

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

critics' picks

Paris

Takashi Murakami

CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

Place d'Armes, 78000 Versailles, France,

September 14–December 12



Takashi Murakami, *Oval Buddha*, 2007–10, bronze and gold leaf, 18 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 10'.

French historical institutions have proved willing to experiment with contemporary art installations (a few standouts this year include Miquel Barceló at the Palace of the Popes in Avignon and Mark Dion at the Musée Départemental Arles Antique). But Jean-Jacques Aillagon, president of the Château de Versailles and the force behind three consecutive annual contemporary installations at Versailles, has had to put himself on the defensive. In a series of videos on the official Versailles website, Aillagon sits behind his desk and responds to visitor comments about Takashi Murakami (“Remember your history lessons,” he chastises), like Mister Rogers in a really nice suit. Aillagon’s selection of Jeff Koons in 2008 also sparked controversy, but Murakami’s

exhibition is on another scale, installation verging on invasion: The bright polychrome sculptures along the circuit of the royal apartments are placed centrally in front of each room, never on a sideboard. The artist literally carpets the King's Guard-room with a custom-made rug saturated with Murakami's signature smiling emoticon flowers. The needle that tops the twenty-eight-foot-tall *Tongari Kun*, 2003–2004, a stack of hybrid cartoon figures on a frog-lotus base, nearly scratches the ceiling of the Veronese-decorated Hercules Salon. But if the presence of these sculptures is aggressive—note the hard, relentless shine of Murakami's synthetic-resin surfaces in contrast to Versailles's sumptuous range of textures from velvet to gold to painted canvas—the thematic resonances between object and setting can be subtle and thoughtful. One could see the nearly twenty-foot-tall gold-plated *Oval Buddha*, 2007–10, that dominates the upper garden as histrionic luxe; or the figure's two-sided head, smiling bodhisatva and then razor-toothed monster, could incarnate the capricious benevolence of the ancien régime.

— Julia Langbein