



Gates to a Special Part of Hell Reserved for People Who Don't Recycle, 2017
 Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Misha Kahn, Photography by Dan Kudla

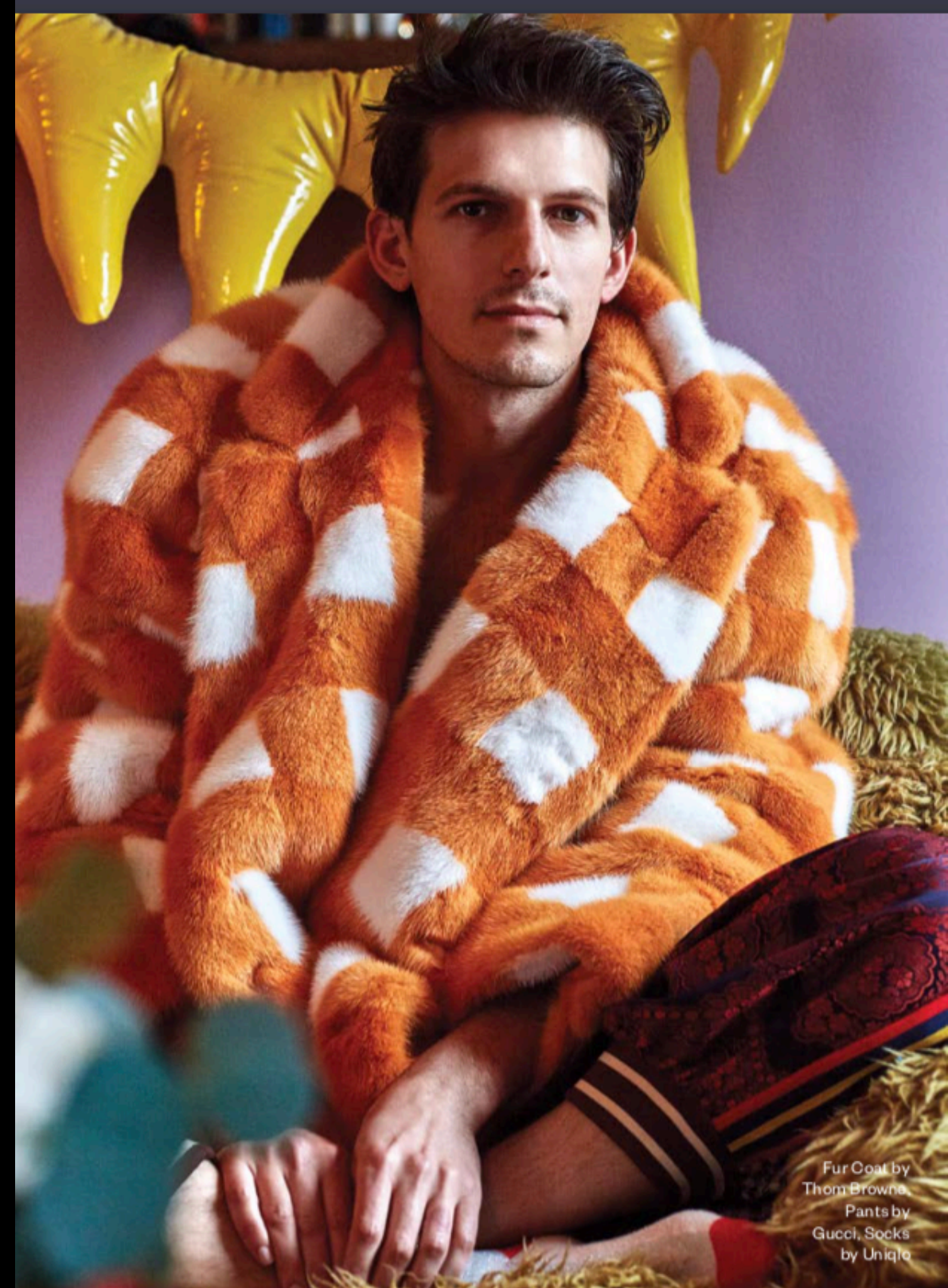
Known for his fanciful, resplendent sculptures, installations, and designs, artist Misha Kahn opens his door for a crib tour of his equally imaginative parallel wonderland. Visual eccentricities aside, Kahn's work aims to bring artfulness, color, and, more importantly, fun into every creation.

Photography by Wikkie Hermkens | Styling by Marc Sifuentes | Interview by Benjamin Price



Shirt and Pants by Versace, Shoes by Thom Browne

Misha Kahn



Fur Coat by
Thom Browne
Pants by
Gucci, Socks
by Uniqlo

Entering Misha Kahn's apartment is a bit like jumping through a psychedelic wormhole portal with passage granted inside the unrelentingly whimsical mind of the Brooklyn-based artist. In cities like New York which have long touted black and neutrals as their palette of choice, Kahn's apartment instantly blindsides the unsuspecting with a fabulously disorienting array of colors, shapes, and textures bursting in every fathomable square inch of the space.

A Minnesota-raised midwesterner, Misha's boyish air and quiet personality betrays the masterfully creative and conceptual mind beneath—something his home and work do not. His chosen medium of design is furniture and home goods, but the range within that genre is vast with Kahn set out to put a unique stamp on everything from chairs and mirrors to staplers and light switches. His own home is decoratively littered with custom pieces from his art studio, such as the twin gold and copper leaf light sconces flanking his bed

which are made to resemble feathered, organic, amorphous creatures. The kitchen cabinets, floor, and refrigerator are all bound in painted vinyl of swirling, kaleidoscopic colors and the "Yves Klein blue" custom-made pigment powder encased in a plexiglass box coffee table punctuates the space with its iconic hue.

Kahn left no stone unturned, and it is clear his gears never stop turning, in constant search of more overlooked materials to transform into objets d'art. For an artist known for transforming found materials, one man's trash just needs Misha to turn it to treasure. In fact, during the portrait photoshoot, the photographer inadvertently stepped on the trash can, crushing the side of it. After apologizing for the accident, Kahn brushed it aside, "I like it better now! It's such an interesting shape!" In what others overlook, Kahn sees possibilities. The artist's partner, Editor-in-Chief of Interview Magazine, Nick Haramis, affectionately refers to the home as "Pee-wee's Playhouse" and it is easy to see

the parallels, sans talking chair and Jamb the Genie, of course.

Kahn has been working as an artist since graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in furniture design in 2011. His approach melds an array of processes, from casting, carving, welding and weaving, to imaginative and singular modes of production. Furthering the dialogue of taste vs. functionality, Kahn's work is delightfully human, appealing to the visceral feeling of joyous abandonment and tactile curiosity. According to the former president of the Rhode Island School of Design, John Maeda, "Misha creates work for a parallel wonderland, where traditional perception of material and structure is pushed to the edges of the room to make space for one big party." His work has been exhibited internationally and is in the permanent collection of numerous museums and public collections; including The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Corning Museum of Glass.

Here, *IRIS Covet Book* met the artist in his other-worldly apartment, dressed him to match, and spoke with him about his journey from the suburbs and RISD to the epicenter of the New York art world.

Growing up in Minnesota, did you find a niche community that inspired you to go into the arts and eventually attend RISD?

Yes, I was always surrounded by creative people. My mom had lots of artist friends and was always directing plays when I was a kid. This probably instilled some kind of idea that making up silly situations was a chill way for adults to spend their time.

Were there any influences in your family? Was your artistic inclination supported by your family?

My family has always been very supportive, and now when they come to my shows I tell them they have to arrive at the moment of the opening—because historically they would fly in a day or two ahead of time but I would always put them to work sewing last-minute details or naming the pieces. My dad is a contractor and my mom writes young adult fiction, and in many ways what I've ended up doing feels like constructing a world and telling a story.

Where do you find inspiration when working on a new design or series? What's the beginning process for you? Do you have any specific influences from which you pull

inspiration frequently?

I really take things from all over. I love to travel to the places where things are made, and I get lots of ideas from learning about different processes. I love going somewhere new and getting flooded with a whole new way of considering aesthetics.

One of your recent shows, entitled "Midden Heap," was also reflective on current politics and events, how important is it for you to include politics in your art?

I'm trying to take everything that's happening in the world, and in my life, and kind of drop it into a stubborn object that will just sit there, bearing witness to that strange period of time. In my more immediate circles, there's support and empathy for all kinds of people, and then in the news and politics, it's like this right wing hellscape—the fact that what feels like a dreamy liberal renaissance exists at the same time as these close-minded, evil, destructive shithheads is so hard to reconcile. From an artistic point of view, I'm enjoying using this sense of disjointedness. My other political takeaway is that we don't need credentials anymore. I've always felt like I was an architect. I have a lot of heroes who are architects, so now I feel like I, too, can just say that I'm an architect. We don't need to have any job credentials anymore, and abandoning them is political.

What's a typical day in the studio look like for you?

The upside of the dubious decision to work on so many different projects with different materials and processes is there's really no such thing as a typical day. I'm really self-critical, so I usually have a few pieces I'm working on at the same time, so when I convince myself one is total trash and must be burned, there's another one to start working on. Then when my attitude switches over to "fuck it, people will buy anything" I can come back with some fresh and irreverent eyes.

How do you come up with your tongue-in-cheek titles, such as "Backbend Starfish Puts on all Her Jewels for Her Workout"?

I just noticed that other people would make these really insane titles that I felt were kind of cheap ploys to add an arbitrary intellectual gravitas to their work. I was listening to a pop song and my friend described it as cultural speed reading—the words didn't make sense together, as though an algorithm spit out

topical chunks. I now imagine that this algorithm title machine lives in my head, and I let it churn out titles. I also let my mom come up with a lot of the titles—but not that one.

What are your thoughts regarding sustainability? How do found and recycled objects fit into your work? How does the idea of waste and excess fit into your artistic ethos?

I guess I want my work to feel like a human—which means that it's often hypocritical and contradictory. I care a lot about environmental issues, and feel pretty strongly that we don't need to be producing more objects, and yet that's exactly what I'm doing. Oddly this does get reflected: some objects are woven out of grass and trash, and others feel jarringly opulent with polished metal and glass gems. It's kind of admitting what a tricky time this is, like we need to be doing so much more, like, upending our entire idea of "normal" living, but we can't figure out how to do that. I guess this translates as sparkle and grit.

I also believe that we need to make sweeping, radical changes to our material culture so that it's more sustainable. Our current methods revolve around just tinkering with what we consider normal to make it better, but I think by trying to get people to accept insane, idiosyncratic

objects, they'll ease into living in houses built out of trash with beetle farms integrated in-between the walls and tilapia eating their feces.

What have been some of your favorite collaborations to work on?

I worked on a ring with GianCarlo Montebello that we just finished. He's in his 80s. To meet him and talk to him about materials and processes—I felt like an outdated luddite. He was so free with his approach to mixing high and low materials. I was really inspired.

Your home is filled with so much unique art, even the refrigerator and light switches have been transformed into sculptures, did you have a vision of how you wanted to transform your space or did it happen organically?

It happened pretty organically! My boyfriend and I chose a bunch of pieces together when we moved in, and then we kind of just decorated around them. It's a rental apartment, so I'd say we just went all in with all the things we could do, like covering up the cabinets and hardware and painting or wallpapering every single surface.

Misha Kahn, *Return of Saturn: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, Friedman Benda, 2016. Courtesy Friedman Benda and Misha Kahn. Photograph by Andrew Meredith.





Installation by Misha Kahn, NOMAD Monaco, 2018. Courtesy Friedman Benda, Misha Kahn, and Estudio Campana. Photography by Giulia Piermartiri.

I find your idea of bringing intention and creativity to functional objects to be somewhat intuitive, why do you think people view things like staplers, doors, and tables to be simply functional and superficial rather than potential works of art?

I think it's because people mistakenly believe in human progress. I don't. If you believe that objects, functional in so much as they "efficiently" accomplish a task, can aid you in your quest to accomplishing more tasks and acquiring more things, and that this giant cog is moving mankind in some positive direction—then I think the vast array of products being peddled will probably suit you just fine. I think we've regressed from the four-hour workday of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. If these seemingly senseless objects that fill our lives are in fact not helping us do anything, then they become really silly things, and that should be celebrated and accentuated. I see my objects existing sort of like the Qwerty system on the keyboard—functional but not as functional as it could be.

How do you think the viewer's/user's relationship with a piece of your art, changes that piece, if at all?

One of my best friends, Katie Stout, always says about pretty much everything, "It's going to look so much better once it's dirty." I think about this a lot. I think

people using things and spending time with a piece can only make it better. I hope they see a life that wears them in like a nice glove.

How do you view Duchamp's concept of Readymade? Form losing function to become art on a pedestal, contextually, where as your work is form+function—are these oppositional concepts for you?

Hmmm, no? I don't really think function exists. I think a porcelain urinal is a really interesting object—it's a large slip cast ceramic thing, with very curious and bodily contours.

I think the point also had to do with noticing forms. The canon decided that it was just about questioning what is and isn't art, and redefining it as context/intention which is basically the most bland and unexciting takeaway to come from that stunt. Presumably they did their research, and I admittedly haven't, but in this era of make-your-own-truth-up-as-we-go... I don't FEEL that it's true. I think function and art have essentially nothing to do with each other, in the sense that they can overlap or not overlap.

Could you ever see yourself creating your own clothing line or having a brick and mortar furniture boutique?

I would LOVE to have my own clothing

line. I draw a lot of clothes in my sketchbook. I initially wanted to study fashion, and have been sewing clothes since my mom got me a machine at age five. I don't think I want a brick-and-mortar furniture store. I'm really bad at selling my own things. I would like to open up a restaurant, a hotel/all-inclusive resort, a casino, a beached cruise ship, a religious cult... so many things, and I imagine creating all the objects that would fill these locations.

What advice do you wish you would have received when you were just starting your career?

Only work on things with people you enjoy spending time with, because there will never be enough money to compensate you for dealing with assholes.

If you had not become an artist what occupation do you think you would be in at the moment?

An architect, but like I said, I sort of already am one. †

For more info about the artist visit mishakahn.com



Sweater by Comme des Garçons, Pants by Gucci, Socks by Uniqlo