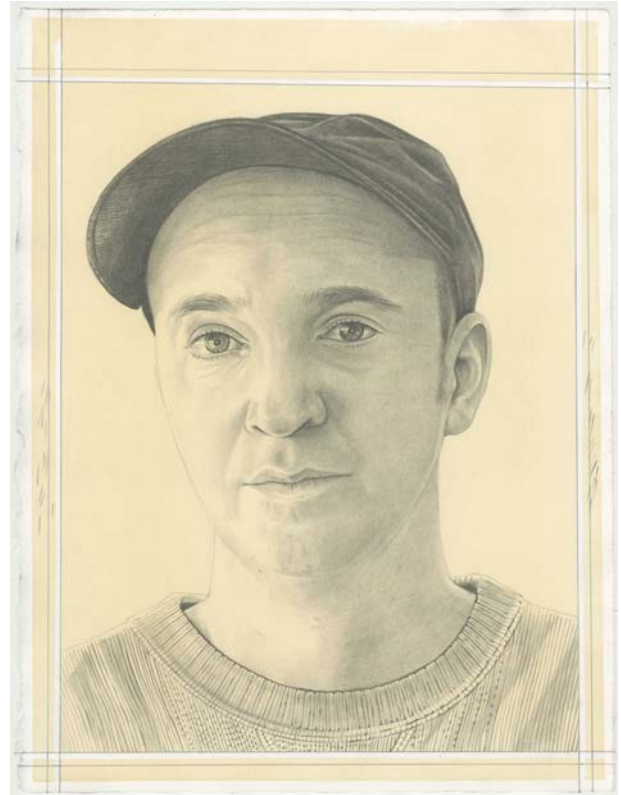


## KAWS with Jason Rosenfeld

“When I make new works I’m thinking of it as adding a family member into this sort of dialogue with everything. I’m very cautious about what to bring in.”



Portrait of KAWS, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

**KAWS:** *WHAT PARTY* at the Brooklyn Museum is the artist’s first museum show in New York. It is a career spanning survey starting with sketchbooks wherein he developed his tag, documentation of early street art, and examples of advertisements that he painted over in the 1990s. It concludes with a multimedia display about his project titled *HOLIDAY*, a gargantuan float of his *COMPANION* character in various positions, which has toured the globe. The exhibition includes paintings, drawings, and sculpture both large and small, including toys, apparel, and furniture. I spoke to KAWS in his Brooklyn studio.

**Jason Rosenfeld (Rail):** How did you get interested in comics or animation? What shows did you watch when you were a kid in 1980, '82? And why did you then take up *The Simpsons* as an early motif?

**KAWS:** I watched whatever was on television. It wasn’t that I was deeply into animation or comics. I did collect comics when I was little. I just liked them visually. I kept them in bags. My uncle used to take me to Forbidden Planet. I have a brother who’s six years older than me, and between him and my uncle they used to take me around the Village to go get buttons at shops, whether it’s Canal Jeans or Flip NYC. References are the reason why I kind of gravitated towards the Simpsons. I just loved the way they took

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everything in it. There's Bart playing a video game and it says "Prac-Man." The way the show worked around infringement. It just made them a perfect vehicle for making work.

**Rail:** They do exist in a kind of bizarro world where all those things are slightly tweaked. Everything looks normal.

**KAWS:** But you know what it is without even overthinking it. It is tweaked, but it just seems right.

**Rail:** I had never seen the *UNTITLED (KIMPSONS)*, *PACKAGE PAINTING SERIES* (2001). We both grew up with *Star Wars*, and the rise of the collectibles market. The idea seems so foreign to me because I played with everything, to keep them in their packages, that somehow they're worth more money that way. It was an amazing shift in the commodification of toys.



KAWS, *UNTITLED (KIMPSONS)*, *PACKAGE PAINTING SERIES*, 2001. Acrylic on canvas in blister package with printed card. 23.5 x 19 inches. © KAWS. Photo: Brad Bridgers. Courtesy the artist.

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**KAWS:** I grew up very conscious of that, with *Star Wars* and that whole collector mentality about keeping everything C-10 mint. When I was first going to Japan, I saw what was collected there, and the obsessiveness and the connoisseur-ness of it. I loved that. You're always very aware of your own bubble. But you don't realize how many other bubbles there are. People tend to think, "oh, collector," and immediately they're thinking art, and then in this day and age probably contemporary art, and to see people fully absorbed in what they're collecting in different fields with the same sort of integrity and the same sort of knowledge of where it's come from, I was really fascinated. So I made that series of package paintings to kind of play off of the idea of the ultimate collectible, the hand-painted piece, the one-of-one type of thing, but packaging it and distributing it in this sort of way that's very mass and familiar.

**Rail:** Have you found that anyone took it out of the packaging? Because that happened with Warhol, where he would make a "Disaster" painting and have a pendant blank canvas in the same color. People would discard the second canvas. They just wanted the screen-printed one of the car crash or electric chair.

**KAWS:** There were definitely collectors that took them out of the packaging. And I don't know if they discarded the packaging. But I've seen pictures of those canvases hung without them, and only somebody out of the loop would do that. To a younger kid, that's sacrilege.

**Rail:** On the other hand, they bought it. So they have the right to do what they like with it—

**KAWS:** They absolutely do.

**Rail:** Just like with action figures. Take them out and play with them and turn them into a narrative, but then you've ruined this reliquary container that they came in.

**KAWS:** When I was little I played with my toys. Any sneakers I have ever gotten I've worn. I never bought a pair with the intent to keep them in an air-tight thing. But I do like that culture.

**Rail:** It seems when you went to Japan you saw how people had turned collecting into an art. In America it was slower for people to come to that kind of realization.

**KAWS:** Definitely. There've always been collectors, in all different sorts of categories. I saw in Japan how the material looked so great, and so obsessive. Especially with vintage prototype *Star Wars* figures and things like that. It's hard not to look at them like you look at any other art object.

**Rail:** And now you have the ironic, or meta situation where they're displayed in the museum in a glass box.

**KAWS:** In the packaging. [*Laughter*]

**Rail:** It turns into something even more brilliantly removed.

**KAWS:** It was a way of bridging art, painting, and product culture. I wish you could walk around the package paintings, because the backside of the cards are printed. It's die cut so that you can see the stretchers and the signature. It plays off all the same stuff that normal packaging does. I did those package paintings, the *KIMPSONS* ones. And then I did little ones in 2002, five by six inch canvases, with a hanging paper tag, like when you're at the supermarket and there's that ring that looks like a metal

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Christmas tree with toys hanging on it? So it was like that, with a clear bag. I did probably about 40 of those.



KAWS, *UNTITLED (HARING)*, 1997. Acrylic on existing advertising poster. 68 x 48 inches.  
© KAWS. Photo: Farzad Owrang. Courtesy the artist.

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**Rail:** Another thing that I thought was really striking in the show and fun was the Keith Haring poster, *UNTITLED (HARING)* (1997). It was interesting because I didn't recognize the source image before you bombed it. And the wall text said that it was just an advertising poster.

**KAWS:** He did a show at the Whitney.

**Rail:** This was the advertisement for that show, so it's a *museum* poster.

**KAWS:** Originally there were two versions of the same Haring poster. I showed them both in '97 at a friend's restaurant/gallery in Seattle, and sold them. And then only a few years ago I got that one back. I'd wanted it back this whole time. One I knew was with a collector friend, and that wasn't going anywhere. [Laughs] The other one was around, and somebody who I've become good friends with contacted the studio. He wanted to do a legit check as it had been offered to him. I said, "If you buy that, I'll offer you a canvas for it." And he was like, "really?" [Laughter] So he did. And that's how I got the piece back. For me, I always thought Keith was a bridge. I used to love seeing the stuff with the Pop Shop. And when I was younger I had one of those *Free South Africa* posters in my bedroom, just cause it was five dollars but massive, and in a world that seemed very cold he was sort of a welcoming artist. That gave me a parallel interest in graffiti, and then you eventually connect the dots of this coexistence in the '80s. I was lucky. In the early '90s I got to paint with a lot of my heroes, and get firsthand stories of that whole world, like Zephyr telling me about doing exhibitions, then Crash and Daze and Futura. It also made me grow up very skeptical of the art world. Because, you know, they were so glorified. And then they all got the rug pulled out from under them. Crash and Daze were showing at Sidney Janis. They were getting flown everywhere. There was a moment, then the whole art market crashed, but it just wasn't kind to them in the long run.

**Rail:** Do you think that many of them didn't really modify what they were doing? Or sort of flipped it a bit?

**KAWS:** Now, I think, they've found their place. They've pushed through and found their way to exist in a strong way. But the art world is so fickle. If that's your only check, that's a hard place to be.

**Rail:** You have to be moving on your own, in a parallel way.

**KAWS:** Exactly. It's important to have many outlets. And if I feel one thing is getting a little bit stale and boring for me, I could slide over into something else and focus on that. And then come back in six months or two years and be like, oh you know, this is what is actually feeling good right now.

**Rail:** Do you think that you're considered more of a sculptor now than a painter?

**KAWS:** The sculptures have such a big presence. You do one outdoor piece and it's like doing five painting exhibitions. So it's hard not to be viewed that way. But it really depends on who the viewer is, what their background is, how they came into my work.

**Rail:** I would think the majority of people came through the toys and the sculptures. It's a great thing to go to the exhibit and see so many paintings if you haven't seen a lot of them. And to think about the diverging streams of what's going on in your work. In the exhibit, the curator, Eugenie Tsai, placed the painting of the two removed arms, *NEW MORNING* (2012) next to the sculpture titled *GONE* (2020). And then it leads you into the vitrines with the toys and the drawings. It's kind of unexpected. But that kind of jarring juxtaposition at the same time makes you understand how it's all interwoven.

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KAWS, *NEW MORNING* (2012) and *GONE* (2020) installed at Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2021. © KAWS. Photo: Michael Biondo.

**KAWS:** I was talking to a friend and they mentioned to me that the way the toys are, where they are in the show, makes it seem like they came after. And that's not the case. When you're putting together a show, it's really hard to translate how all these things are from the same time, like in '99 I can be doing the phone booth ads and designing my first toy. To communicate that in an exhibition is always really difficult, and not have it be a jumbled mess.

**Rail:** It's just much better not to have a strictly chronological installation.

**KAWS:** I agree. Also, a lot of times I returned to imagery throughout the work. If you look at work I made in the early 2000s to the present, as I either get into new mediums, or get excited about new things, I pull imagery back, and I want to show some of those conversations in the sightlines in the exhibit.

**Rail:** I'm interested in *GONE* because it's been misidentified. People always talk about it as a pietà. It is not a pietà. A pietà is a seated Madonna, holding Christ's body. Now the body and hanging right arm of BFF in this composition is definitely Christlike. But the standing figure of COMPANION makes me think of the Creature from the Black Lagoon carrying the woman who's passed out, not dead. That presentation of the bodies of BFF in the arms of COMPANION is very different from a pietà, which is this intimate moment between a seated mother and her dead son.

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**KAWS:** He could just be a drunk friend. For me what I was going for is just something that could bring the thought of loss. I wanted to create this heavy relationship of loss between friends or family.

**Rail:** I think of you using your lexicon of characters in repertory, as in a theater company. They do Shakespeare, they do Brecht, and it's the same actors, and they come in and they do different things. You're developing a modern pantheon of characters who we don't *know* that well, I feel, which is something I do want to talk about, because they never come to life. They're always static.

**KAWS:** Yeah.

**Rail:** But they are readily recognizable, and give you a sense of comprehension, an ability to access them because they're familiar, and then they are mixed in different ways. Have you ever considered making them into animated cartoons?

**KAWS:** I've gotten pitches to do animations, all kinds of narrative-based things that have never been that interesting to me. When we started last year doing the augmented reality works, I had the option to animate them there—we'd already done all the work. But I liked them existing as sculptural, still, static virtual objects.

**Rail:** It separates what you've been doing from the source material. Because we know the source material through some kind of narrational motion-based imagery, whether it references Disney or *Sesame Street* or *The Simpsons*. And you pull that away with your characters. You deny the viewer the kind of dramatic enveloping story that they expect from a cartoon. We all have a full idea of Homer Simpson because he is part of a narrational scheme. But viewers have to do that for themselves with your characters. So the idea of not animating them is a way of keeping their aura.

**KAWS:** I want you to look at the form. I don't want you to think about what they might say.

**Rail:** Right, they don't really have mouths anyway. *[Laughter]*

**KAWS:** Exactly. I haven't worked that out! Yeah, I'm more interested in what its presence can give off to you.

**Rail:** And how do you think people have responded to them?

**KAWS:** It's funny. People come at it with different lenses. It's been everything. It's great if I do the public work and people stop and take pictures with it and reenact the pose. I see a surplus of such images through social media, and I love that interaction. I love that people feel like they want to take a moment, take a picture with the work or of it. A friend of mine texted me a picture of the Seagram Building sculpture, *WHAT PARTY* (2020), yesterday. And I was like, "Oh, thanks for visiting it." And she said, "Yeah, we were visiting it, and I feel like it needs a hug."

**Rail:** Exactly. It is something that can't be underestimated, the way that people connect with these characters, not just the ones you make, but other fictional characters or reality TV people who viewers feel they're friends with. There is this contemporary atmosphere where people feel a close relationship to the inanimate, essentially.

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KAWS, *WHAT PARTY* (2020) installed at Seagram Plaza, New York, 2020. © KAWS. Photo: Michael Biondo. Courtesy the artist.



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**KAWS:** When I make new works I'm thinking of it as adding a family member into this sort of dialogue with everything. I'm very cautious about what to bring in. It's a very slow process. One of the great things about the public work is, depending on where you're putting it, there is a very different mood, as with the Seagram Building's *WHAT PARTY*.

**Rail:** It's pretty perfect, that sculpture.

**KAWS:** I feel the same way.

**Rail:** Many sculptures have been defeated by that piazza. But this one really works well.

**KAWS:** I love that building, the bronze in that building. We were talking about it long before everything shut down. And I always wanted to put that sculpture there. But then when it did actually come to be put there Midtown was still dead. It felt perfect, it just reinforced that sculpture in that space.

**Rail:** So the *WHAT PARTY* figure in black at the Seagram Building, has that been installed elsewhere?

**KAWS:** No, that's the first place for it. There was a smaller version in my exhibition at Skarstedt Gallery in 2018, on East 79th Street. That was also the first place we showed *GONE*.

**Rail:** There are subtle distinctions between each of your sculptures that people have not written about enough, especially regarding the formal qualities of the works. The *COMPANION* figure in *CLEAN SLATE* is striding. The figure in *GONE* is standing in a kind of contrapposto. It's a very different element there. So the idea of *CLEAN SLATE* and moving forward is enhanced by that. At the exhibition I spent a long time with *COMPANION (RESTING PLACE)* (2013), the half-flayed work.

**KAWS:** Oh, my death euphemisms? [Laughter]

**Rail:** Yes, they're very compelling because forget the Damien Hirst analogies, as they don't really work. Your sculptures, such as this seated *COMPANION* with half of him exposed, are removed from cartoons because here you finally have musculature. This is the basis of all sculpture since the Classical era, whether it's the muscular body, the flayed body, or Christ on the cross. There's musculature and cartoons always elide that—not comic books, I'm not talking about superheroes. Mickey Mouse and the Simpsons, everyone's just—

**KAWS:** Bulbous.

**Rail:** Yeah, bulbous forms. And then here, when you peel off the skin, you see it actually is humanoid. And you also see an eye, an actual eye which is a sighted eye in a sense. And I know you did the first such flayed figure in the store in Tokyo. But how has that continued to be kind of a potent subject or form?

**KAWS:** I did *ORIGINALFAKE COMPANION* for the shop in Tokyo in 2006, and then *COMPANION (RESTING PLACE)*. I was thinking about the history of sculpture. Even though all my things are sculpture, I don't think people look at my work as sculpture. So I just wanted to make a very classical figure, a reclining figure, playing off people's reference points. Anyone with an art background couldn't not see Damien Hirst (*Hymn*, 1995–2005, et al). One of the things I like about his work is the way he claims imagery, like he'd claim a butterfly and it just becomes his. It's very Duchamp. With *COMPANION (RESTING PLACE)*, I thought to make a beautiful classical, reclining figure, even though he's half cartoon-feeling.

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**Rail:** I'm wondering about the idea of using these characters. You have shown a number of them together in one room.

**KAWS:** The first time I did that in a show that was just sculpture was at CAC Malaga in 2014 in Spain.

**Rail:** It does kind of change the way that you perceive them when you see them as a community, in a sense. That's something I find really compelling about your overall project, that it is a bit about building a community. You talk about that a lot, starting from your early outdoor work where you wanted to share it.

**KAWS:** I always complain that articles talk so much about the graffiti, but it does go back to it. The graffiti community is so strong and real. You're out painting, but it's as much about what you're putting on the wall as that whole night and what went down. It was such an important thing. I still am in touch with so many guys that I painted with.

**Rail:** You have a community of practitioners who are bonded. And then you have the community of people who are trying to find the stuff and appreciate it, who are not the artists, the consumers for want of a better word.

**KAWS:** You definitely find that in street wear. People would complain, "Oh, these kids are out of their minds to camp out overnight for a release at some shop." That's not my personality. I love collecting, but I'm not standing in line for shoes. But I don't judge it. At their age and this date that's the thing. It has so much more to do with seeing their friends and hanging out all night. The sneakers are the icing on top. I would imagine that that environment and that repetition, especially if you're going in different cities and you're seeing familiar people, is the same thing as being too young to go into CBGB, but skating out front because you want the residual interactions with different people.

**Rail:** And it's a unifying element. It's why the Brooklyn Museum only lets people go to the gift shop once a day and you can only buy two things. It feels like an early Prada boutique, because it's very minimal and sparse. *[Laughter]*

**KAWS:** That was part of the challenge of doing this. It's a museum. It's not a retail place. And as much as they prepare for it, it's a hard thing to dive into for a show. I've never done a show in New York, a museum show. Figuring out how to keep the shop full and interesting is a tough one.

**Rail:** The nice thing about it is it's up for so long. It can change.

**KAWS:** Exactly. That's what I told Anne Pasternak. I love the fact that this is here. And we can activate it and it doesn't need to be this static thing.

**Rail:** Maybe your augmented reality (AR) app, Acute Art, is also part of the community building, because you really do feel as if you're participating. It's a collaboration with what the artists put on the app. And then the photograph that the participant makes—

**KAWS:** —is then disseminated through social media. I noticed that when I was doing the large inflatable "HOLIDAY" projects. They're only there for two weeks, you know, sometimes. And so you're getting like thousands of people going to the location.

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KAWS, *HOLIDAY*, 2021, Hot Air Balloon, approximately 140 feet tall. Bristol, UK. © KAWS. Photo: @ARR.AllRightsReserved.

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**Rail:** It's like a Christo project. Same thing!

**KAWS:** Yes. It's really about being there at the moment. And when you see it you'll remember who you saw it with, remember what city you went to. People will say, "I was only in Taipei that weekend, first time I'd ever been there." I saw, you know, things like that. And then I started to see AR as existing in the same format. And you bring in your own picture on the app, the free versions, they're small, or with the other editions when we plant virtual works outside, they can be 10 meter tall sculptures, and this could exist in Brazil, it could exist anywhere. Kids will be able to experience the work and walk around and see it in relationship to their architecture that they're familiar with. And we don't have to worry about shipping, damages, insurance, nothing.

**Rail:** It's green!

**KAWS:** It's completely green!

**Rail:** It's the same concept as your early graffiti. You put it on a billboard and it's there for people to go see it and then interact with it. You have talked movingly in some interviews about the idea of people traversing through their regular, everyday quotidian space and suddenly seeing something different, something changed—one of your modified bus shelter or phone booth ads. And here is another great example of this inclusive practice. Because with the AR, it's geotagged, it's there. And it's almost like a kind of secret, even if it's 10 meters long, and you need your phone to see it, but it changes your experience of your environment.

**KAWS:** And it will change your perception when you go back to that place. That is going to be registered in your mind. It does work the same way. Like with the ads, if you put a piece in a phone booth and somebody comes across it the next time when they're moving around the city. If they're seeing that same ad unpainted it's bringing them back to think about my painted one.

**Rail:** I think of something like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates* in Central Park (2005). Perfect example of what you're talking about. It's only there for two weeks, but it could have an AR life after that.

**KAWS:** Exactly.

**Rail:** I found the paintings in the exhibition fascinating and I had real trouble figuring them out, which was part of the pleasure of it. The last sequence of paintings with the nine tondi comprising *THE NEWS* (2018), and the three large works, *FAR FAR DOWN*, *LOST TIME*, and *ALONE AGAIN* (all 2018), this abstracted work, felt like nothing I'd seen before in the show.

**KAWS:** In those three large paintings I just started with three silhouettes. It's not important to me that you see it. It's just sort of my entry point into the picture.

**Rail:** And then how do they develop from there? Because the complications are intense. And the show includes some of the drawings where you do color keys for the paint.

**KAWS:** All the paintings that I work on are developed almost like collages. So I'll build up all these different elements. And sometimes I might build them completely unrelated to these pictures. I like to make drawings. Then I draw over it in Illustrator, which is a vector-based computer program. You get these little pin lines and then you can move them around. I'll create these catalogs of imagery and make

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them as collages. I project the drawings out, and then I'll start thinking about the color. Those schematic papers that you saw in the show—I have binders of every painting I ever did like that—it's sort of my cataloging of colors. I'll work out the whole picture, colors and all, in dots. And then I write the color numbers down and work around it. Then I start painting. So it starts with three basic reclining figures in silhouette. A Kermit with his legs out. Winnie the Pooh. [Laughs] And this is a big sitting Ernie.



KAWS, *LOST TIME*, 2016. Acrylic on canvas. 72 x 120 inches. © KAWS. Photo: Farzad Owrang. Courtesy the artist.

**Rail:** Like an odalisque.

**KAWS:** And they're on top of these extreme zooms of faces, of eyes, some crossed out and some not. And then within the figures are overlays from other animators that I draw completely freehand and stylize. But when you're taking all these simple things and changing the scales and overlapping them, then it kind of disintegrates any sort of recognizable elements.

**Rail:** I wonder how people have received these, because they're so much more challenging, just in terms of the visuality, compared to the sculpture.

**KAWS:** I think no matter what I put on canvas, people don't think of me as a painter.

**Rail:** That's bizarre. But why, what's the disconnect?

**KAWS:** You tell me!

**Rail:** You're doing it all freehand—it's amazing! [Laughs]

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**KAWS:** It looks very much like printing. But, when you're there, if you know anything about painting, you know that it's not easy to get to that place.

**Rail:** No. And you can see real textural work—some of the brushstrokes were vertical, some were horizontal, like Mondrian did in his grid paintings from the '30s and the '40s.

**KAWS:** Yes. Take the one painting, *MIRROR* (2018), in the big room, with the sculpture *SEPARATED* (2019) and the 10 "URGE" (2020) paintings. This painting started because I wanted to do this collapsing, I was just picturing everything falling apart—if you could picture a façade falling down or an avalanche. And so what I drew first was this yellow line art. And painted that area first.

**Rail:** But it reads as on top, on the frontal plane.

**KAWS:** Yeah. But the only way it'll ever glow like that is to just have fluorescent yellow on top of white. You can never achieve that by painting it on top of a color. So I had to just start backwards, basically. And then everything else is painted around it. So it's trapping it off opaquely. And then I add all these shadows, which you don't even really notice. But there's a reason why you feel things are lifting off planes.

**Rail:** These pictures never allow you into depth. That's why I thought *TIDE*(2020) was such an outlier in a sense.

**KAWS:** The *TIDE* painting came from quarantine drawings. As did all the "URGE" paintings. It existed as a drawing first. Then I had to figure out how to paint it. When I painted it I changed it to have this sort of glow. I just really wanted to make a painting that felt like that year, you know?

**Rail:** Yeah. That is cool. This cross hatching and then the moon is just negative space. But this also relates to *FINAL DAYS* (2014), that sculpture of *COMPANION* with his arms outstretched.

**KAWS:** I was also thinking of the *HOLIDAY* piece, just drifting.

**Rail:** And slowly sinking.

**KAWS:** You just don't know. There's not a clear definition. Is he just hanging out, is he just enjoying the moonlight? You know, is there a dock 10 feet away? *[Laughs]*

**Rail:** Where does the tondo format, as in *NEWS*, get you, you think?

**KAWS:** I just liked it. I had all these sculptural forms that were bulbous and round and I liked that it is never ending, there's no corner, there's no edge to it. And it gave me this play that the rectilinear canvases didn't.

**Rail:** And the drawings are great because they go off the edge.

**KAWS:** All the canvases I paint kind of do that. I always paint the sides of the canvases.

**Rail:** It befuddles me that people don't consider it painting. They don't think about it formally. It's not just historical reference, it's what the things are actually doing. Recent writing on your work is all about this idea of emotionality and sentimentality and how this is now okay, in this period. Even before COVID it was

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becoming okay. And pathos is okay, now. I didn't ever think it wasn't, you know, but modernism kind of said you can't do that shit. Writing on your work is hardly ever about the intricate changes from sculpture to sculpture, the surfaces, the way that figures are put into motion, the way they are interacting with each other.



KAWS, *HOLIDAY*, 2019. Inflatable. Approximately 121 feet long. Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong.  
© KAWS. Photo: @5.12, courtesy AllRightsReserved, Ltd. Courtesy the artist.

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**KAWS:** You know, I feel it's somehow because my work is flat, there's this dismissal of cartoons.

**Rail:** Peter Saul paints flat! I don't get the resistance.

**KAWS:** Do you think the fact that I'm so involved and controlling of my own work as far as production, distribution, and the business of it overshadows everything?

**Rail:** I don't see how that's different from any other artist ever who has had a big practice, right? Rubens wasn't controlling? Michelangelo? Of course, they were. They just didn't know how to disseminate their work in different ways.

**KAWS:** All the commercial stuff I find super fun and a great outlet. I really enjoy that part of what I make.

**Rail:** You can't talk about what Paul McCarthy is doing in sculpture and say your monumental work is any different in terms of the quality. I don't see any difference there. The difference is in the characters and the situational sex and violence in his work. In terms of impressiveness, material, loving care that goes into it, that's all there. Your wooden works are amazing. The materials are critical. You walk into the Brooklyn Museum and see *ALONG THE WAY* (2013), the two huge figures in wood in the atrium, and it just draws you in so brilliantly. The scale and the planking and—I don't know how the hell you guys do it, and then fitting it all together. Critics who overlook that are missing out. They're not thinking about it as the art. It is wrapped into the toy versus sculpture debate.

**KAWS:** When I'm approaching a toy, it's the same process, it's the same as with *WHAT PARTY* in front of the Seagram Building.

**Rail:** Toys are sculpture. The Brooklyn Museum catalog gets it right, when Tsai's talking about this collapsing of distinctions.

**KAWS:** They don't take into account what goes into one of those projects, the logistics of the *HOLIDAY* project at the base of Mount Fuji, or the work in Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong. And for me and my team in Hong Kong to figure out all the permits to get it through all the different parts of the water and to get the government permissions—

**Rail:** That's why Christo is a good comparison, or Andy Goldsworthy, because the amount of legwork that goes into making these large projects is insane, and a team has to be built to make it all come together. You're an artist and a manager at the same time. But you have to be, you want to get it right. That's why the works are successful.

**KAWS:** You know, if I didn't have my studio in place to sell my own editions I could never get those projects done. When we do a *HOLIDAY* project, we have an edition. And that subsidizes the project, and that makes me in debt to nobody.

**Rail:** How did Christo fund his projects?

**KAWS:** Yeah, exactly.

**Rail:** Has no one made that analogy? I haven't read it.



# SKARSTEDT

**KAWS:** No. Alison Gingeras just wrote a text about Niki de Saint Phalle and about how she used to sell her editions to fund her projects. She was trying to make that connection with my work. But that was the first time anybody's connected my practice to that of another contemporary artist.

**Rail:** Christo and Jeanne-Claude, they sold the project, they sold the images, they sold the drawings, they sold the plans, as much as they could to make the thing, which was not permanent, unlike your stuff where you know, it's gonna last for a long time. Not the *HOLIDAY* balloon, but the large sculptures. I am wondering how you think of the difference between what you're putting in Skarstedt Gallery on East 79th Street, and what you're doing for a museum.

**KAWS:** I don't think of a difference, right?

**Rail:** I haven't seen an audience like the audience I saw at the Brooklyn Museum since the Alexander McQueen show at the Met. That show brought in a wide range of ages, diverse kinds of people, kids who had never gone to the Met before unless they were dragged there by their school, were going to see that exhibit.

**KAWS:** It was the same thing for that show at Skarstedt. I think that's great. I remember clearly being young and walking into galleries and feeling I needed to, like, walk backwards out of them. I am hoping I can plant that seed, and create that comfort zone that they can then say, actually, that was all right, and then go check out the next show, and the next show and say, "This wasn't the worst experience, what else can I see?"