

PRESSBOOK

Takashi MURAKAMI
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ART

TAKASHI MURAKAMI TAKES OVER CHICAGO

BY ELLEN GAMERMAN

TAKASHI MURAKAMI'S Tokyo studio is bustling with staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Judging by the artist's latest show—his first major museum retrospective in a decade—there is plenty to do.

Yesterday the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago opened "Takashi Murakami: The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg," featuring the Japanese artist's work from 1982 to the present. Some pieces Mr. Murakami created for the exhibit are so new, the show's organizer didn't learn their titles until days before the opening.

The 55-year-old Mr. Murakami is known for colorful works filled with gleefully distorted eyeballs, smiling daisies, snarling ogres and other psychedelic images. He is famously savvy about commerce and has collaborated with companies such as Louis Vuitton and celebrities including Kanye West.

For the Chicago exhibit, he designed an octopus-like character and dressed up as the

creature for some promotional events.

The walls of the show's final gallery are covered with 45 panels filled with Mr. Murakami's anime-inspired figures. Such immersive installations captivate viewers—and their cellphones. In Washington, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's show, "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors," attracted the institution's largest crowds in 40 years. The exhibit, which engulfed visitors in dazzling rooms, went viral. A hashtag for the show reached 91 million Twitter and Instagram accounts.

The Chicago exhibit is one of the artist's many projects. Mr. Murakami's company, Kaikai Kiki, employs about 270 people in Japan and the U.S. Its locations in Tokyo, Saitama, Kyoto, Sapporo, New York and Seattle handle animation, film post-production and art production.

Mr. Murakami, whose retrospective coincides with the Chicago museum's 50th anniversary, mixes cherubic characters with darker subtexts, like the atomic bomb in the form of happy-go-lucky mushrooms. Lately, he has focused on the aftermath of Japan's

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Mr. Murakami covered the walls of the final gallery of his Chicago exhibit with one massive work.

devastating 2011 tsunami and earthquake, with craggy Buddhist monks and strange monsters in his candy-colored canvases, said MCA chief curator Michael Darling.

In the coming weeks, Mr. Murakami's art will be hard to miss around Chicago. The

show's octopus character and Mr. Murakami's smiling flowers will appear on lamppost banners and on the museum's exterior. The exhibit runs through Sept. 24 before traveling next year to Vancouver and Fort Worth, Texas.