

Michael Bucur, founder of Ingmar Studio



Art on Apparel

This is me, Michael – wearing a blank canvas.

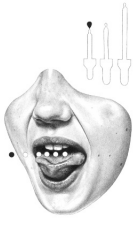
Ingmar Studio was born...

I was doing the merchandise for a record label that died – posters, t-shirts, vinyl sleeves. I had all these talented artists I'd found. I wanted to commission more from them. So I gave birth to Ingmar Studio.

Here's a piece Alessandro Ripane did for us – a gramophone, faces melting in the sound. Prodigy saw it, posted "Who did that?" – Alessandro's success was quick from there. I love being a springboard for these wonderful artists.



Alessandro Ripane —>



The monkey in the mask...

I found these stunning photo-realistic pencil-drawn illustrations online. Awe-inspiring. I never saw anything like them. Then – pure chance – I bumped into the artist at a beer kiosk across the street from my apartment in Frankfurt. Crazy. Oriana Fenwick's the artist's name.

I'd given myself this challenge, to find someone who can draw a monkey in a mask. It's super-hard – particularly with feathers and things like that. I'd asked artists to do it and they'd flat refused. But Oriana did it beautifully.

It's about when we go out, we try to be cool. But really we're wearing a mask. And at the same time, evolution didn't jump so far – that's why it's a monkey ...I mean we defend our territory, or act the boss or whatever – all these instincts.

By the way, that kiosk I met Oriana at, is called *Yok Yok* – Turkish name. *Yok Yok* is tricky to translate; but it's kind of "Non-existence doesn't exist." Or "It's not possible that I can't give you it." Something like that. So it's pretty apt that there I found the woman who made us the art that nobody else could.



← Oriana Fenwick



Course, most of the concepts come from the artists – not from me

I like when the artist has a message. Unexpected, unsettling, maybe comical. When I find a great undiscovered artist ... that's intoxicating. I'm always hunting.

When we get in touch with an artist, there's always a piece I just want – I'll be trying to talk them into selling me something. If I don't have a burning hunger like that, I won't commission the artist for t-shirts.

It can be any media – painting, photography, just anything we love. I met Asae Tanaka at a party and she said she did collage. I thought, collage...? But when she brought me some of her work, I was blown away. I never saw such elaborate collages. So she did a silk scarf for us. Women go crazy over it. About six months after she did the scarf, Coca-Cola bought this style from her. She's super-successful now.

Asae Tanaka —>





The whole thing about Ingmar Bergman...

When he was creating films, the topics were super-deep – love – doubt – crisis – death – decay – what-happens-after – very raw topics.

So this is what we're trying to do: kind of 'excavate' topics that are not so easy.

Maybe some of those subjects sound bleak. But we're very positive in what we choose. We look for artists with a spirited, distinctive vision. I think Ingmar Bergman never tackled these topics in a way that made it hard to watch.

We do things that touch people; disturb them; make them think; make them laugh. We don't do the norm, and stuff that's popular in street culture. We wouldn't do gangster-style. You definitely don't see our type of thing on every street corner.



Don't shut up

You've got this space on a t-shirt, and so often it's filled with things that're really unenlightening. The message will be negative or superficial. Just things like 'Shut up'. ... Maybe not that – but you know what I mean...

Our aim is to get people to peer over the edge into ideas. We have a piece, it's Yves Saint Laurent with chicken pox. The artist wanted to put Yves in an unexpected but familiar context. I don't know exactly – but the way I see it, one day way back, that guy had chicken pox – you don't usually think of that when you see an Yves Saint Laurent bag or whatever.



Then there's the King with the McDonald's cup

You look at it and you think, "Nice drawing," – but then you look closer and you see this cup, and you go "*WTF – Why is he doing this?*"

This is this Japanese guy, traveling round the world drawing people in red, yellow, and blue. It's kind of a reminiscence of his childhood drawing with those colors.

...These days you don't need to think – how things happen ...and you're surrounded by media – everything is easy. Pop songs are easy. There's no message anymore. Basically the message is "What shall we do on Friday night?" I mean, come on...

If we can do something that snaps people out of the routine – gets their head into a different track – so they're thinking, "What the heck is going on?" – this is important to us. It's one of the biggest things that drives us.

← ITOKiN



I've found men in general are not brave when it comes to strange things

Like the Mickey t-shirt with a penis for a nose – mainly it's women who've bought that. I gave it to friends as a present, and some gave it back – they were saying "I just don't have the balls to wear it."

That's part of the concept – you need to have balls.

...or at least not be the type to sit and curl up in a corner.

That's why we're doing this.



This is not for everybody

We don't plan on ramping up production that much. Building a business for the big retailers is a different story. We're more into pimping the webshop, and going to fairs, talking to people – it's nicer. We meet people who bought their t-shirts from us years ago, and they're still kind of lit-up about them.

We spot our t-shirts out and about from time to time. I remember the first time, in Alsace in France – and we weren't even selling into France – a barge passing on the canal – my wife was like “Look! – look – on the thing – the wotsit – the boat.” And I'm like “What – is it sinking?” And there was this guy on the barge wearing our t-shirt – the Mushroom Explosion.



<— Clara Luzian

Karina Eibatova, Russia —>



What's great is you can sometimes feel or see what country the artist is from

We have two artists from Russia – their work is all nature, and preternatural – they have this esoteric thing... boulders, and fog type-of-thing.

Japan it's artificial, technical – partly from how they make the art. Then the guy we have from Australia – from Bondi Beach – his work is vibrant, energetic, crazy. And work by German artists tends to be precise. You see that in Oriana's pencil drawings. ...It's fascinating to see how artists are influenced by where they live and their culture. Gives you insight into a country and how people are.

Asae Tanaka, Japan —>



<— Mulga the Artist, Australia



Everything is produced fair

We get our t-shirt made in Lithuania. Quality-wise it's one of the best I've seen, and it's a really nice cut. We started out printing on ready-made garments; but they were shrinking – losing their form.

[there'll be t-shirt production images on this page]

Sometimes designs don't sell

We'll think we have this super-incredible thing – one of the coolest things we've done; but then people don't buy it. But we'll keep it on a shop hanger – because we love it. And then there'll be this one person comes – like at a fair ...this happened with the Funnel Funds piece... and they'll be saying "WTF is this? This is really amazing. I've never seen anything like this before," – they'll come back to it – get a bit crazy about it – they have this selfsame feeling that's in the artwork. Sometimes the deeper, stronger reactions are from the less popular pieces.

←— Funnel Funds, Juli Jah

