

# KIKO

## THE FRENCH POP ARTIST

All about childhood!

Creating is always saying something about childhood, asserts KiKo, who has rooted his approach to art in this belief stated by Jean Genet, a French Novelist. Each of his paintings is a “Proust’s madeleine” triggering a memory of our childhood, waking up the child we once were, and sublimating the one we will always be.

Preserving the candor of childhood is both an artistic and personal quest for this hypersensitive young man. And if the Hermes logo shows up here and there on his canvases, it is to better

question us about the consumer society and the influence of social networks on children, which as he sees it, is robbing their childhood. According to him, it is shaping a generation of children who will project into adulthood the melancholy of a childhood they were not able to live to the fullest.

If smooth and ultra-glossy finished canvases are part of his artistic signature, it is also to remind us that the essential is always found under the varnish of appearance. What matters is the child and the emotion you feel deep inside while looking at his paintings.



My quest as an artist is to create the emotion that will awaken the child deep down in each of us” KiKo

KiKo in his studio in Collioure, South of France (Credit: Théo Collet)



KiKo in his studio in  
Collioure, South of France  
(Credit: Théo Collet)

## Let your dreams set sail... is the quote of his life

Manuel Fernandez, alias KiKo, is a French artist born in 1985 in Martigues, the small town near Marseille dubbed the “Venice of Provence”. It’s the inspiration behind his Mediterranean colors and more particularly the burning orange that infuses many of his works.

KiKo has always had a fondness for drawing and painting. As a child, drawing came to him as naturally as breathing. In a single assertive stroke, he would pencil emotions that his words did not carry. Undeniably, he had a gift for drawing, and for his teachers, his way forward was clear. But art was not quite part of the picture in this family of sailors, whose chief passion was for the sea and fishing. KiKo thus hopped onto the family tuna boat, trading his canvases for fishing nets; he certainly wasn’t going to jump ship!

Living the harsh life of a sailor, constantly brought back in line by the sea, KiKo built himself an imaginary universe where a childhood suspended in flight would inspire all his work. He would never stop drawing childhood.

It was in the studio of his father-in-law, the French painter Max Rovira, that KiKo began a journey on canvas, giving a new life to his drawing. The use of new tools and materials gave his work a different dimension and he soon found his own artistic DNA. The success is immediate. In 2017, when he decided to give himself over entirely to his passion for art, he symbolically chose “KiKo”, his childhood nickname, as his alias.

Since 2017, the “KiKo’s children” have become globetrotters: from Shanghai to the U.S, and on to Europe, they can be found in the

homes of collectors and influencers as well as in many art galleries. Each year, they are also featured in contemporary art fairs in France and Europe.

From Pop/Street Art to Expressionism... standing on the shoulders of giants! KiKo is a child of intersections, overlapping between art and street, poetry and color, childhood and nostalgia. In this sense, he is quite naturally a worthy heir to pop/street artists from whom he drew his inspiration at the beginning of his artistic career – such as Roy Lichtenstein, Keith Haring, Takashi Murakami, J.R, Mr.CHAT and more.

However this is Expressionism, the artistic style in which the artist seeks to depict not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions arousing within a person that inspires him the most today. The artist Amedeo Modigliani and his ability to bring out his models’ soul particularly move KiKo. Not surprisingly, the artist is fascinated by the children in Modigliani’s work; old souls that have retreated into their inner world with all its secrets, eager to flee a reality yet too heavy for their shoulders.

KiKo in Port-Vendres, both a yachting harbor and an active fishing town where KiKo spent all his childhood. The two blue ships on the right had side of the picture belongs to his family



KiKo in his studio  
- the acrylic spray  
used to create the  
colorful back-  
grounds (Credit:  
Théo Collet)



## Into KiKo's poetic world

KiKo draws inspiration from children and the world they live in. He has a fascination for the expressions of the faces, of the eyes, for the attitudes of children, which allow them to express themselves without words.

In his view, art must remain a child's drawing and he is constantly in search of their guileless motions, not yet influenced by educational and artistic convention.

## KiKo's world is divided into 5 main themes:

### The Teddy Bears

Confidants, accomplices and best friends, teddy bears bring back a rush of the very best in childhood. Comfort objects for adults as much as for children, they protect us from life's hardships.



The Ballerina's bear, The Dancers, 120x150cm, 2020, KiKo

L'Ourson, The Teddy Bears, 100x100cm, 2020, KiKo



### The Dancers

"Les danseuses de KiKo" is a theme highly personal to the artist, inspired most often by his own daughter, who dances ballet. But over and above the ballerinas, Kiko goes in search of the movement of little girls swirling in the care-free kingdom of childhood.

### Les Mômes de KiKo (KiKo's Kids)

They are the children of the world, particularly little vagrants robbed of their childhood: Gavroches from every era, street urchins, migrant children or tots in transition from one home to another. In their suitcases or tied into their bindle, the history, the secrets, the joy and all the bumps and bruises of a life sometimes too heavy for their little shoulders.



Tourne, tourne ma jupe, The Dancers, 120x150cm, 2020, KiKo

KiKo in his studio  
- signature (Credit:  
Théo Collet)



### The Portraits

Mischievous, sulky, thoughtful, happy or melancholic, KiKo's portraits embody all the expressions and bearings of childhood. Their large eyes convey emotions, exert great fascination on the viewer giving him the impression that he has captured « what is behind »



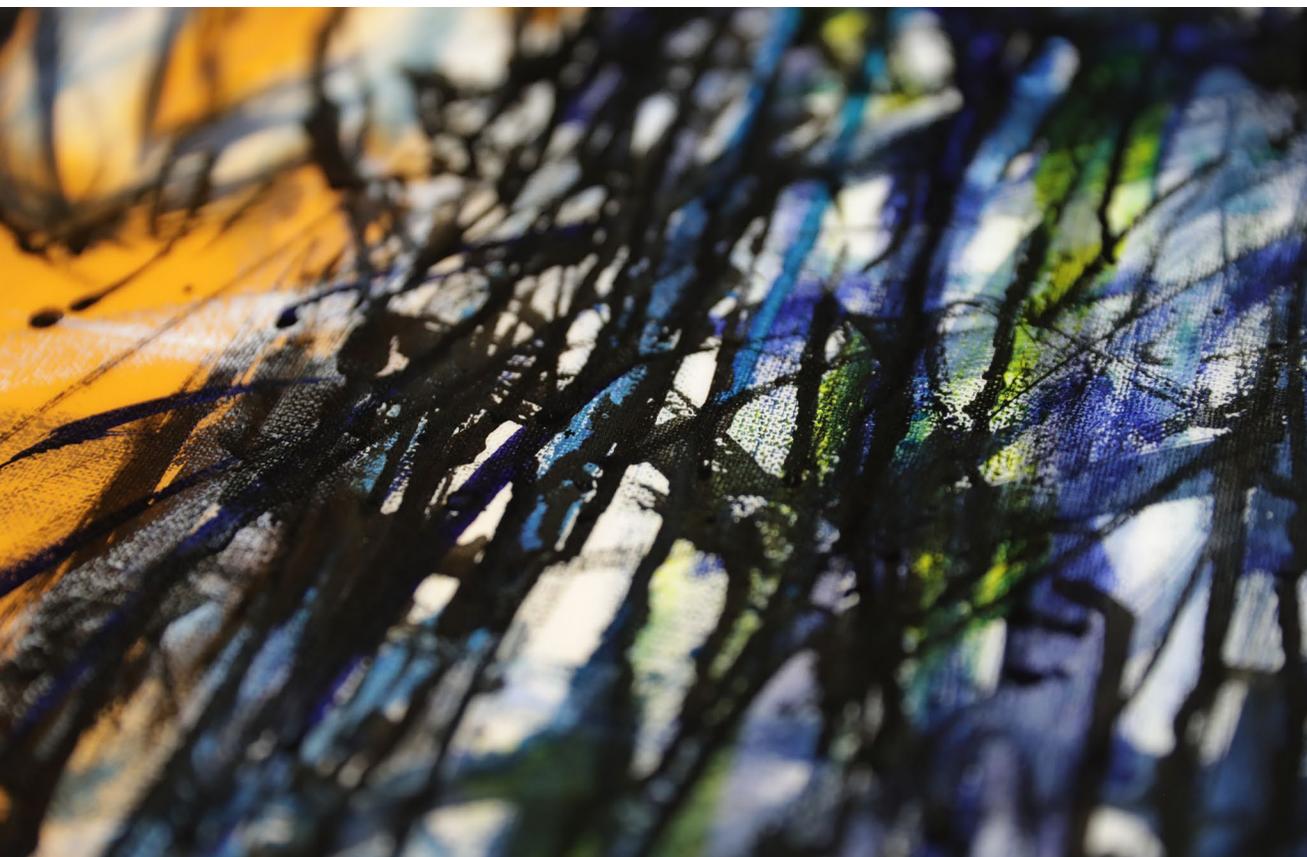
La Petite Boudeuse, KiKo's Kids, 100x100cm, 2020, KiKo



Le Petit Gangster, KiKo's Kids, 116x89cm, 2020, KiKo



The Balloon Girl, KiKo's Kids, 60x80cm, 2020, KiKo



Marianne's eyes, Portraits, 160x130cm, 2020, KiKo. Marianne is the personification of the French Republic.

Collaboration with the  
French brand Religion  
Rugby for the Rugby  
World Cup 2021 (Credit:  
Théo Collet)



Gavroche,  
Portraits,  
160x130cm,  
2020, KiKo.  
Gavroche is  
a fictional  
character  
from Les  
Misérables by  
Victor Hugo,  
a poor young  
boy who lives  
on the streets  
of Paris.



### The Chaplins

Each painting in this series is a tribute to one of the greatest geniuses ever to grace the silver screen. KiKo is passionate about Chaplin and his central figure, The Tramp - the lonely, destitute yet optimistic character who became a heroic saviour. The Tramp is Chaplin's representation of his own childhood, marked by sadness and poverty.

**Artworks on concrete:** Where Street Art has enabled art to take over the streets, KiKo gives urban art a place of expression inside. Replacing sometimes his canvas with a "wall" of rough concrete, he paints works of swelling power that bring out the concrete's cold and grey, and the hued lights of his India inks.

Slip into KiKo 'studio and unlock some secrets of his creative process

While KiKo shows endless inspiration and already-recognized talent, it's his very personal technique and sense of perfection that seal his artistic DNA.

The Tramp  
and The Kid,  
The Chaplins,  
195x130cm,  
2020, KiKo



The Tramp and The Kid in KiKo's studio,  
The Chaplins, 195x130cm, 2020, KiKo

Charl'In Love, The  
Chaplins, 1116x89cm,  
2020, KiKo

KiKo draws in charcoal, freehand onto the canvas, driven by the urgency of creation. He feeds off this adrenaline to relive what graffiti artists must have felt standing before the forbidden wall. Each drawing is unique, the artist refusing to use a stencil. On the sketch done in charcoal, he unfurls a technique called inking, used in the past on comic strips, then he goes over each line again with Indian ink, applied by brush. It's with acrylic spray and thrown paint that he creates his sublime backgrounds, often in primary colors, taking extreme care to preserve the drawing.

KiKo finishes off his canvases with a layer of evenly poured resin. He is a master at this very complex technique, which can damage the work if imperfectly executed. Although resin has become his trademark, KiKo is quick to emphasize that what really matters lies under the varnish of appearance.



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Credit Photos: KiKo & Théo Collet