

## Artist Resources – KAWS (American, b. 1974)

[KAWS at Perrotin Gallery, Paris](#)

[KAWS on Instagram](#)

“The graf stuff was almost like a sport I fell into and was good at. I woke up wanting to do it and fell asleep thinking about it. When I was in school, my mind would be on painting. I guess that’s the only thing I’ve ever really been focused on,” KAWS reflected in an intimate talk about his background, graffiti, and toys with Tobey Maguire in 2010 for [Interview Magazine](#).

In 2012, KAWS created a float for the [Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade](#) based on his signature character, COMPANION.

KAWS installed his first exhibition in UK in 2016 at [the Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#). Curators, gallerists, and collectors came together in a [video profile](#) with the artist to discuss his rise through the graffiti world and ability to bridge the gap between fine art and commercial enterprise.

In a [2017 interview](#), KAWS discussed graffiti as an artistic outlet, his conceptual process, the identity of KAWS, and product design. “You can’t really put a lot of weight behind other’s opinions, because they are not you and they’re not going to really understand where you see things can go,” he explained, “things can play out or not play out, but at least they’re your choices.”

“In the U.S, it just felt as if, ‘Oh, you could be a fine artist or you could be a commercial artist.’ There was a split division: if you do this, you can’t do that, like one thing knocks out the other...still, even today you get that. You have people who are a little bit scared of commercial projects or still pretend that there is this church,” KAWS told *Juxtapoz Magazine* in a [2018 illustrated interview](#). “But for me, I enjoy just having work disseminate in different countries at the same time. That can never happen in a gallery space.”



Donnelly, 2018

Photography: Brian Durball

In his [first show at Skarstedt’s New York gallery](#), KAWS debuted a new series of paintings and four large bronze sculptures, featuring his beloved characters, COMPANION and CHUM. The artist [returned to Skarstedt in 2019](#), for his first solo show in London, which showcased a rarely celebrated facet of KAWS’ practice through a new series of abstract works.

KAWS talked with [ARTnews](#) in a 2019 profile about his foray into the collectibles market and his own collecting passions.

[Companionship in the Age of Loneliness](#), at the National Gallery of Victoria from September 2019-March 2021, celebrated the emotional core of the artist’s practice through a compilation of old work and new. KAWS spoke about the process of planning such a show and new commissions in an in-depth [artist talk in New York](#) about his career, graffiti, travel, and product lines.

The Brooklyn Museum’s [2021 exhibition KAWS: WHAT PARTY](#) will be the artist’s first career survey, bringing together over 100 works, including rare drawings and notebooks with early graffiti, paintings, sculpture, installation, and furniture. In conjunction with the show, [KAWS spoke with Vogue](#) about his early career and the trajectory of his practice.



Donnelly, 2019

Photography: Donald Stahl



KAWS (American, b. 1974)

**Urge**, 2020

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:17.1

*On view February 24 – May 20, 2021*



KAWS (American, b. 1974)

**A Lonely One**, 2019

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2019:140.1

Multi-media artist KAWS, née Brian Donnelly, began his career as a graffiti artist in the 1990s after studying animation at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Merging commercialism and cultural reference with street art, painting, and sculpture, his work recalls the fundamentals of Pop Art and conflates the distinction between fine art and commercial objects; KAWS is in fact known for merchandising his work and has collaborated with such international brands as Dior and Nike. The artist's animated style and use of vibrant colors are often compared to the work of Japanese artist Takashi Murakami (b. 1962). **A Lonely One** demonstrates a mild temperament rarely featured in KAWS's oeuvre. His signature subversive appropriations of cartoon characters and cultural icons are absent, replaced by a graphic abstraction that seems to provide a close-up glimpse of a strange, energetic world that extends beyond the confines of the frame.

*On view January 22 – April 26, 2020*





KAWS (American, b. 1974)

**TAKE**, 2019

Bronze; Edition 2 of 5

Private Collection; L2019:117.1

Brian Donnelly (aka KAWS) developed his first signature character, COMPANION, in the late 1990s as collectible toy. With an inflated skull-and-crossbones as a head, gloved hands, booted feet, and a pair of shorts with two front buttons, the figure resembles a dystopian Mickey Mouse. It reflects the artist's early career as a cartoonist and Disney illustrator, his life-long love of toys, and passion for pop-culture collectibles. A series of other foreign yet familiar characters fill Donnelly's quirky canon, each representing different aspects of human emotion and interacting with one another to evoke the complexity of human experience. In **TAKE**, a large, blue furry figure named BFF carries a child-size, listless, grey and white COMPANION in a protective, almost defensive posture. BFF debuted in 2016 as KAWS' first character with a furry, rather than smooth, exterior, modeled after childhood favorites like *Sesame Street's* Elmo. In 2020, the artist introduced a new TAKE collectible, with both figures painted black in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and proceeds going to charity.

*On view June 9 – September 12, 2021*