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.
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 a 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