

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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With money and fame, Takashi Murakami has it all Prominent contemporary artist holds 'petite' retrospective at Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art, with new works

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Artist Takashi Murakami poses for a photo in front of his artwork. (Park Hae-mook/The Korea Herald)

Takashi Murakami is famous for his Japanese anime-inspired artworks and celebrated characters, which appeal to not only an Asian audience, but to the international art scene as well: His works often sell for millions of dollars at auctions.

His artworks represent an example of combining fine arts with commercialism as they are regularly featured in popular culture. His collaboration with the luxury brand Louis Vuitton produced the famous monogrammed bags. With Kanye West, he created an animated music video featuring the singer's track, "Good Morning."

In fact, his record shows he is a successful man in both the arts and business.

"What does success mean to me? That is the question I ask to myself," he said during the press conference for the opening of his retrospective at the Samsung Museum of Art, Plateau.

"If an artist in his 20s sees me, he would think I am a successful artist. But when I see myself, I have a different feeling."

The 51-year-old said he's been trying to get his voice heard in Western art and he's halfway there, but the next step is to get his audience into a deeper discussion in the world of social networks.

“I am not there yet. I can say I accomplished 10 percent on a scale of 100 percent,” he said.

His endeavor to engage with a broader audience has resulted in the creation of a studio named “Kaikai and Kiki” in 2001, which produces various art products and conducts collaborations with figures from various fields. The studio has offices in Tokyo and New York.

Murakami is also a theorist, creating the word “Superflat” in 2000 as a core philosophy of his works.

Literally, it means flattening objects as seen in “Superflat Flowers,” a sculptural work composed of two-dimensional flowers.

“It was initially meant to criticize the shallow, frivolous popular culture,” he said.

The concept explains his exploration of combining elements of Japanese traditional painting, manga culture, fine arts and commercialism.

Murakami believed that by incorporating the Japanese sub-culture into art, he could better depict the Japanese culture. Calling himself “otaku,” or a person who is obsessed with anime and cartoons, he creates sculptures and paintings that feature anime-inspired characters and elements of the Japanese traditional painting “nihonga.”

The retrospective at Plateau features his recent works such as “DOB in Pure White Robe (Pink and Blue),” a painting made this year which features Mr. DOB, Murakami’s representative character that resembles famous animated icons like Mickey Mouse and Doraemon.

Since 1993 when the character was first introduced, Murakami has been slowly transforming the Mr. DOB series to reflect the artist’s own personality.

“The new works are paintings that feature a portrait of myself. After the earthquake we had in 2011, I have been focusing more on the essence of human beings than the relations between art and commercialism,” Murakami said.

The exhibition continues through Dec. 8 at Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul. For more information, call (02) 1577-7595.