



Untitled, 2021. Acrylic paint, aerosol on canvas. 120 x 160 cm. ©2021 MADSAKI/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.

## MADSAKI

### ***Hello Darkness, My Old Friend (I've come to talk with you again)***

Opening reception Thursday, April 29, 12-8pm

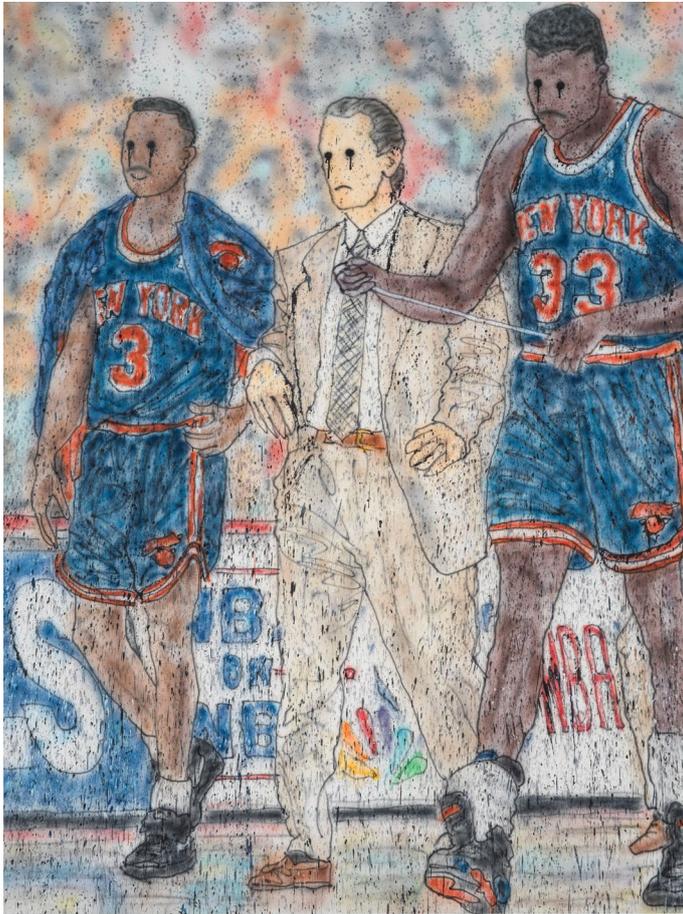
April 29 - June 5, 2021

**The following text was written by curator and art critic Marc-Olivier Wahler to accompany the exhibition.**

MADSAKI says the first time he saw the canvas of the *Three Musicians* by Picasso, he thought it was a depiction of a scene from Star Wars. I love this anecdote. It shows the way in which the artist navigates through the visual universe of our society and highlights the unique artistic vocabulary he has developed within the reality of the cultural landscape.

Early in his childhood, around the 1980s, he moved with his family from Japan to New Jersey. He did not speak a word of English. He was isolated and did not fit into any community. The world around him felt out of reach, too distant for him to interact. This feeling of social as well as cultural distancing has come to have a profound impact on the way he approaches his artistic work.

MADSAKI defines himself as a painter, but he never touches the canvas he works on. He uses spray paint, which allows him to constantly maintain a distance from the surface he works on. Spray painting implies an intense physical engagement. The artist's entire body is involved. But this effort, in constant tension, never rests against the material body of the canvas. It can be likened to choreography, where each gesture is performed without the hands ever encountering any resistance. The fine particles of paint released by the aerosol settle on the canvas after the artist has sprayed them. The very evanescence of this spray, of these particles suspended in the air for a fraction of a second, contrasts with the physical presence of the artist's body and its inevitable heavy mass. This paradox – between the aerial impermanence of the particles in suspension and the physicality of the body of the artist in action – constitutes a kind of chasm of antagonistic movements, revealing the artistic force of MADSAKI as well as offering an interesting key to understanding his work. The movement between these elements generates a fluctuation between opposite poles, creating a tension that the artist constantly seeks, feeds, and deploys.



Untitled, 2021. Acrylic paint, aerosol on canvas. 230 x 172.5 cm.  
Courtesy MADSAKI/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. Courtesy Perrotin.



Untitled, 2020. Acrylic paint, aerosol on canvas. 160 x 120 cm.  
©2020 MADSAKI/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.

This oscillation is manifested in the themes the artist conveys. For example, we see no distinction between Picasso's *Three Musicians*, a waitress from *Twin Peaks*, the McDonald's family, Reggie Jackson from the Yankees, and the Fresh Prince of Bel Air. Throughout multiple bodies of work, and without hesitation, Gauguin, Monet, Manet, Ingres, David, and Cézanne rub shoulders with Sonic Youth, Nirvana, The Ramones, The Cure, The Beastie Boys, Anthrax, and Flavor Flav. Painted in the same half-decade, MADSAKI moves seamlessly from Warhol's *Double Elvis* to Ronald Reagan on the ground after his assassination attempt. In his singular practice, it seems entirely plausible that Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* could lead the New York Knicks to their first NBA title or George Washington on his white horse could enter the famous CBGB.

It is important to note that MADSAKI does not seek to organize such confrontations. His desire is not to create yet another clash between popular culture and High Culture. Let's remember his first encounter with Picasso's *Three Musicians*. He sincerely believed he saw a scene from *Star Wars*. Everything MADSAKI paints is intimately linked to his life, to his experience as a Japanese kid immigrating to New Jersey, and then as an uprooted foreigner upon return to Japan. This feeling of detachment from the world has generated a lens through which to read his work, free from the hierarchies instilled in us at a young age. Only the artist's stories remain, transformed into an artistic vocabulary.

He was introduced to the practice of spray painting by a group of graffiti artists, The Barnstormers, in 2001. When confronted with a painting by Monet in a museum, he asked himself "What would Monet have done if he had had access to a can of spray paint?" He then threw himself into a painting inspired by Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* so as to test this hypothesis, with no wish to juxtapose the styles, the eras, or the cultural values.

The artist's aim is ambitious: to give the viewer a chance to remove themselves from the cultural hierarchies that generate mutually exclusive levels of interpretation. We have not learned to view a Renaissance painting in the same way we view a cigarette advertisement. It seems natural to us to attribute different interpretations to a scene pulled from a TV series versus one from a family photo album. We tend to view a rock album differently than a clipping from *Daily News*. The multiple ways of approaching the images around us mostly lead us to establish ontological hierarchies between, for example, classical painting and advertising, or between journalism and a personal diary.

By creating a series of paintings that flatten hierarchy – in which a death metal band socializes with a Picasso, or the McDonald's family greets George Washington – MADSAKI creates a universe in which all mutual exclusion evaporates. The spontaneity with which the artist links each pictorial scene – all intimately tied to his own personal history, marked by a strong feeling of social and cultural detachment – invites the viewer to consider his oeuvre as a field of "variable intensity." Both his paintings and their respective components contribute to a "flat ontology," a phrase used by philosophers like Tristan Garcia and Manuel De Landa to mean a philosophical and visual method that treats every object and image with equal dignity.



*Untitled, 2021. Acrylic paint, aerosol on canvas. 230 x 306 cm. Courtesy MADSAKI/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. Courtesy Perrotin.*

### Biographies:

A graduate of New York City's Parsons School of Design (BFA, 1996), **MADSAKI** was born in 1974 in Osaka, Japan, and raised in New Jersey, USA – experiences between two cultures that formed his aesthetics and personality. While much of MADSAKI's work centers on his interest in art history and critiquing mass culture with references to slang, movies and manga characters, the artist has recently been exploring more personal, intimate topics. To express this visually, MADSAKI developed a signature style using spray paint as a fine art medium, stemming from the fact that he has never participated in illegal graffiti on the streets. The artist is particularly known for his Wannabe's series, which at first glance humorously targets old masters, yet their deeper meaning is a reoccurring theme that can be found throughout MADSAKI's artistic practice – an attempt to use laughter and humor as both distraction and therapy for his internal turmoil.

### **More information about the artist >>>**

**Marc-Olivier Wahler** is a Swiss curator and contemporary art critic and art historian. He is the newly appointed director of the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva. He also serves as the Founding Director of the Chalet Society and PAL, Paris; and Founding Director of Transformer Sculpture Park, Melides, Portugal.

---

#### **PRESS CONTACTS**

**Katherine Wisniewski**, Perrotin New York  
katherinewisniewski@perrotin.com

**Caitlin Merrell**, Perrotin New York  
caitlinmerrell@perrotin.com