

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

WALL STREET JOURNAL

Takashi Murakami on Junk Food, Warhol, Napping

By Lim Li Min



Gion 'Murakami-Ego' is at the Museum of Islamic Art's Al-Riwaq exhibition hall in Doha, Qatar, through June 24.

Takashi Murakami does things in a big way.

For an exhibition in Doha, Qatar, he designed a Gulliver-sized inflatable replica of himself, its giant, calloused hand extended to greet entering museumgoers.

"Children, adults, families — I want to bring everyone into my world," Mr. Murakami says.



Chika Okazumi

Takashi Murakami's Gulliver-sized inflatable replica of himself, on display at the show.

For the last 24 years, he has strived for that. The 50-year-old artist and entrepreneur draws freely from Japanese pop culture to create work that is both critically and commercially successful. His handbag designs for Louis Vuitton resulted in a now-ubiquitous best-seller. For Kanye West's 2007 album "Graduation," he designed an anime-inspired cover. His work has shown at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, France's Chateau de Versailles and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.

His Doha show, "Murakami-Ego," revisits many of his best-known themes, including *otaku*, or geek, culture, and his own "Superflat" aesthetic that merges high and low culture. Kaikai and Kiki, two cartoonish, grinning characters that are well-known to Murakami fans, make an appearance, but one highlight is new: a 100-meter panel with Buddhist monks, drawn in the traditional *nihonga* style Mr. Murakami was trained in.

"Murakami-Ego" also critiques Japan's response to last year's nuclear crisis and what Mr. Murakami considers the country's sour mood. "Right now, Japanese people are very low," he says.

Once a year, I take a holiday for one week, on a very small, super-boring island in Japan. Very few people live there.

I eat junk food to relax.

I'm not religious, but I love sci-fi — things like UFOs, psychic powers, supernatural elements.

Andy Warhol — I super-respect his style. He's very honest.

I tweet, in Japanese. Mostly I say, "I wake up, I'm sleeping." Stupid things, everyday stuff. "My dog is cute."

As I get older, it's harder for me to feel the difference between absolute right and wrong.

I was an activist 25 years ago, but I gave up. Activists say many "no, no, nos" but cannot create what is a better way. That's why I gave up and came back again to art.

I'm like an otaku kid. Otaku people have this inability to communicate. When my mum saw an otaku kid's room on TV, she shouted, "Oh my God. That's just like your room!"

Three things that make me angry about the Japanese: They don't want to take on the responsibility necessary to be an independent nation. People only think about how they can live an easy life, that's all they think about. They criticize people who are successful.

Three things I'm proud of: the strong element of kindness in the culture. They have a lot of respect for aesthetics, beauty. And the food is great. That's why I cannot escape from Japan — the food is brilliant. The food is my soul.



Chika Okazumi
'Pom & Me,' by the artist.

I have a team of assistants doing my paintings. I maybe do 20% to 50% myself. I'm like a director in the movie industry.

I hate traveling. Airplanes are scary.

I hate hotel living, because I want to enjoy making small drawings, watching YouTube and immediately responding to my studio people.

I have an average ego, maybe. Not like Picasso. He believed he was a genius.

In Tokyo, everyone knows about super-strong radiation, but you cannot do anything. Everything you eat — milk, meat, fish, vegetable — is all radiated. But we have to eat, we have to drink milk. We cannot escape.

In Japan, I get up at 5:30 a.m., nap at 11 a.m., work, have lunch, have half an hour's nap. I sleep anytime from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m.

I hate death. I don't like to die. A Taiwanese feng shui master said, touching my hand, "you will die at 79." I screamed: "Please don't tell me about that!"

I would like to live to 120, because conceptually, people can survive to 120. Every 20 years, it changes. So maybe, in the next 20 years people can go to space. I don't know what the next revolution will be. I want to watch.

In wintertime, it's very important to do aerobics, because you're stiff. So I make my staff stretch. And now we say "hello" and "good night" and "thank you so much," because the young generation cannot say hello. Everyone wants to keep quiet. But SMS is loud, and everybody is quiet and cannot look each other in the eye. It's crazy. I hate that. You have to say hello. Hello. Hello!

—Edited from an interview with Lim Li Min