. He describes the time they spent together photographing the toys as 'imbued with an aura of childlike intimacy where no one else was permitted'. The end product of the book - and accompanying exhibition – however, draws the reader in and demands their involvement; by rekindling childhood memories of their own toys, or touching on the cult following of film characters and icons, or by simply blowing their minds through the sheer spectacle of some of the compositions.

Toygiants takes you on a journey through the fascination of toy design, from the more conventional dolls such as Barbie and Blythe, to the increasingly popular designer vinyl craze sweeping the globe. There are superheroes from the comic book worlds, such as Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Wonder Woman and Hell Boy, as well as the cast from Sin City, albeit characters from the feature film version of the graphic novel. Movie characters abound, from the usual suspects of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, to the more unconventional such as Uma Thurman as The Bride in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* (as well as Tarantino himself), Al Pacino as Scarface, Bruce Willis as *Die Hard*'s John McClane and Sly Stallone's Rambo.

What really stands out in *Toygiants* is the opening 'sequence' of images, a politically charged and alarming display of toys that unbelievably do exist. The first toy to take the stage, is that of George W. Bush, in full US Air Force gear, complete with interchangeable hands so that he can give the thumbs up to the troops. What follows is a sinister exploration of a real life game of heroes and villains: an extreme close up of Bush is placed in a double page spread with Osama Bin Laden. More portraits of world figures follow, from the revolutionary Che Guevaro, Fidel Castro and Abraham Lincoln, to the more notorious faces of Saddam Hussein, and Adolf Hitler.

The Hitler sequence begins with an extreme close-up, followed by what may be deemed fantastic poses including the figure of Hitler playing with *Star Wars* ships, to having his head in the jaws of a dinosaur, to being subjected to the sadistic whims of mutants. The imagination and invention of the compositions of the group shots elevate the objects out of their packaging and the toybox, and brings them to life: whether it's Andy Warhol in the barber's chair (hair by Edward Scissorhands), or colour-coded designer vinyl toy group compositions on long fold-out pages, or the extreme close-up portraits that allow you to become closer to the toys than you thought was possible.

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© TOYGIANTS - Hitler

Toygiants also shows that the collector's bug does not belong solely to Selim, as Daniel and Geo Fuchs are collectors in their own right. Using their camera to collect, 'they do not view these extremely disparate collections in a conventional way, but rather see archiving, or placing an order of particular things that interest them, as photogenic landscapes,' observes Dr. Eugen Blume, Director of the Nationalgalerie in Hamburger Bahnof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin. He believes that their aim is to 'conserve the world in absolute detail', and that's just what they have done with the world of toys in *Toygiants*. This is especially the case for the accompanying exhibition at the Rebel Arts Gallery, Hamburg, which includes an oversized 4 x 5.5 metre groupshot, as well as a selection of enlarged portraits. At this size, the toys command the exhibition space and become powerful images, and indeed works of art, in their own right.

By making the decision not to include captions to help illustrate each of the figures in the book, *Toygiants* does rely a little too heavily on the pop culture knowledge of its reader, and in some instances can distance those who may be new to this toy world. But when examined for what it is, a photographic collection of toys as you've never seen them before, this book is truly a collector's item in itself.

TOYGIANTS Silver Edition contains invaluable extras such as interviews with Daniel and Geo Fuchs, as well as a removable poster of one of the group shots.

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Daniel and Geo Fuchs
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www.toygiants.com
www.daniel-geo-fuchs.com
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