



NEWCOMB

ART MUSEUM *at Tulane*

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A SHARED SPACE: KAWS, KARL WIRSUM, & TOMOO GOKITA
Artist's Collection Spurs Never-Ending Conversations

NEW ORLEANS, La. — As part of its recast mission focused on innovative contemporary art and design, the Newcomb Art Museum presents *A Shared Space: KAWS, Karl Wirsum, & Tomoo Gokita*. On view from September 9 through January 3, the exhibition presents new work by KAWS, alongside pieces from his collection by two artists, Chicago-based Wirsum and Japan-based Gokita. This is the first time that KAWS will show his works in this manner.

“Artists like KAWS surround themselves with works they deem interesting and instructive—even critical—to spark their own creativity,” noted museum director Mónica Ramírez-Montagut. “Their collections are as much a source of personal delight as they are a professional tool for informal study and examination, and a site for the ongoing exchange of ideas.”

For KAWS, collecting means living with artworks for his enjoyment and furthering a professional dialogue. “I think of collecting like building a library I can access and reference 24/7. I collect firstly for personal daily enjoyment but I also collect to fully comprehend as well as support the world I work and live in. Ultimately for me, understanding art and artists leads you to other art and artists. It’s a never-ending conversation, and it’s exciting.”

While the three artists’ works in this exhibition have few formal associations, KAWS as the collector, sees commonalities underlying Wirsum’s whimsical and brightly colored figures, Gokita’s sleek grayscale faceless portraits, and his own meticulous, brightly-colored paintings. Ramírez-Montagut explains, “This exhibition is a lyrical exercise in exploring the works’ points of contact as perceived by KAWS, despite their seeming dissimilarities. The viewer comes to see these artists’ mutual appreciation for popular culture, irreverent iconographies, humor, and impeccable craftsmanship together with a shared use of strong graphic forms that evoke visceral reactions.”

The exhibition features 17 works by KAWS including shaped canvases referencing pop-culture characters and *COMPANION (PASSING THROUGH)*, a sixteen-foot-tall sculpture located in the Newcomb Pottery Garden that employs several of the artist’s signature motifs such as its allusion to animated cartoon figures and an inflated skull with gloved hands covering its face. Also comprising the show are 26 works by Karl Wirsum including drawings, paintings, and sculptures dating to 1968, as well as 9 portraits and one sculpture by Tomoo Gokita.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Brooklyn-based, KAWS (1974-) is considered one of the most relevant artists of his generation. Within the Pop Art tradition, he has created a prolific body of influential work that straddles the worlds of art and design including street art, graphic and product design, paintings, murals, and large-scale sculptures. KAWS

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developed a passion for popular culture in art and design early in life. He pursued his interests by studying illustration at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in Manhattan in the early 1990s. By then he was already well versed in graffiti, having prolifically tagged walls and freight trains with the letters K A W S. KAWS continued developing his vocabulary conceiving his soft skull with crossbones and crossed-out eyes, which would become a signature gesture. After college, he worked as a freelancer for animations studios, which further catalyzed his appropriation of iconic characters from popular culture and comic books. KAWS currently has a solo exhibition, “ALONG THE WAY” at the Brooklyn Museum, and is part of the outdoor group sculptural exhibition, ARTZUID, in Amsterdam, while a survey exhibition of his work will open at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in the fall of 2016.

A life-long resident of Chicago and alumnus of the School of Art Institute of Chicago, **Karl Wirsum** (1939-) participated in the late 1960s series of exhibitions titled Hairy Who that featured artists infamous for their wry humor and irreverence to established artistic conventions. Later identified as the Chicago Imagists, the group became known for its grotesque but nonetheless meticulously executed works. These artists looked at their gritty urban environment, as well as popular culture, folk art, and Surrealism for inspiration. Wirsum’s works also reveal influences of the era’s most iconoclastic musicians as well as Chicago’s diverse population. With wit and an expressive use of cartoonish, dynamic lines, dots, flat surfaces, and eclectic colors, Wirsum creates nearly abstracted hybridized figures that reveal traces of comic books, toys, and non-Western art. The works’ strong graphic nature and humor helps to mitigate their contrarian attitudes but still elicits a visceral reaction in viewers.

Born in Japan (1969-), **Tomoo Gokita** lives near Tokyo in the idyllic suburb of Chōfu. The pop-culture influenced artist is known for his enigmatic, monochromatic faceless portraits that are both figurative and abstract. Gokita readily admits that his childhood exposure to the body-conscious advertisements edited by his father for Japanese *Playboy* informs his works. His resistance to distinct facial features stems in part from his interest in the masking traditions of Mexican wrestlers. For Gokita, masks—particularly those worn by the “lucha libre” wrestlers—embolden wrestlers’ sense of self-fashioning and, in turn, excite viewers’ imaginations.

RELATED EVENTS

Artist interview

KAWS in conversation with Newcomb Art Museum director Mónica Ramírez-Montagut

When: September 9, 5:30-6:30pm. FREE

Where: Dixon Hall, Tulane University

RSVP: bbox@tulane.edu

Opening reception

When: September 9, 6:30-7:30pm. FREE

Where: Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane, Woldenberg Art Center

RSVP: bbox@tulane.edu

Curator lecture

“KAWS. An Interdisciplinary Journey” by Newcomb Art Museum director Mónica Ramírez-Montagut

When: September 17, 6:00-7:30pm. FREE

Where: Freeman Auditorium, Woldenberg Art Center

RSVP: bbox@tulane.edu



Street Art Panel Discussion

With Brandan "Bmike" Odums (creator #ExhibitBe; founder/director, 2-Cent Entertainment), Alex Glustrom (artist; producer/director, *Big Charity*), and Candy Chang (creator, *Before I Die* public art project)

When: November 19, 6:00-7:30pm. FREE

Where: Freeman Auditorium, Woldenberg Art Center

RSVP: bbox@tulane.edu

ABOUT THE NEWCOMB ART MUSEUM

The Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University builds on the Newcomb College legacy of education, social enterprise, and artistic experience. Presenting inspiring exhibitions and programs that engage communities both on and off campus, the Museum fosters the creative exchange of ideas and cross-disciplinary collaborations around innovative art and design. The Museum preserves and advances scholarship on the Newcomb and Tulane art collections.

The academic institution for which the Museum is named was founded in 1886 as the first degree-granting coordinate college for women in America. The H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College was distinguished for educating women in the sciences, physical education, and, most importantly, art education. Out of its famed arts program, the Newcomb Pottery was born. In operation from 1887 until 1940, the Newcomb enterprise produced metalwork, fiber arts, and the now internationally renowned Newcomb pottery.

In 1996, the Newcomb Art Department completed an expansion and renovation of its facilities that included the addition of the Newcomb Art Museum (previously the Newcomb Art Gallery), a 3,600 square-foot exhibition space dedicated to presenting first rate contemporary and historic exhibits. Housed in the Woldenberg Art Center, the Newcomb Art Museum today presents original exhibitions and programs that explore socially engaged art, civic dialogue, and community transformation. The Museum also pays tribute to its heritage through shows that recognize the contributions of women to the fields of art and design.

As an entity of an academic institution, the Newcomb Art Museum presents exhibitions that utilize the critical frameworks of diverse disciplines in conceptualizing and interpreting art and design. By presenting issues relevant to Tulane and the greater New Orleans region, the Museum also serves as a gateway between on and off campus constituencies.

Free and open to public, the Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 to 5; Saturday and Sunday 11 to 4; and by appointment. For general information, please visit <http://www.newcombartmuseum.tulane.edu> or call 504-865-5328.

High-resolution images available upon request: KAWS, *COMPANION (PASSING THROUGH)*, 2010 (Newcomb Art Museum outdoor installation); KAWS, *Flight Time*, 2015; Tomoo Gokita, *Speechless*, 2013; Karl Wirsum, *Yodel Me Back to Orville Overhaul*, 1998