

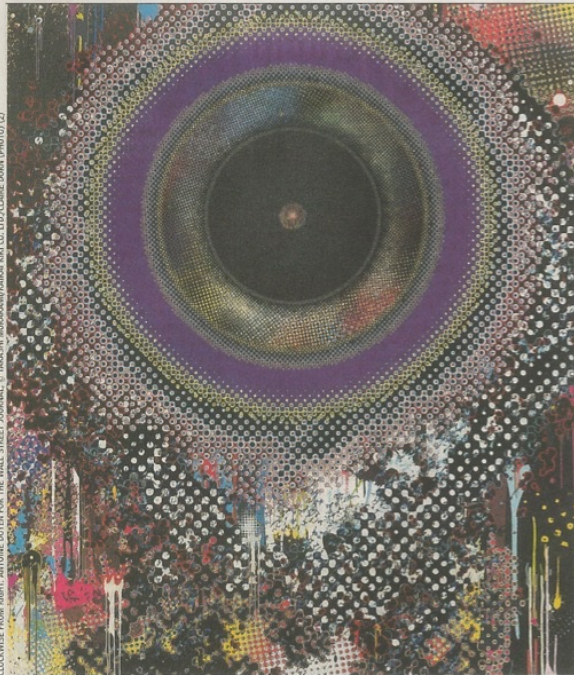
**PRESSBOOK**

Takashi MURAKAMI

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: ANTOINE DOYER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL; © TAKASHI MURAKAMI/YOKO KURI CO. LTD./CLAUDE DORNI (PHOTO: G2)

Pieces include a tribute to Francis Bacon featuring colorful, surreal portraits on golden and silver backgrounds, smaller variations of "The 500 Arhats," and handbags made out of pieces of discarded painted canvas that Mr. Murakami has accumulated over his 20-year career. The works are priced between \$50,000 and \$3 million, and the gallery said several had already sold.



For his enso works, Mr. Murakami used spray paint instead of a traditional brush and drew the circles over backgrounds of skulls and flowers. "I'm not making fun of Zen," he says. "I respect it. This is more about the feeling of painting, and how I can generate proper energy as a painter." Here, the artist talks about five pieces:

**'Amitabha Buddha Descends, Looking over His Shoulder' (2015)**

After the big earthquake we found out what religion was for. Religion for Japanese is a mixture of different cultural influences, so there is not really a lot of authenticity. I like this aspect of it. In Japan, people don't focus so much on the religious concepts, but more on the surface, on the image itself.

**'Homage to Francis Bacon (Three Studies for Portrait of George Dyer (on light ground))' (2016)**  
Bacon's themes were becoming more and more masochistic. That was reflected in his technique and his structure. I thought this was something I would like to learn, so I made my own studies of it.... What makes Bacon so interesting is that there is imbalance in his work, but at the same time it is perfectly balanced. This is something I wanted to develop.

**'Enso: At Our Side, Bending Space-Time' (2015)**

As I studied art history, I realized that self-portrait is an important part of the work of each artist's historical legacy. As time goes, the character will have to change, getting gray or white hair. He will certainly age.

**'A Picture of Lives Wiggling in the Forest at the Deep End of the Universe' (2015)**

Traditional painting scrolls are somehow the origin of Japanese mangas. Each of my characters—the panda and Mr. DOB—appear in many parts of the paintings. There is no narrative in my case.

**Untitled (2016)**

Now fine art is influenced by commercialism and fashion, and that borderless world continues. There is still a line between fashion and art, and I am walking on that line.

# Zen and the Art of Takashi Murakami

BY INTI LANDAURO

**TAKASHI MURAKAMI** GOT religion. In "Learning the Magic of Painting," an exhibition opening this week in Paris, the Japanese artist best-known for colorful, anime-inspired pop art and fashion collaborations with brands like Louis Vuitton presents a series of new works based on traditional Zen art.

Mr. Murakami turned to his ancestral culture following the 2011 earthquake in Japan. The devastation the tremor caused the county and its people pushed the artist to question religion as a social phenomenon that helps people cope with disaster.

"Japanese people on the surface have no religion," says Mr. Murakami. "Still, they have a spirituality below. With the big earthquake, I could see how we need religion."

As part of that reflection, Mr. Murakami embarked on a project to create a modern rendering of "The 500 Arhats," a classic Japanese scroll depicting the disciples of Buddha who have achieved enlightenment. His massive, 300-foot-long, 10-foot-high 2012 painting replaces the traditional portraits of mostly elderly wise men with grotesque, cartoonlike creatures.

Four years on, Mr. Murakami continues to revisit the ancient Japanese arts—most recently with his interpretation of the enso, a circle painted in a single gesture of the brush that symbolizes the search for perfection.

"The enso is a true homage to Japanese tradition, a return to a more unfettered minimalist practice, the result of a complex artistic and spiritual path," says gallery owner Emmanuel Perrotin.

A circle is also an apt metaphor for the career of the 54-year-old artist, who trained as a traditional Nihonga painter before emerging in the 1990s as a leading contemporary artist.

In the more than 40 new works on display at Galerie Perrotin until Dec. 23, Mr. Murakami brings the two disciplines together, mixing religious characters such as Buddha, dragons and tigers with his signature icons, including pandas, skulls and flowers.



**FULL CIRCLE** The artist, top right, incorporates Zen arts into new works such as 'Enso: Black Hole' (2015), top. Above, 'Homage to Francis Bacon (Three Studies for Portrait of George Dyer (on light ground))' (2016).