

AUDIO 1

GOOD INTENTIONS

2015

bronze and paint

Collection of the Madison Group, Courtesy Corkin Gallery

Audio description of the work

GOOD INTENTIONS is a sculpture, presenting two identical figures which stand closely side by side on a low riser against the wall. The one on the right stands at 7 feet tall. The one on the left is smaller reaching the right figure's waist and hides, childlike, behind its leg. They are various shades of matte grey and white.

The features and style of these figures are those of a character which KAWS has dubbed quote "COMPANION". With its white cartoonish gloves, oversized shoes, and large-buttoned shorts, it bears an intentional resemblance to Walt Disney Studios mascot Mickey Mouse. The notable exception is the mouse head, which in the "COMPANION" character is replaced with a white "soft skull" and grey crossbones with black X's for eyes.

The figures are smooth with slightly rotund torsos and perfectly round legs. They wear brownish grey shorts with two palm sized circles in the front like buttons where suspenders might attach. Their short gloves have a bulge at the cuff, and their hands have three fingers and a thumb. They wear smooth rounded shoes that bulge above the ankle.

The taller figure on the right stands with its right foot slightly forward. From behind, the smaller figure holds onto the taller figure's right leg, threading its hand between the taller figure's legs and leaning in as a child might do. The taller figure twists to hold its right hand behind the smaller figure's head, shielding it or pulling it close in what could be perceived as a protective gesture.

These two figures in KAWS's "COMPANION" character style, share signature traits with other characters in the KAWS Family: Letter X's etched into their heads instead of eyes and the same X motif on the backs of their gloves and tops of their shoes. Their large heads are in the style of a cartoon skull with two divots for nostrils and knobby "crossbone" protrusions on the sides of their heads. At the bottom of their heads they have 4 rounded bumps with teeth-like gaps.

In the room around them KAWS's "Kimpsons" characters are displayed. These are liberal appropriations of characters from the popular long running tv show The Simpsons which are instantly recognizable. The Kimpsons have X's for eyes and other traits KAWS has created that make up his signature style.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

In this two-figure sculpture, KAWS (spelled “K” “A” “W” “S”) casts COMPANION—one of his signature characters—in the roles of parent and child. Partly hidden, the child peers out from behind the adult’s leg. In its role as parent and protector, KAWS imbues the adult figure with a sense of assuredness. Through the lens of parenting, “good intentions” can have positive associations, but also darker ones. Can a parent truly protect their child from the harsh realities of contemporary life? COMPANION, with a supportive hand on the back of its small offspring, is figuring it out along with the rest of us.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 2

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

2014

acrylic on paper

Audio description of the work

This work is a massive gridded rectangle of 50 black and white line drawings. The width of the work is about 3 king size mattresses and it is almost one and a half mattresses high nearly reaching the Gallery ceiling. Each framed drawing is 22 inches tall and 18 inches wide. The grid is composed of two dimensional line drawn characters from Peanuts which resemble Snoopy, a familiar comic strip character which is a Black-spotted white beagle and Snoopy's friend, a small bird named Woodstock. In each of the close-ups the character's eyes are replaced by x's, in KAWS's trademark X shape. Recognizable in the paintings are: the spiky feathers on the top of Woodstock's head, Snoopy's water bowl, the side of Snoopy's head and floppy letter U shaped ear, Snoopy's short pointy tail and back foot as he walks upright, the top of Snoopy's head with a Mountie hat on it, his black dot of a nose, and his up-curving-line wide smile and various extreme close-ups of his eyes marked as an X.

The wall on which this work is hung and two adjacent walls on either side are covered in oversized black lines that look as if they were made with a giant black pen that leapt off of one of the drawings and danced around on the walls with explosive energy. Nearby on either side of the work are sculptures called SHARE and TAKE. On the left is SHARE. SHARE features KAWS's "Companion" Character standing holding another character dubbed "BFF" which is toy sized and dangles from it's left hand like a stuffed animal. BFF is bright blue and resembles Sesame Street muppets like Cookie Monster or Elmo. It has bulging eyes atop it's head with x's for pupils a round yellow nose and a fuzzy frame like a soft toy. On the right of the grid of drawings, in the opposite corner, the sculpture titled TAKE swaps the two characters; a large BFF stands and clutches a small toy sized COMPANION character to its chest.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

In this large black-and-white grid of acrylic works on paper, KAWS references Snoopy, America's most iconic black-and-white cartoon dog. Creator Charles Schulz debuted Snoopy and friends in 1950 via his daily comic strip, Peanuts . The Peanuts universe expanded beyond the comic to include television specials, syndicated programs, and even books. On his interest in the cartoon, KAWS explains: "I think Peanuts is part of being a kid in America. Whether it's the Great Pumpkin on Halloween or just seeing a different cartoon in the paper, it's sort of around everywhere."

Here, across 50 individually framed compositions, KAWS moves in and out of abstraction to fragment Snoopy's form and figure, playing with Schulz's cartoon-black line in a daring but controlled way. The works—along with the vinyl backdrop, which extends the composition out onto the gallery wall—emphasize the centrality of the drawn line in KAWS's practice.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 3

KAWS in Galleria Italia

Sculpture in Wood

KAWS

born Jersey City, New Jersey, United States, 1974

Audio Description of the work

These sculptures are situated in Galleria Italia, a city-block-long 4 meter or 14 foot wide east/west thoroughfare in the Gallery building. There is a two storey window wall on the north side and warm brown coloured wood paneling on the south. Although they are placed without barriers the works are not intended to be touched and a recommended distance to be held of 1 meter or three feet is indicated.

At a short distance from the passageway between the Signy Eaton gallery and the ramp on the western end of Galleria Italia is the first of three playful works called FINAL DAYS, the second is called ALONG THE WAY and the third, AT THIS TIME. All three larger than life size statues feature the character KAWS has dubbed COMPANION.

The sculptures are solid, and glossed to a high shine with a veneer finish, giving them a silky appearance. They show wood grain and a vertical rectangle assembly much like a hardwood floor.

The statue figures are smooth with slightly rotund torsos and perfectly round legs. Their short gloves have a bulge at the cuff, and their hands have three fingers and a thumb. They wear smooth rounded shoes that bulge above the ankle. The letter X motif is also carved on the backs of their gloves and tops of their shoes. With its cartoonish gloves, oversized shoes, and large-buttoned shorts, it bears an intentional resemblance to Walt Disney Studios mascot Mickey Mouse. The notable exception is the mouse head, which in the "COMPANION" character is replaced with a "soft skull" and crossbones and carved X's for eyes. In these sculptures, KAWS's "Companion" figures veer toward the human in their poses and their implied pathos.

The first work diagonally faces us at the left of the walkway near to the window wall.

FINAL DAYS

2014

Afromosia wood

Here, the character of “COMPANION” is slightly taller than average person standing height and uniquely has a small cottonball shaped tail, and does not wear gloves or shoes or have buttons on its shorts. It steps forward on its left leg with arms extended. Its arms are held wide to the side with palms vertical and fingers slightly curled reaching in joy or perhaps stretching for balance as it moves.

The next sculpture stands 35 feet further east up against the south wall and faces the windows.

ALONG THE WAY

2013

Afromosia wood

This 8 feet tall and 6 feet wide statue is wood with a black finish. It has two “COMPANION” figures who stand side by side as one supports the other. The figure on the right is completely limp from mid back up and appears zapped of energy, strength or both; it uses its right arm to hold onto the supporting figure’s shoulder. The supporting figure braces the limp figure by leaning its body towards it. The supporting figure also holds its left hand on the small of the limp figures back in a consoling gesture.

30 feet further and centred in the walkway is the last physical statue towards the middle of Galleria Italia. It is placed nearest to the window wall and faces us.

AT THIS TIME

2013

Afromosia wood

The largest COMPANION character statue is a medium brown wood colour and stands nearly 8 and a half feet tall.

The figure stands feet together, body slightly bent backwards with its head tilted up and back. Elbows wide, COMPANION’S gloved hands reach up and shroud its face.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition Interpretive Panel text:

Composed of hardy Afromosia wood, these larger-than-life sculptures appear at home among the soaring Douglas fir beams of Galleria Italia. KAWS began experimenting with wood in 2005, recalling the warmth and feeling of the wooden toys he had growing up. Of his large wood figures he says, “I want the viewer to feel like they should somehow help or console the work, despite its towering gaze.” FINAL DAYS greets us, hands spread in an eerie pose. With ALONG THE WAY , we encounter two figures with heavy heads and perhaps heavier hearts, holding each other’s backs in support. The figure in AT THIS TIME stands with its head tilted back,

hands covering its face, in a state of exasperation or perhaps despair. As with all KAWS characters, the poses and gestures of these figures convey a wide range of emotions.

End of Interpretive Panel text.

The exhibition continues in the AI Green Gallery on the east end of the building.

AUDIO 4

UNTITLED (HARING)

1997

acrylic on existing advertising poster

Audio description of the work

This large portrait orientation work is a painting done on a black and white poster. The original poster features a photograph of artist Keith Haring.

In this framed work the height of an average person and 4 feet wide Haring is captured larger than life from the waist up. He is in profile facing left, drawing on a blank area on the left of a subway ad displayed inside a subway station. Haring is a white man with short curly mid-tone hair. He wears glasses and a leather jacket with the word champion on a patch on his left sleeve.

He is drawing with chalk onto a dark background with his right hand. The drawing resembles both a cowboy hat and a UFO, and he is connecting it to a pyramid with a series of vertical dashes. On the right the ad appears to say, "now roast without risk" above a photo of a dark roast turkey.

KAWS has painted onto this poster in an uncomplicated cartoonish style. Here he has added a character named "Bendy". Bendy looms over Haring's shoulder as he works. Bendy is a yellow creature with a big head with x's for eyes, commas for nostrils and grey crossbones shaped protrusions. Bendy's head narrows to a serpentine body which wraps under Haring's right arm and around his body once and through his open left hand held at waist height as if Haring is grasping onto its tail directly in front of him.

KAWS has signed the work with the year "97" and a copyright symbol and written what looks to be Keith Haring's name but only the Keith is visible.

This work is hung in between two other pieces which are existing advertising posters that KAWS painted over.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

By the late 1990s, KAWS (spelled “K” “A” “W” “S”) transitioned from graffiti tagging to more covert public interactions, like these advertisement interventions. American artist Keith Haring (1958–1990), whom KAWS credits as a pivotal influence, once said, “The public has a right to art ... Art is for everybody.” This principle is fundamental to KAWS’s practice.

KAWS developed his artistic vocabulary as he made his interventions. First, he took the posters out of their vitrines and brought them home. There, he carefully painted over them, ensuring no brushstrokes were visible and making his intervention appear seamless. He then put them back in their cases for public consumption. It was around this time that he fine-tuned his motif of the soft skull and crossbones with X’d-out eyes. Here, his amoeba-like character BENDY snakes around Haring, who is pictured making his own intervention in a New York City subway station.

End of Exhibition label text.

AUDIO 5

THE NEWS series

2017

acrylic on canvas

Audio description of the work

Nine equally sized circle shaped paintings each with a two foot or 50 cm diameter displayed in a grid of three rows of three comprise this work. They use a bright neon palette of pinks, blues, greens and yellows; these are also a typical colour palette in KAWS's depictions of graphic or cartoon-inspired works. Kaws uses opposing colours to create contrasts.

These round canvases show layers of motifs used by KAWS. Each canvas is like a closeup of another work, in a way drawing focus to a particular aspect of something larger. They are dynamic and playful. Most of them have black outlined eyeballs that have x'd out pupils which take up half or more of the canvas. A third have eyelids and a couple have eyelashes. There is a tongue and digits of a hand and most have a line or wave of colour at the centre. They do not form an image when viewed all together, rather they present a detail that serves as the focal point for each canvas.

On each canvas KAWS plays with optical illusions, the 3D effect of which can become apparent for many people if looking at the works with a fixed gaze. This is accomplished through the subtle addition of shadows which are painted on. These shadows create a sense of depth and aspects of the painting appear to pop out from the canvas.

End of Audio Description.

Exhibition label text:

This series of nine circular canvases, or tondos, highlight KAWS's cartoon-inspired colour palette and polished painting skills. A "tondo"—a Renaissance term derived from the Italian "rotondo" or "round"—refers to a circular artwork that allows painters to emphasize the middle of an image by containing a scene within a frame. With each of these works, KAWS upends this notion by painting a zoomed-in, chaotic focal point of what appears to be a wider scene. Although the works appear abstract at first glance, a closer inspection reveals glimpses of X'd-out eyes, multihued teeth, gloved hands, and other identifiable features. It is up to us, the viewer, to imagine how these characters might extend into a different universe, a place beyond the limitations of the circular frame.

End of Exhibition label text.