

Takashi MURAKAMI

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The Artist Who Steers His Own Ship: Takashi Murakami

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Takashi Murakami's *Transcendent Attacking a Whirlwind*, 2017. ©2017 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.

Occupying all three of the expansive floors of Galerie Perrotin in New York, Takashi Murakami's *"Heads↔Heads"* is an exhibition offering a fresh look into the artist's psyche, unveiling another layer of his obsessive interest in art history. While Murakami's art practice has often explored unique ways of reinterpreting traditional Japanese painting, new work from an ongoing series pays homage to the symbolism and motifs employed by Francis Bacon. Over the years, under the guise of his avatar Mr. DOB he's inserted himself into various cultural and frenetic landscapes, such as those by Bacon. Having carved a niche in the contemporary art market, Murakami has the power to turn what he touches into gold, literally and figuratively and several of the Bacon inspired works on view glisten with gold and platinum leaf. Working with graphic, manga inspired shapes, the artist is known for his 'Superflat' technique yet in some of his newer paintings, the depth of field isn't only on the surface. While his work is often composed of a brightly colored palette and smiling flowers, there is almost always a profound, esoteric nucleus at the core addressing themes from the dark-side of commercialism to the Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi disaster both which occurred in 2011. In this way, Murakami makes art that is deceptively linked to the present, just as much as it is to the past.

"The analogy [for my practice] is the story of *Treasure Island*," he stated. "There is a map that you must follow, but then maybe a huge storm rolls in, or there is a mutiny within the crew—and I run my own company, so of course there are situations like a mutiny from time to time," said the artist. "Having that kind of map I can keep my practice fresh. Maybe there is no treasure on *Treasure Island*, but it's very important to set out on this quest."



A portrait of the artist. ©2018 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Without using the written word within his complex compositions, Murakami may be the first to make art that is itself, a meme. The artist and his elaborate paintings are synonymous and it's impossible to imagine one without the other. His paintings are so incredibly stylized and visually specific that they are recognized all over the world. This global familiarity has led to various collaborations with brands and designers alike from [Virgil Abloh](#) of Off-White and Louis Vuitton to Uniqlo, as well as contemporary Renaissance men, Pharrell and Kanye West.

“When I first collaborated with Louis Vuitton,” Murakami said, “I thought about fashion and what it means, reading several books only to realize that fashion is about recycling history in the same way that art is about recycling history. It might seem obvious, but it is important to learn. If I can learn something from art history, then I’m more likely to make something you’ve never seen.”



Takashi Murakami's Homage to Francis Bacon (Study for Head of George Dyer (on light ground)), 2016. Photo by Claire Dorn. Courtesy Perrotin.

Having first encountered Emmanuel Perrotin in 1993 in Japan, Takashi Murakami along with another Perrotin artist, Maurizio Cattelan and Damien Hirst, was still unknown. Emmanuel was immediately drawn to Murakami's work and they stayed in touch via fax, later meeting again in New York at the now defunct Gramercy International Contemporary Art Fair. The two formed a friendship as well as a longterm working relationship. Their first exhibition together was in 1995. Sitting in the gallery on Orchard Street twenty-five years later, Perrotin retold their initial meetings in detail, even mentioning a restaurant where they had their first meal in New York. Murakami occasionally rolled his eyes and laughed, uttering, "So your memories and my memories are different." Beaming, Perrotin replied, "You know Takashi, you were a beautiful woman to my eyes, one of the days I will not forget."