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Watch Out, Warhol, Here's Japanese Shock Pop



Reassembling a Murakami sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum. [More Photos >](#)

By [CAROL VOGEL](#)

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The fifth-floor rotunda of the [Brooklyn Museum](#) on a recent afternoon was strewn with a curious array of body parts. Resting on a mover's blanket was most of "Miss ko2," a busty blond waitress whose jellyfish eyes stared up at the ceiling (and whose white-painted fiberglass bosom pointed skyward too). Nearby, her counterpart from "Second Mission Project ko2" (pronounced ko-ko) balanced on one leg.

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Ruby Washington/The New York Times

Too big for a Brooklyn show: Head of Takashi Murakami's "Oval Buddha," a work that will stand 18 ½ feet tall after assembly in the atrium at 590 Madison Avenue. [More Photos »](#)

Overseeing the scene was Paul Schimmel, chief curator of the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#) in Los Angeles but in recent weeks a fixture in Brooklyn as he mounts a major retrospective of the creator of these works, the Japanese artist [Takashi Murakami](#). The show closed on Feb. 11 at the Los Angeles museum's Geffen Contemporary space and will open on Saturday in Brooklyn.

"It took 11 trucks driving across country to get everything here," Mr. Schimmel said as he surveyed the pieces of Mr. Murakami's art in the rotunda and the battalion of installers at work.

"The Geffen Contemporary is a large, theatrical space," said Mr. Schimmel, who organized the retrospective. "Brooklyn has more traditional galleries, so the layout here is more chronological, more classical."

The show includes some 90 works, sampling Mr. Murakami's entire whimsical world in paintings, wallpapers, colorful sculptures, drawings and a 20-minute animated video. It will consume 18,500 square feet of exhibition space spread over two floors.

This show is the Brooklyn Museum's largest after "Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection," which opened in 1999 to considerable furor over [Chris Ofili](#)'s depiction of the Virgin Mary in a painting that included elephant dung. Mr. Murakami's retrospective is expected to generate talk of a different sort.

Popularly known as the Warhol of Japan, Mr. Murakami, 46, has earned an international reputation for merging fine art with popular Japanese anime films and manga cartoons. Intent on exploring how mass-produced entertainment and consumerism are part of art, he teamed up with the fashion house Louis Vuitton in 2003 to create brightly colored versions of the classic LV monogram on Vuitton handbags.

The show — its title, appropriately, is "©Murakami" — includes a fully operational Louis Vuitton shop selling some of Mr. Murakami's designs for that luxury brand. A leather strap for a cellphone carries a \$220 price tag; handbags range from \$1,310 to \$2,210. He has designed three new patterned-canvas wall hangings just for this exhibition; printed in editions of 100 each, the first 50 will be offered at the shop for \$6,000 apiece, and the rest at \$10,000 apiece. Other leather goods designed for the show will be for sale too.

The shop was also part of the retrospective when it appeared in Los Angeles, and some criticized the marriage of art and commerce as crass and inappropriate in a museum setting. But Mr. Murakami says his product designs are simply an extension of his art.

"It is the heart of the exhibition," he said of the Vuitton shop.

[Arnold L. Lehman](#), the Brooklyn Museum's director, does not object to Vuitton's presence. "I think it's absolutely fine," he said in a telephone interview. "It would be very different if it was after the fact or a curatorial add-on. But it was part of Takashi's original idea."

The Vuitton boutique isn't the only shopping experience museum visitors will encounter, of course, as the museum will have its own Murakami gift shop right outside the exhibition, with postcards, T-shirts, mugs and stuffed animals of Mr. Murakami's characters. Most of the merchandise, however, is produced by Mr. Murakami's company, Kaikai Kiki (from the Japanese words for bizarre and elegant), and it will share in the proceeds.

Mr. Murakami first became famous in the 1990s for a theory he called Superflat. Derived from traditional Japanese painting, it was adopted by the contemporary art world to indicate a mix of high and low art. The retrospective begins with his fantastical and sometimes dark universe from that period. Creatures like Mr.

DOB, a Mickey Mouse-type character, and Mr. Pointy, another cartoonlike creature, inhabit this space alongside smiley-faced flowers and colorful mushrooms.

The artist's latest, largest and most colorful version of his Mr. Pointy character greets visitors just inside the museum's front door. Known as Tongari-kun in Japanese, this character is represented by a 23-foot-tall edition flanked by smaller pointy guards that wear different expressions — smiling, yawning, sleepy, etc.

“©Murakami” opens on Saturday and continues through July 5 at the Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, at Prospect Park; (718)683-5000.

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“In order to get Mr. Pointy into the museum we had to take out half the glass in the front of the pavilion,” Mr. Lehman said. The piece is on loan from the New York collector Richard B. Sachs.

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©Murakami

One work that was on view in Los Angeles but is not in Brooklyn is “Oval Buddha,” a platinum-clad sculpture made by Mr. Murakami in 2007. Standing 18 ½ feet tall and weighing 6,613 pounds, it is a comical self-portrait of the artist sitting in a lotus position, perched on a lotus pad. Too large to fit into the museum, it is instead being installed this week (and on view starting on Saturday) in the sculpture garden of 590 Madison Avenue, the former I.B.M. building, between 56th and 57th Streets.

Mr. Murakami, clad in a green down jacket, navy blue down vest and blue jeans, was on hand in Brooklyn the other day as the show was being installed in the rotunda. The skylight had been blacked out — the only lighting in the space will come from three spotlights — and wallpaper with a lightning pattern was about to be hung on the walls and ceiling.

“It's been very busy in my studio,” Mr. Murakami said, explaining that he has been working on new designs of wallpaper and vinyl floor coverings to be shown for the first time in Brooklyn's version of the retrospective.

In Los Angeles, he said, “people kept saying that they hoped I would make some new things. So I have. It helps keep my attention.”

As Mr. Murakami spoke, he kept an eye on a small room off the rotunda where the rapper [Kanye West](#)'s hit song "Good Morning" could be heard wafting through the space. An installation team was testing a new, longer version of his animated video, the story of his fictional Kaikai and Kiki characters. (When the 20-minute animation isn't playing, an [MTV](#)-style video of "Good Morning" will be shown there.)

The room is a small, cozy nook with black-and-silver carpeting depicting the Kaikai and Kiki characters. "This room was so popular in Los Angeles," Mr. Schimmel said, "we had to have security guards posted the entire time because kids tried to record the videos on their cellphones and post them on YouTube."

The Los Angeles show attracted young people who had never been to the museum. "Many of the kids were first-time visitors, who came because they heard about the show through various kinds of cross-branding," Mr. Schimmel said. "Names like Louis Vuitton, Kanye West and eBay."

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2. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/02/arts/design/02mura.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1

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