

January 29, 2016

OPENING

Takashi Murakami's Superflat Collection

–From Shōhaku and Rosanjin to Anselm Kiefer–

Venue: Yokohama Museum of Art

Dates: January 30 (Sat) - April 3 (Sun), 2016

This exhibition is the first large-scale public showing of the renowned contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami's private collection centered around contemporary art.

Murakami (b. 1962) received the first Ph.D. in *Nihonga* (Japanese Painting) to be granted by the Tokyo University of the Arts Graduate School of Fine Arts, and has since come to be known worldwide for his extremely polished works blending contemporary art and traditional Japanese painting, high culture and pop culture, East and West. He has held a number of solo exhibitions at prestigious museums around the world.

While energetically pursuing his creativity as an artist, Murakami has also been active as a curator, gallerist, and producer. In recent years, in particular, he has become an avid collector, acquiring a wide variety of artworks in and out of Japan with a perceptive eye and unique aesthetic sensibility. This little known collection, while loosely focusing on contemporary art, also includes old Japanese and Asian artifacts, European antiques, contemporary pottery, and folk art and crafts. Murakami's guiding concept of Superflat not only refers to formal aspects he identifies with Japanese art, such as flatness of the picture plane and decorativeness, but also extends to a view of art that rejects hierarchical divisions between different artistic genres or eras and frees artistic activities from definitional boundaries. It is a dynamic, expansive concept that applies to the entirety of the artist's life and activity as he wrestles with the big question, "What is art?" from various angles.

This exhibition of Murakami's unique collection, with its overwhelming quantity and diversity, will provide an insight into the sources of the artist's aesthetic ideas, the nature of art and desire, and the mechanisms that create value in contemporary society, while also encouraging viewers to question art's conventional context.



Takashi Murakami and his Superflat Collection, Photo: Kentaro

■About Takashi Murakami's Exhibition at Yokohama

Takashi Murakami (born in 1962) first emerged as an extraordinary Japanese artist who aspired to attain international recognition by pursuing an original approach that diverged from Western aesthetic values when he was a student at Tokyo University of the Arts.

After earning the university's first Ph.D. in *Nihonga* (Japanese Painting) in 1993, Murakami shifted his focus to the world of contemporary art, introducing Japanese subcultures such as anime, manga, figures, and characters to fine art in the 1990s, and carefully developing the Superflat concept, which upended Western aesthetic views and values. Through his extremely accomplished works, which traverse categories such as contemporary art and Japanese classical painting, high and popular culture, and East and West, Murakami has continued to provoke the art world and garner international acclaim.

While energetically pursuing a creative path, Murakami has proved to be a talented critic, curator, gallerist, producer, and manager. Underlying these activities are his personal skepticism and his passion for innovative types of thought and criticism that expand the artistic framework, the ideas and systems that determine artistic values, and the development of the art market and artistic talents.

Continuing to take on challenges of all kinds, in recent years Murakami has also begun to pour his heart and soul into building up an enormous collection of art. He first approached me in 2014 and proposed an exhibition of his own collection. I was not only overwhelmed by the quantity and diversity of his collection, but also fascinated by the items and artworks. They were both compelling and outlined the trajectory of the artist's career and his aesthetic values. Deciding to accept his proposal, I rushed to adjust our exhibition schedule to overlap with Murakami's solo show at the Mori Art Museum, which had been already fixed by then. I commissioned Akiko Miki as guest curator to work with the Yokohama Museum of Art's curatorial team to alleviate complications in organizing the exhibition.

Murakami first became involved in the vast field of collecting after acquiring a Shino tea bowl once owned by Kitaōji Rosanjin. Using a wide range of methods, such as bargaining with antique art dealers, bidding in auctions, and making purchases at galleries and on the Internet, Murakami's energetic efforts to realize this collection of several thousand items in less than a decade and the works it contains are a testament to his remarkable abilities.

To Murakami, who has continually confronted overarching questions like "What is art?", "How is the value of art determined?", and "What is a collection?", creating a collection is a new challenge and a mark of his intention to constantly transcend his own limitations.

After plans for this exhibition were finalized, Murakami's collection has continued to grow, so the list of works has continued to be revised despite the fact that the items have already been transported to the museum.

To Murakami, this is an "alternative solo exhibition" and a demonstration of his critical attitude toward the existing system of art.

January 2016

Eriko Osaka
Director, Yokohama Museum of Art

■The Five Sections

Takashi Murakami's Superflat concept does not limit itself to mere formal concerns such as two-dimensionality and decorativeness; it frees artworks and artifacts from the constraints of historical periods, genres, and existing hierarchies, and proposes a parallel structure for them. Furthermore, it encompasses artistic activities that transcend any specific framework. It can also be understood as a wide-ranging and dynamic concept that comprehensively expresses the artist's overall practice, or life, in which he has continually tackled the eternal question, "What is art?", from a variety of different angles.

This exhibition sets out to examine Murakami's experimental activities through an exploration of his collection. Assembled based on the artist's unique eye and aesthetic, the collection currently includes over 5,000 items, encompassing domestic and international contemporary art, Japanese antiquities, Japanese, Asian, and European antiques, crafts from contemporary life, and ethnological materials. It is overwhelming both in terms of its quantity and its diversity.

Here, we present a select portion of the whole. In five sections entitled "Sculpture Garden," "Japan / Utility / Beauty," "Study Room & Factory," "The World Inside Takashi Murakami's Brain," and "1950 – 2015," we consider issues such as the sources of the artist's aesthetic ideas, the meaning of the act of collecting, art and value, and the relationship between politics, economics, and society.

[Guest Curator: Akiko Miki]

Sculpture Garden:

In the vast open space at the entrance to the museum known as the Grand Gallery and around the corridors on the upper floor, viewers are greeted by spectacular sculptures and installations, which together transcend the framework of a private collection and seemingly challenge restrictions of size and cost. In the sculptures by Anselm Kiefer, one of which uses the wreckage of an airplane, and Zhang Huan, which evokes the remains of a huge creature made of cowhide, we can discern Murakami's interest in a variety of complex relationships, including military defeat, capitalism and socialism, imperialism, ideology, history, and the arts. At the same time, Maurizio Cattelan's works, such as the once stolen safe and the elevators that are too small to use, are filled with an air of impudent humor and raise various questions about the meaning of artwork, the alchemy of value, and moreover, the human act of paying for something with an inherently fluid value. Murakami's collection also includes works by such artists as Lee Ufan and Yoshitomo Nara, both internationally active and with whom he has a close relationship, as well as Chiho Aoshima and other artists represented by Kaikai Kiki.

Japan / Utility / Beauty:

Of all the items in Murakami's collection, the group of ceramic works is particularly notable both in terms of quality and quantity. While these objects from everyday life exemplify the cultural climate of various eras and regions along with people's aesthetic sensibilities, they are also works of art with a historical background that have been rediscovered and revalued across the ages. This section boasts a truly wide array of works, ranging from Jōmon pottery to ancient ceramics from regional kilns that emerged in Japan in the 12th century, tea ceremony utensils such as the gray Shino tea bowl, which is thought to have been made in the Momoyama period, Kitaōji Rosanjin's ceramics, pottery and porcelain from the ancient kilns of Korea and China, miscellaneous everyday vessels, and European slipware.

Alongside these ceramic works are displays of paintings from the mid-Edo Period by artists such as Soga Shōhaku and Hakuin Ekaku, who belong to a lineage of eccentrics in Japanese art, and historical documents such as a letter hand-written by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Together these works provide us with insight into Murakami's interest in the origins of Japanese art and the roots of Japanese aesthetics.

Study Room & Factory:

David Shrigley's installation is a classroom for life drawing. Visitors to the exhibition are encouraged to freely sketch the human-model sculpture that stands in the center of the room and display their works on the wall. On the other hand, Mika Rottenberg's installation, which was shown at the Venice Biennale last year, consists of a video contrasting Asian women sorting pearls in a factory while a white woman performing meaningless tasks in an office, and a display of countless pearls. Next to this is a pearl that was found in a plate of food by a diner in an American restaurant and was later sold at auction for a high price. These works urge us to consider subjects such as art education, the creation (or fabrication) of value, the mechanisms that lead to the formation of value, and labor and compensation.

The World Inside Takashi Murakami's Brain:

In this room, a wide variety of objects are displayed alongside one another in a non-discriminating and chaotic manner, turning the entire gallery into an installation. Among the items on exhibit are contemporary ceramics, wooden Buddha statues, lucky Fukusuke dolls, a ritual cup from Bolivia, Buddhist sutra from Nepal, patterned tiles from the 13th to 17th centuries, costumes worn by religious ascetics, a leather skirt made by the Zulu people, wooden shoes from Korea's Joseon Dynasty, old rags from the Showa period, Mitsuya cider glasses, huge wooden sculptures of human forms, graffiti paintings, antique furniture, beer mugs, and balls from the French game pétanque.

This spatial realm, filled with both wheat and chaff and lacking any apparent logic, functions as if Murakami's treasure box or toy box has been turned upside down, inviting viewers to share the fantastic adventure of peering inside Takashi Murakami's brain.

1950-2015:

In this section, Japanese and international artworks from 1950 to the present, which serve as the main pillar of Murakami's collection, are for the most part mechanically arranged according to year of production. This temporal framework for the postwar era overlaps with the artist's life, as he was born in 1962. Among the works are photographs by Doug and Mike Starn, who were stars when Murakami was a young man; drawings by Horst Janssen, who reminded him the importance of self-portraits; works by Shinro Otake, whose exhibition made Murakami decide to enter the contemporary art world; small works by Andy Warhol; and some Neo-Expressionist works, which were all the rage when Murakami was in university.

This section also includes works by Mokuma Kikuhata, Kazumi Nakamura, and Nobuyoshi Araki, who have each made a unique mark on Japanese art history; outsider art as represented by Henry Darger; and photographs of key figures from the art world and others such as Steve Jobs. There are works by young emerging artists who have turned trivial everyday expressions and the idea of distribution systems such as FedEx into art, as well as some by both Japanese and international artists whose works Murakami has shown in his own galleries. Distancing himself from the various art historical trends and mainstream developments that have influenced him in countless ways (or as Murakami refers to them, "nostalgia"), this section introduces us to Murakami's wide-ranging personal interests. These include a reverence for innovators and epoch-makers who carved out their own unique territories, ever-changing standards of beauty, the search for artistic essence, and the context for Murakami's own singular work, which diverges from art history of the past.

Takashi Murakami

Born 1962 in Tokyo, Murakami completed his doctoral work at Tokyo University of the Arts Graduate School of Fine Arts, becoming the first person at the university to earn a Ph.D. in *Nihonga*. In 2008, he was selected as one of *TIME* magazine's "The 100 Most Influential People." He is well known for his corporate branding projects with Louis Vuitton, VANS, shu uemura, and Roppongi Hills, as well as collaborations with musicians such as Kanye West, Pharrell Williams, and Yuzu. More recently, he has been working on film and video productions, and releasing his first live-action feature film *Jellyfish Eyes* in 2013. He is working to release an animated television series *6HP(Six Hearts Princess)*.

General Information

Title: Takashi Murakami's Superflat Collection —From Shōhaku and Rosanjin to Anselm Kiefer—
Dates: January 30 (Sat) - April 3 (Sun), 2016
Hours: 10:00–18:00 (Last admission at 17:30)
Closed: Thursdays (except February 11)
Venue: Yokohama Museum of Art
3-4-1, Minatomirai, Nishi-ku, Yokohama 220-0012
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URL: <http://yokohama.art.museum/eng>

Produced & Directed by: Takashi Murakami

Guest Curator: Akiko Miki

Co-curators: Tomoh Kashiwagi, Shintaro Matsunaga (Yokohama Museum of Art)

Organizers: Yokohama Museum of Art, Nikkei Inc.

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Admission : Adults ¥1,500, University and high school students ¥900,
Junior high school students ¥400, Free admission for children under 12,
Seniors (65 and Older) ¥1,400 *ID required. Only available at the ticket counter in the museum.

Exhibition Catalog

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[Conversation] David Walsh (Museum of Old and New Art [MONA]) xTakashi Murakami
[Essays] Akiko Miki (Guest Curator)
Tomoh Kashiwagi (Curator in Chief, Yokohama Museum of Art)

Related Information

Takashi Murakami: The 500 Arhats

The first large-scale Murakami solo exhibition in Japan in 14 years features *The 500 Arhats*, one of the largest paintings ever produced in global art history, as well as a number of new works in which he continues to offer up new challenges to the history of contemporary art. This exhibition takes a close-up look at the endeavors of Murakami as a mature artist working with astonishing scale, energy, and artistic accomplishment.

Dates: October 31 (Sat), 2015 - March 6 (Sun), 2016

Hours: 10:00–22:00 (Tuesdays: 10:00–17:00)

*Admission until 30 minutes before closing.

Venue: Mori Art Museum

53F Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, 6-10-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan

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<http://www.mori.art.museum/eng/>



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The 500 Arhats (detail) 2012
Acrylic on canvas mounted on board 302 x 10,000cm
Private collection
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