ALMINE RECH

KAWS. Art & Comix

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'KAWS. Art & Comix' explores the interplay between comics, comic strips, cartoons, and fine art. This presentation places the American artist KAWS in dialog with selected contemporary stances with a focus on the artistic autonomy of his characters, who unite characteristics of pop, commercial, and public art.

Comics are characterized by a universal language and exist in many cultures as an accessible way of telling stories graphically, in words and images. Jean-Michel Basquiat and Ad Reinhardt were fine artists who created comics in a near-classic vein. And even prior to the advent of photography and (animated) films, caricature, satire, and frame-by-frame narration represented an attractive way in which stories could be conveyed—transcending boundaries both national and otherwise, addressing all age groups and social strata. Starting in the 1960s, artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, H.C. Westermann and Keith Haring questioned the distinction between high and low art in a radical manner. Prominent contemporary stances of a similar bent range from KAWS and Joyce Pensato to Cosima von Bonin and on to Peter Saul.

KAWS started out as a graffiti artist during the 1990s, whose practice evolved to overpainting posters and advertisements displayed in public; in doing so, his trademark strategy was to cover the models' faces with a stylized skull and crossbones. He is especially well known for his larger-than-life figurative sculptures—frequently realized in varied materials from bronze, to wood, to inflatables—in the public realm. His COMPANIONs and ACCOMPLICEs, as he calls some of them, exhibit self-confident, shy, or sad demeanors. Sometimes they hug each other and other times they just sit there alone, covering their faces with their hands as if ashamed. They frequently appear alone, isolated and melancholy, though one also encounters them in groups or even as families.

Comic characters will be seen throughout this exhibition as leitmotifs, including in works by contemporary artists such as the Pink Panther paintings of Katherine Bernhardt, the ceramic figures of Venezuelan artist Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, and Isolde Maria Joham's paintings inspired by Asian manga culture: these artists go beyond employing the world of comics as a mere reference, examining specific characters and their physical dispositions through their portrayal, through the depiction of their physiognomy, and through their gestures and motions.