

Takashi MURAKAMI

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Takashi Murakami Talks Instagram Exposure for Emerging Artists, Francis Bacon, Virgil Abloh

Ann Binlot, CONTRIBUTOR



*Takashi Murakami, « Heads ↔ Heads », Perrotin New York
portrait of the artist in the exhibition
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It was a painting of a man and woman with black tongues coming out that caused Japanese artist Takashi Murakami to feel inspired by the grotesque portraits painted by Irish-British painter Francis Bacon, he noticed that it was very similar to an old Japanese sculpture where many figures emerge from two mouths. “I could use this in my own work,” thought the artist, who began studying the way Bacon would distort human faces in his paintings. Murakami compared the process to the way a plug-in for a computer might morph a face in a certain way on Photoshop. “I really think about how Bacon might have transformed a face, and the methodology and the form of it, and that’s how I’ve been trying to do the same kind of transformation using Bacon’s style,” he said.

The results of Bacon’s influence on Murakami can be seen in the exhibition *Heads ↔ Heads*, currently on view at Perrotin New York through June 17. The exhibition — Murakami’s first New York outing with Perrotin — spans through a number of the artist’s bodies of work, including *Homage to Francis Bacon* as well as “Attacking a Whirlwind Fresco,” which was originally exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston last fall.



Homage to Francis Bacon (Study for Head of George Dyer (on light ground)), 2018
Acrylic on canvas mounted on aluminum frame
100 × 100 × 5 cm / 39 3/8 × 39 3/8 × 1 15/16 in
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Unlike most of the art world, Murakami has also managed to break into the mainstream, collaborating with brands from Uniqlo to Mentos to creatives like Kanye West and the new Louis Vuitton Men’s creative director Virgil Abloh. Outside the gallery on the day of the exhibition’s opening, people queued up along Orchard Street in hopes of getting the artist’s autograph at a book signing later that day.

On the ground floor of the gallery, large-scale works of Murakami’s iconic and cheerful smiling flowers hang on the walls. People love flowers, and when I started this flower thing, the Warhol flowers were very popular, so they’re not colorful, just monotone, so my idea was to make them colorful, “ said the artist.

In Homage to Francis Bacon, Murakami takes one of his signature characters, the vibrant, almost magical, and sometimes alarming Mr. DOB, incorporating his likeness into several portraits of one of Bacon’s subjects, the writer George Dyer, transforming his face in a way that one could hardly tell that the artist was referencing Bacon.

The biggest insight into Murakami’s process is the room filled with endless drawings and studies by the artist. They display initial renditions of his plans, along with the shades of the color palette that he planned to use in his work — but, unlike the rest of the pieces in the exhibition, the drawings are not for sale. “I did once sell some drawings, but they immediately came out on the secondary market, and I got annoyed, so I stopped selling them,” explained the artist.

Depending on who you ask, Murakami first met his dealer, the Paris-based Emmanuel Perrotin, 25 or 27 years ago. The artist took a daring approach that would never work in today’s frenetic art world by presenting the French gallerist, who had impressed the artist with the art he brought — among the works was a Damien Hirst photograph for a bargain price of \$1,050 — youth and energy, with a portfolio of his work. Perrotin, who had arrived to the fair with — again depending on who you ask — one or two suitcases filled with work.

“Then, being a contemporary artist in Japan, there was almost no possibility of making a debut in New York or London, so when I had an opportunity to present my work, I really was putting everything into my presentation to show Emmanuel, who was in his early twenties at the time,” said Murakami, who

advised young artists not to that approach, but to go on social media instead. “If you’re really good at posting on Instagram sometimes people will immediately grab you,” advised the artist, who thinks that the social media platform has helped to democratize the art world by allowing emerging artists to exhibit their work online. “I bought pieces from Instagram where I never see the actual piece,” revealed the artist.

When asked if he would collaborate with Abloh (the two also collaborated on art for a Gagosian London exhibition last winter) for Louis Vuitton some 15 years after Murakami’s first collaboration with the French fashion house, he replied, “Yes, if he offers me,” adding that he would be very happy because it would be coming full circle with Louis Vuitton.

Next up — Murakami is working on an exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, then Gagosian Hong Kong, and perhaps Perrotin Shanghai.