

PERROTIN

PRESSBOOK

MADSAKI

Hypebeast

May 2018



MADSAKI Discusses Japanese Identity, American Culture, and Takashi Murakami

At his latest “COMBINATION PLATTER” exhibition.

By [Drew Pulig](#) / 20 Hrs ago / [Arts](#)

America is a nation built by generations of immigrants searching for better lives. While it does offer many opportunities and freedom, parents soon realize that they can’t control what their child is exposed to in this foreign land. For Japanese-artist [MADSAKI](#), moving to New Jersey at age six gave him an interesting perspective of American culture. Unable to speak much English at the time his cultural identity was forced to adapt, reflecting the surroundings as a result. This unique point-of-view would teach him much about the western world, gifting him with the elegance and vulgarity of the English language. He naturally would also acquire the troll-like attitude and humor that fuels his art along the way. Apparent in much of his work, MADSAKI often uses the paint medium to explore the power and concept of words, poking fun at the fine-art masters in the process.

In the latest solo exhibition “COMBINATION PLATTER,” [Kaikai Kiki Gallery](#) and [Galerie Perrotin](#) have assembled the largest collection of MADSAKI’s work to date. The exhibition, which is on display at Bangkok’s retail-beacon, [Central Embassy](#), references the ubiquitous takeout dish that Americans have come to expect from Chinese restaurants. The show runs until June 3, so check it out if you are in the area, and don’t forget to stop by the [SIWILAI store](#) to pick up the exclusive merchandise from the show.



Since the last time we spoke to you back in [Seoul](#), are there any memorable movies you've seen lately?

Recently I have no time to watch anything man, just too busy.

What about music? Listening to anything specific right now?

Right now I'm in a phase of listening to old cheesy 80's music. The music that I was playing when in like 4th or 5th grade.

Is that what your parents were listening to time?

Nah my dad listened to Classical music. So fucking boring.

Do you appreciate it now?

Yeah, I appreciate it. When I hear classical music now I'm like, "that's Mozart, that's Tchaikovsky." I'm glad I know who the composer is. But at the same time I grew up listening to Metallica and shit.

So your dad was fluent in English, a businessman right?

Yeah he used to work for Panasonic. He was the typical Japanese salaryman.

Did you grow up with all the newest electronics?

(Laughs) No man... I didn't know at the time but we had that Technics thing that the DJs used. I didn't know what a DJ was at the time, but I used to scratch my dad's classical records on it.

Did he try to push you away from art?

Oh yeah big time. But my dad like, give him a pen or pencil and he can draw so good. Way better than I do. He can just do a quick portrait, I don't know why he became a salaryman...

Every place we traveled to around the world, we would go to fucking museums. So I grew up seeing a lot of art. When I graduated high school he says, “alright Masaki, it’s time to go back to Japan.” and I’m like high every day, like “fuck no I’m not goin’ back.” He says “No you got to go back to Japan, go to a good college, get a good salary.” But I grew up looking at him knowing I would never do that. “What are you going to do?” he asked, and I told him art school. “But you haven’t painted or drawn anything,” he said, so I started and made a portfolio and that’s that.



You’ve said your teachers at Parsons didn’t recognize your work as art. If they saw your full body of work now, do you think they would they put a bit more respect on it?

Hell no! All the stuff I’m doing now is what they told me not to do. I’m doing all of that every day.

Is there a teacher that you would like to catch-up with now?

Well, there was one teacher I hated who loved Matisse, and back then I didn’t understand why it was great, but now I appreciate and love his work. So I would want to go back and say thank you for putting me onto it. I understand it now.

Have you noticed any changes in your work since joining Kaikai Kiki?

Yeah man, Murakami fucking pushes me off the edge. Every day. Maybe he knows me better than I do. He opens up the drawers in me and pulls out skills that I didn’t even know I had.

He told us last year about finding you on Instagram, how did that go on your end?

One morning I woke up and he had followed me. I thought he pressed the wrong button or something! A month later he wanted to buy a painting and I’m like, “nah you’re fucking kidding me.” I DM’ed him to ask if he was serious. That’s how we started chatting. He gave me a show, it went well. Then we started like really talking, I think we just have the same groove.

He's Japanese, but he has an international mind. He never grew up outside of Japan, but he has that mind. I never met anyone that has the same mentality that I have, so we just clicked.

Do you and Murakami communicate in English or Japanese?

We speak in Japanese, but the funny thing is like... with paintings, there's sound effects. He's like "Okay, can you do.. shehh sheh shehh sheh then fehfh fffeh fff feh." [Gesturing paint motions with each sound] Some people might not understand it, but even with eye contact we communicate.



As an American-raised Japanese artist, do you feel a responsibility to represent your heritage a certain way?

I used to, but at a certain point I said fuck it. I don't even know if I'm Japanese or American, you know? I'm all mixed up. I speak Japanese but on the inside I'm not Japanese.

How was it when you moved back and looked the same as everyone around you?

Oh my god dude. I speak fluent Japanese, but when I started speaking it out there we couldn't communicate. Same language but we weren't able to communicate. I still don't feel at home living in Japan, never. I went back in 2004, and still feel like a foreigner.

Even after the Internet has spread western culture around the world?

Yeah, because it's just an image. I'm like culturally American inside, it isn't just my appearance — you know what I'm talking about.

Yeah I thought I could move to Asia and slide-in, but I feel the most out of place I've ever been.

It's so weird man.

It's funny to be out here hearing rap songs reference local bodegas or liquor stores. Are there any small, local spots you visit when you go back?

I went to NY last week, first time back in eight years. Everything that I loved was gone. The mom and pop stores, the bars I used to go, the local bodegas are all gone.

When I lived in Brooklyn, I had to run to the bodega every night if I wanted Kit Kats or 40s — I didn't want to get shot (laughs). But now there's a billion dollar condo there, white people just walking around, the old New York is gone.

And what's your preferred brand of 40s to drink?

Olde English... with a fucking Philly blunt or a White Owl I guess. That's the shit I grew up on.



[View More on Instagram](#)

524 likes

hypebeast We sat down with Japanese artist [@madsaki](#) to discuss his new solo exhibition entitled "COMBINATION PLATTER" on display at [@centralembassy](#) in Bangkok. Get to know more about the show by visiting the link in our bio. Photo: HYPEBEAST

[view all comments](#)

21 HOURS AGO

Is there anything from your childhood that hasn't quite hit the international spectrum?

Hmm... Daytona 500 (laughs). I used to love watching that shit, just going in that circle you know. People say — even Americans say that's the fucking most boring fucking thing. That's why there's the NASCAR painting downstairs, I just grew up watching that shit.

I guess it is a huge part of American culture...

Beer, chicks, engines.. smoking tires, yup.

Since you grew up around so much English slang, are your Japanese friends always learning new things from you?

I have a book out from a few years ago.. How to use ‘fuck,’ how to use ‘bitch.’ It’s translated in Chinese and Korean. The funny thing is when I started the Word series, my friend was like “let’s have an English class as a joke.” I never thought people would come but there were like 30-40 people that showed up. I was like “wow,” wasted off of Jack Daniels. Someone came up and wanted to make a book, I was like “you guys are crazy.”

Anyone else you would credit in shaping your understanding and usage of English?

I grew up watching Eddie Murphy. That was my teacher — and Andrew Dice Clay... You don’t know him right. Go to YouTube, and look (laughs).

Central Embassy

1031 Phloen Chit Rd

Pathum Wan, Khet Pathum

Wan, Thailand 10330

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

KAIKAI KIKI

MADSAKI

GALERIE PERROTIN

EXHIBITIONS

CENTRAL EMBASSY