

Teacher Resource

KAWS: FAMILY

EXHIBITION OPENS SEPTEMBER 27

AGO

KAWS: FAMILY

Exhibition Opens September 27



KAWS. TIME OFF, 2023. Vinyl, Overall: 18 x 28 x 15 cm (7 1/16 x 11 x 5 15/16 in.) Courtesy of KAWS.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Art, Media Arts, Literacy, Social Studies and Humanities, Language

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Brooklyn-based artist Brian Donnelly, popularly known as KAWS, makes his Canadian museum debut this Fall at the AGO.

KAWS effortlessly combines art, popular culture, and business with clever humour and insightful creativity. His work is famous for its immense sculptures featuring characters inspired by cartoons and comic book characters, as well as vibrant paintings that skillfully highlight lines and colours, much like the influential Pop artists of the 1960s. Through his art, KAWS blurs the lines between art that appeals to the masses and art that is considered more exclusive, effectively bringing media images into traditional art spaces. With his unique ability to straddle the realms of art and design, KAWS has garnered a significant following both within and outside the art world on a global scale.

In this exhibition that expands throughout the AGO, students will get a firsthand experience of the artist's incredible attention to detail, their unique creative process, and their wide range of artistic expressions. Over 60 artworks will be on display, including captivating wall murals, intriguing sketches, vibrant paintings, captivating sculptures, and even phone booth advertisements that the artist has altered. The highlight of the exhibition is a massive bronze sculpture called FAMILY (2021), which is larger than life. This sculpture showcases four of the artist's recurring figures, each in different sizes, posed together as a nuclear family. The exhibition will be centred in the Signy Eaton Gallery, but you'll also find surprises and artistic interventions throughout the entire museum.



KAWS. *UNTITLED (TOGETHER)*, 2017. Ink on paper, 27.9 x 21.6 cm. © KAWS. Photo: Farzad Owrang

ARTIST BIO

Brian Donnelly was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1974. In the early 1996 he earned a Bachelor in Fine Arts, emphasizing on illustration from the School of Visual Arts. He began his career as a graffiti artist in New York City, and also worked as an animator at Disney.

As a street artist, Donnelly was known for his KAWS tag on buildings around Manhattan and New Jersey. There is no meaning behind Donnelly's artist name, he simply liked how the letters looked together. This simple tag soon evolved into the unique stylistic cartoon-like figures and sculptures we are familiar with today.

KAWS' work is heavily influenced by toys as well as comic and cartoon culture. His work has been compared with other canon modern and contemporary artists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, and Jeff Koons. His art challenges the concept of "high" art and "low" art and blurs the fine line between commercial art and fine art. From being a street artist to collaborating with major fashion brands such as Nike, Uniqlo, and Vans, KAWS has become one of the most famous and successful multi-faceted artists today.

SPOTLIGHT

FAMILY



KAWS. FAMILY, 2021. Bronze, paint, Overall: 219.1 × 207 × 95.6 cm (86 1/4 × 81 1/2 × 37 5/8 in.) Courtesy of KAWS.

GUIDED OBSERVATION

- Follow the lines on the sculpture. Where do your eyes go? How do the lines lead you through the artwork? How do the lines make you feel?
- How would you describe it to someone who has never seen it? What descriptive words would you use?
- What feelings do you think the artist is trying to communicate?
- If this artwork has a sound, what would it sound like? What would it smell like?

ELEMENTARY

- What kinds of textures you do see on the sculptures?
- If each of these figures had the ability to speak, what do you think they would say? How do you imagine their voices to sound?
- Does this artwork remind you of any of your own personal memories or experiences?

SECONDARY

- For whom do you believe this artwork was made? Why?
- The piece on display at the AGO is life sized, but KAWS also has smaller versions of his FAMILY, as small as 13 inches tall. How do the varying sizes affect your perception of the artwork?
- Do you think these figures are connected in some way? What visual cues lead you to make such an observation?

CONTEXT

Over the years KAWS has created numerous memorable characters, many of which share a common thread and lineage. Three of his most popular characters are BFF, Chum and Companion.

FAMILY is composed of five figures, including three of KAWS' characters: Companion - inspired by Mickey Mouse, Chum - a parody of the Michelin Man, and BFF. On the left, a large Companion stands behind a smaller Companion who holds a small Chum. Next to the small Companion is a child-sized Chum in front of BFF. This group of various sized characters is known as the KAWS FAMILY. FAMILY comes in various different variations and colour schemes.

In this grouping, KAWS explored modern day family dynamics and the intricacies of family life.

CREATIVE RESPONSE

Create your own KAWS inspired characters and FAMILY.

Using your imagination, create 2-3 characters. Like KAWS, you can be inspired by cartoon characters or comic book characters that you are familiar with.

Draw your version of the character. Think about adding or taking away aspects of this character, while still making it somewhat recognizable. For example, KAWS' Companion has gloves and shoes like Mickey Mouse, but a different head.

Think about different textures you could draw, or the different colours you would use.

After designing your characters, depict them as a family unit. Consider the various ways in which family members can engage with one another. They can adopt a formal and close stance, similar to KAWS' artwork, or perhaps they are seated or standing at a distance from each other. How do different poses within a family alter the dynamics among its members?

An extension to this activity is to develop a profile for each family member. Consider their personalities, sound of their voice, hobbies etc.

Your final piece can be digital or mixed media. Share your creations at #AGOSchools

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