Puma, Billionaire Boys Club and more team up with Micah Johnson's crypto native NFT Aku

By Roxanne Robinson - April 12, 2022

In case you've been on the fence about jumping into the world of NFTs, the story of Aku, a virtual boy astronaut with an oversized space helmet, could convince you otherwise.

Created by former MLB player Micah Johnson, Aku was the pro-athlete-turned-digital-artist-and-entrepreneur's answer to a question a young fan asked if astronauts could be Black. Johnson shows they can be profitable crypto native NFTs as well. Since launching in February 2021, Aku has generated $24 million in sales.

Johnson is taking Aku to the next phase by partnering with streetwear brands Puma, Billionaire Boys Club, Icecream, Paper Planes, Upscale Vandal, and Who Decides War, the latter being the label that featured Aku in its Fall 2022 show.

The tie-up will result in a collection of 15,000 one-of-a-kind 'Akutar' designs within the greater 3D avatar collection that melds luxury streetwear fashion and culture with the next generation of creators. These unique avatars called 'Akutars' will launch on the Ethereum blockchain this month.

According to Johnson, Aku has been a 'gateway' NFT.
"For a lot of people, Aku was their first NFT! Our audience is mostly non-crypto users, but Aku’s character and message resonated with them," he told FashionNetwork.com.

Aku was released as a 10-chapter series priced at $999 apiece. As of April 7, chapters ranged from $3,200 to $60,000. In total, primary sales of Aku were $15.4 million and $9 million in secondary sales. They continue to generate NFT royalties for Johnson’s parent company, WYE Media Company. Johnson declined to disclose operating costs and thus profit, only noting that the team is lean but is scalable for specific projects.

Pusha-T and Upscale Vandal, an American rapper and record producer and streetwear business whiz Mike Camargo, respectively, are advisors and founding creative council members of Aku.

They worked closely with Johnson and the team to curate the first group of collaborators for the first Akutar collection.

"Aku is the first and only one making art and building a community at the highest level of fashion and culture. The first Akutar lineup is a family affair of Black creatives coming together to take the Akuverse to the next level," said Pusha-T in a release.

Johnson insists that even if the young boys dreaming of space can’t purchase an Aku NFT, the character is reachable through other means.

"The broader objective will be reached as a result of being able to remain independent and have control over how and where we want Aku to live," Johnson maintains, adding, "Our goal is not to have everyone own an Aku NFT, but instead, utilize NFTs to orchestrate our audience around the greater mission."
Thus, the former Major League Baseball player says owning the Aku IP means he can exist beyond an NFT.

The mission, which is only two years in the making, has also included several organic grassroots efforts to expose kids to inspiring character.

"These include Aku used in classrooms to Aku murals created by kids in Mexico, the U.S., and Brazil. As Aku continues to grow, more opportunities will allow Aku to inspire a broader audience," Johnson insists.

The cute space boy has already been optioned for film and TV projects and a clothing project last December at Art Basel. The project may aim to prove that astronauts can have any skin color, but it also drives home heroes can also be baseball players-slash-NFT creators.

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