

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

April 19, 2007

PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
980 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK NY 10021
GALLERY HOURS:

T. 212.744.2313
F. 212.772.7962
Tue - Sat 10:00am - 6:00pm



TAKASHI MURAKAMI: *TRANQUILITY OF THE HEART, TORMENT OF THE FLESH – OPEN WIDE THE EYE OF THE HEART AND NOTHING IS INVISIBLE*

Tuesday, May 1 – Saturday, June 2, 2007

Opening reception for the artist: Tuesday, May 1st, from 6 to 8 pm

“Tell me,” the emperor of China asked Daruma, “What is the first principle of Buddhism?”

“Vast emptiness, nothing holy!” Daruma replied.

“Who are you? the emperor demanded, thoroughly perplexed.

“I don’t know!” Daruma announced, departing as suddenly as he had arrived.

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Takashi Murakami. This is Murakami’s first exhibition with the gallery.

Beneath its bright and playful appearance, Murakami’s art is at work challenging established dichotomies. In his approach, high art and popular culture, East and West, present and past, humor and gravity, skepticism and belief are all sides of the same coin. Visually, his work merges the dystopic worlds of popular contemporary Japanese *animé* and *manga* cartoons with the ultra-refined techniques of traditional Japanese art. Operationally, he combines the work of the guild with that of the factory and production studio, resulting in a staggering body of work ranging from rare masterpieces to inexpensive, mass-produced commodities.

Departing from his well-known utopian and dystopian themes – which feature masses of smiling flowers, elaborate scenes of toonish apocalypse, and the ever-morphing cult figures of DOB and Mr. Pointy – Murakami surprises here with a group of monumental portraits of Daruma, the grand patriarch of Zen art. Daruma was an Indian sage who lived during the fifth or sixth century A.D., the founder of Zen Buddhism. Legend has it that he attained enlightenment after sitting in meditation before the wall of the Shaolin monastery for nine years, without blinking his eyes. During this process, his arms and legs atrophied, withered and fell off. In today’s Japan, Daruma’s continuing popularity as the embodiment of resilience and determination has given rise to an entire industry of good luck charms in the form of armless, legless and eyeless dolls, available in endless variations. Murakami’s interpretations of the icon are similarly varied, fusing tradition with a heterogeneous range of artistic and cultural inspirations.

(continue to page 2)

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Zen's assimilation into Japanese culture was accompanied by the introduction of green tea, which was used to ward off drowsiness during the lengthy *zazen* (seated meditation) sessions. The tea ceremony – which began as a sumptuous secular custom in the mercantile class and gradually evolved into an ascetic ritual that is practised widely today in Japan – is still enacted in its original form in honor of Daruma in certain Japanese Zen monasteries. Embracing this tradition, Murakami will inaugurate his exhibition at Gagosian Gallery with a private traditional tea ceremony conducted by Sen So-oku, a descendant of Sen no Rikyu, the reverend sixteenth-century tea master.

Takashi Murakami was born in 1962 in Tokyo, and received his BFA, MFA and PhD from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. He founded the Hiropan factory in Tokyo in 1996, which later evolved into Kaikai Kiki Co., a large-scale art production and art management corporation. In addition to the production and marketing of Murakami's work, Kaikai Kiki Co. functions as a supportive environment for the fostering of young Japanese artists. Murakami is also a curator, entrepreneur, and a critical observer of contemporary Japanese society. In 2000, he organized a paradigmatic exhibition of Japanese art titled *Superflat*, which traced the origins of contemporary Japanese visual pop culture to historical Japanese art. He has continued this work in subsequent impactful exhibitions such as *Coloriage* (Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain, Paris, 2002) and *Little Boy: The Art of Japan's Exploding Subcultures* (Japan Society, New York, 2005).

Murakami's work has been shown extensively in group exhibitions around the world, and in one-person exhibitions at leading institutions such as Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain, Paris and the Serpentine Gallery, London (2002); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2001); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2001). MoCA, Los Angeles is currently preparing a survey exhibition of his work that will open later this year and travel to the east coast.

For further information, please contact the gallery.