



# "Healing"

CURATED BY TAKASHI MURAKAMI

**CHIHO AOSHIMA, YUKIMASA IDA, EMI KURAYA, KASING LUNG  
MADSAKI, TAKASHI MURAKAMI, SHIN MURATA, OB  
OTANI WORKSHOP, AYA TAKANO, TENGAONE, YUJI UEDA**

*HEALING*

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***When [artworks] are produced, the artists and all those involved continue to work as though in prayer, never stopping until "beauty" that is apparent to any beholder emerges, no matter how many years it takes. As the times change, doubts may emerge, and the purpose for forging ahead may get lost at times. But when they force the production to propel through the finish line, fundamental "beauty" emerges; that is when a work worthy of devotion is born. – Takashi Murakami***

Perrotin Matignon is pleased to present *Healing*, an exhibition of works by Kaikai Kiki artists Chiho Aoshima, Yukimasa Ida, Emi Kuraya Kasing Lung, MADSAKI, Takashi Murakami, Shin Murata, ob, Otani Workshop, Aya Takano, TENGAone and Yuji Ueda.

This exhibition comes after a first episode of this group show curated by Takashi Murakami last summer at Perrotin Seoul.

*Healing* explores the multifaceted and eccentric universe that is Takashi Murakami's *Superflat* and the far-reaching and deep influence of Japanese ceramic arts in the context of *Bubblewrap*<sup>1</sup>. Where in the West art is predicated on the differences between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture, 'original' and 'derivative', 'art' and 'commodity', *Superflat* establishes itself as an independent lineage of Japanese contemporary art that roots itself in anime and manga.

**Takashi Murakami** first coined the term *Superflat* in his examination of postwar Japanese society, where the boundary between traditional and contemporary culture was perceived to be 'flat'. Past and present, original and derivative, highbrow culture and lowbrow culture merge as one in *Superflat*, subverting the discourse of Western conventional divisions and challenging their legacy in the contemporary art landscape with an idiosyncratic Japanese sensibility.

The radical affiliation and lack of distinction between post-war Japan's fine arts and popular arts is strongly linked to *otaku*<sup>2</sup> culture. In its infantile and marginal existence, the world of *otaku* could be seen as similar to post-war Japanese society. This isolated world establishes one of fantasy, rooted in the need to overcome reality – a reality where *otaku* (as social outcasts) are excluded from mainstream society and its value systems.

The theme of alienation and/or disconnect is prevalent in the works of **MADSAKI** and **TENGAONE**, although not themselves *otaku*. Both artists are heavily influenced by graffiti and use the medium to express the frustration and feeling of estrangement brought about by their bicultural identities. Street art is also an influence for **Kasing Lung**, whose work is influenced by the economic and cultural boom of the 80's. The fastness and emergency of life run throughout **Yukimasa Ida's** work, which is deeply marked by the theme of "ICHI-GO-ICHI-E" (a once in a lifetime moment).

In a *Superflat* world, the *otaku* becomes the true driver of contemporary culture. As part of the new generation of artists who grew up in an environment where video games and social media have always been part of daily life, also known as Japan's SNS generation, **ob** explores the dreamy filter of the feminine psyche through kawaii elements: sweet, saturated colour; cartoon-like forms; and over-scaled heads with wide eyes and baby faces.

This intersection of reality and fantasy is an important dimension of *Superflat* that is perhaps best illustrated in the works of **Chiho Aoshima** and **Aya Takano**. Both artists present the viewer with fantastical worlds of a utopian nature. Aoshima's liminal spaces are populated by female characters who are transformed into mountains and rivers, disguised as fairies or represented as living creatures in the natural world. This breakdown of the boundaries between humans and animals or plants, and between organic creatures and inanimate objects is echoed in Aya Takano's oeuvre. The latter's floating figures, unphased by the restrictions of gravity, are at one with the universe, conversing with other-worldly animals and plants. There is no hierarchy in either Aoshima or Takano's work, all cohabit in perfect harmony, all are equal, much like *Superflat* itself.

This soft fantasy is also reminiscent in **Emi Kuraya's** works. Her delicate brush stroke and highly-skilled drawing ability have brought up the sense light-weighted feeling in her oil painting. By her daily observations, Emi confers unique and strong personal style in each of her characters.

A new generation of Japanese ceramicists that Murakami dubs "radical artists": **Shin Murata**, **Yuji Ueda** and **Otani Workshop** shed the principle of artisanal technique and adopt the posture of artists, pushing the boundary between ceramics and sculpture (or as *Superflat* would have it, between 'commodity' and 'art'). Their unique pottery methods merge a respect for tradition and lineage with improvisation and experimentation, in a body of work informed by their love of nature and sustainable lifestyle.

*Superflat* focuses not only on contemporary art, but extends itself to contemporary ceramics. However, it is *Bubblewrap*, a term humorously coined<sup>3</sup> by Takashi Murakami to describe the interim period between Mono-ha and *Superflat* overlapping with Japan's bubble economy, that best reflects the modern realm of ceramics. Indeed, the rise and maturation of ceramic art is juxtaposed with Japan's Bubble Economy era. It is at this time that the "ceramics of modern life" appear. These ceramics represent a shift and new phase in the history of ceramics: their popularization. Ceramics thus become, like manga and anime, another popular art of post-war Japanese culture.

The exhibition features for the first-time ink calligraphies on coffee filter papers by **Takashi Murakami**. In these imaginative calligraphic works on used coffee-filters, Murakami brings together a number of his key concerns into an innovative form. The artist studied calligraphy from when he was five to when he was seventeen – mostly at the insistence of his mother, who is passionate about calligraphy and talks about it "in every conversation that we have", as Murakami himself says.

The five used Chemex coffee-filter calligraphies have a strong poetic and Zen Buddhist quality: the work displayed in the middle is the character for "beauty" (either *bi* or *utsukushi* in Japanese pronunciation) surrounded by an Enso, the freehand circle drawn with a brush that followers of Zen Buddhism paint as a form of spiritual practice, and of free, unencumbered motion. For Murakami, born in 1962, it is also a reminder of the way in which technology, and computer culture more specifically, grew hand in hand with the rise of a New Age form of philosophy, in which both high-tech and meditative practices were getting popular.

*Healing* illustrates the undeniable importance of *Superflat* and *Bubblewrap* in the contemporary art scene, disrupting the symbolic order of Western Art History. Incessantly moving between past, present and future, while mixing high culture and popular culture indiscriminately, is a "superflat" group of works devoid of prejudice or boundaries: a truly free expression of creativity and beauty.

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<sup>1</sup> "After Mono-ha, the next established art movement is Superflat, but that means the interim period overlapping the years of Japan's economic bubble has yet to be named, and I think calling it "Bubblewrap" suits it well. It especially makes sense if you incorporate the realm of ceramics." – Takashi Murakami

<sup>2</sup> *Otaku* is a Japanese term for people with consuming interests, particularly in anime and manga. The *otaku* subculture began in the 1980s and continued to grow with the resignation of such individuals to become social outcasts and the expansion of the internet.

<sup>3</sup> *Bubblewrap* is a word play on 'bubble economy' and 'bubble wrap', the material used to wrap and protect ceramics. Takashi Murakami is suggesting bubble wrap is reflective of the Japanese aesthetic of appreciation of fragility and honorable poverty.

## MORE ABOUT THE ARTISTS



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### CHIHO AOSHIMA

Chiho Aoshima (born in Tokyo in 1974) started her art practice in the 1990s, rising to prominence with the international debut of her masterful, digitally rendered work in the acclaimed Superflat exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2001.

A self-taught artist and an early member of the Japanese art collective Kaikai Kiki, she began working in Adobe Illustrator before expanding into traditional mediums namely drawing, watercolor and, more recently, ceramics. Otherworldly figures and dream-like landscapes depicting child-like spirits, anthropomorphic flora, fauna and even skyscrapers, feature in Aoshima's Illustrator-drawn prints and murals, hand-painted works and digital animations (in collaboration with New Zealand animator Bruce Ferguson). Distinctly feminine and spiritual, the worlds and their inhabitants Aoshima has created are built on the natural world, playful and often humorous, belying melancholy and darkness. This duality is to be found in other characteristic themes – utopia/dystopia, nature/technology, natural/artificial – through which she explores ideas relating to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Deeply influenced by Japanese religious and cultural beliefs, her work is rooted in Shintoism, folklore and art historical traditions, which she interprets in a contemporary context to express her views on the future, humankind's coexistence with nature, and the realities of our rapidly changing world.



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### YUKIMASA IDA

Born in Tottori Prefecture, Japan in 1990, Yukimasa Ida completed a master's degree in painting at Tokyo University of the Arts in 2019. In addition to participating in the 2016 VOCA exhibition, Ida won the Special Jury Prize in the 2016 Contemporary Art Foundation Awards. In 2017, he became the youngest person to take part in the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation Auction. Based in Tokyo, Ida is active throughout the world. Running throughout his work is the theme of once-in-a-lifetime occurrences and unrepeatable experiences. Along with his paintings, Ida has expanded his practice to include three-dimensional works and a variety of other media.



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### EMI KURAYA

Emi Kuraya was born in 1995 in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan.

After holding a solo exhibition at Hidari Zingaro and becoming represented by Kaikai Kiki in 2018, Emi Kuraya has gained further popularity through her participation in Hong Kong Art Basel and Frieze New York.



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### **KASING LUNG**

Born in Hong Kong in 1972, Kasing Lung moved to the Netherlands with his family as a child. Having grown up in Europe whereby fairy tales and folklores are deeply rooted in people's culture, Kasing quickly developed a profound interest in the fantastical and began creating his very own magical realm.

Now a celebrated illustrator, Kasing gave life to countless characters under his pen and brush. Amongst them, the bunny-eared Labubu is the most well-known and makes recurring appearances in the artist's extensive oeuvre.



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### **MADSAKI**

A graduate of New York City's Parsons School of Design (BFA, 1996), MADSAKI was born in Osaka, Japan in 1974 and raised in New Jersey, USA – experiences between two cultures that formed his aesthetics and personality. While much of MADSAKI's work centers on his interest in art history and critiquing mass culture with references to slang, movies and manga characters, the artist has recently been exploring more personal, intimate topics. To express this visually, MADSAKI developed a signature style using spray paint as a fine art medium, stemming from the fact that he has never participated in illegal graffiti on the streets. The artist is particularly known for his Wannabe series, which at first glance humorously targets old masters, yet their deeper meaning is a reoccurring theme that can be found throughout MADSAKI's artistic practice - an attempt to use laughter and humor as both distraction and therapy for his internal turmoil.



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### **TAKASHI MURAKAMI**

Takashi Murakami (born in Tokyo in 1962), who has a PhD in nihonga painting, combines the most cutting-edge techniques with the precision and virtuosity of traditional Japanese art. Inspired by manga and kawaii culture, his irresistible world is peopled by monstrous and charming characters alike, facetiously portrayed as descendants of past myths. His theory of the Superflat aesthetic, which he introduced in 2001 with the trilogy exhibition he curated (the third part was titled "Little Boy," a reference to the code name for the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945), attempts to blur the boundaries between popular art and high art; the Superflat movement has explored the evolution of Japan's understanding of its post-Hiroshima condition and the interrelationships between vanguard art, manga and anime, and their forerunner, ukiyo-e woodblock prints. The absence of perspective, the two-dimensionality of ancient Japanese art, filters into every medium.

Since his first monographic exhibition outside Japan in 1995 at Perrotin, Murakami has achieved recognition as one of the most prominent contemporary artists of his time, and his work has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions at museums and art institutions throughout the world.



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### SHIN MURATA

Shin Murata (b. 1970 in Kyoto) graduated from Kyoto Seika University's Ceramics Department in 1993, completing his graduate studies the following year. He established an independent studio following his apprenticeship under ceramicist Yoshitaka Araki. After building his own kiln in Kita-ku, Kyoto, in 2003, he went on to hold over ten exhibitions a year all across Japan. Despite such a popularity, Murata stopped showing new works in 2016 in order to delve deeper into his craft. In pursuit of the ultimate harmony between ceramics and food, he founded a platform along with his wife Fusako and Takashi Murakami to exhibit and sell ceramics, calligraphy, and art. The store, called Tonari no Murata, opened in 2020 after a three-year preparation period. Kaikai Kiki continues to support its operations.



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### OB

Born in 1992, ob is the most important of the many artists who emerged as part of Japan's SNS generation in 2010. As a university student in Kyoto, she organized and curated several local exhibitions after reaching out to other artists her age through the illustration communication service pixiv. This culminated in the exhibition "Wassyoi" for which she received much attention and acclaim. The name "Wassyoi" itself stems from the chant used by revelers in Japanese street festivals. As part of the new generation of artists who grew up in an environment where video games and social media have always been part of daily life, she explores the dreamy filter of the feminine psyche through the recurring motif of a wide-eyed young girl in her delicate, atmospheric paintings. ob collaborated with renowned cosmetics line shu uemura in 2013 and has been featured numerous times in art fairs overseas.



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### OTANI WORKSHOP

Make no mistake: despite the name, Otani Workshop (born in 1980 in Shiga Prefecture, Japan) does not refer to a collective of artists, but to a singular, an eminently singular sculptor who has become the leading representative of Japanese ceramics. Silent and literally bulging heads, figures with their arms raised like praying figures, monumental middle fingers extended upwards, anthropomorphic vases, children, animals, soils, bronzes: Otani Workshop's bestiary is a world in itself, a world in which dreams and tales converge as well as fantasies and daydreams, a world in which the queenly imagination and the kingly gesture triumph, in which forces and forms meet.



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### AYA TAKANO

Painter, illustrator, sci-fi writer and manga artist, Aya Takano (born in 1976 in Saitama, Japan) belongs to Kaikai Kiki, the artistic production studio created in 2001 by Takashi Murakami. Inspired by all art forms, from erotic stamps of the Edo Period to impressionism, from Osamu Tezuka to Gustav Klimt, the artist has built a universe all her own. A universe made of infinite worlds, all means of escaping reality, gravity and its restraints, to attain a certain form of transcendence.

Aya Takano's inner journeys wind their way into delicate works that convey a disturbing impression, somewhere between eroticism and impertinence. In a bedroom or in the metro, in front of the skyscrapers of a megalopolis or on the moon, naïve and androgynous girls are sketched out in thin, sharp lines. The artist's mythology has constructed itself little by little, through her creations and visions of the unknown. In March 2011, a violent tsunami struck the north-eastern coasts of Japan and led to the nuclear accident of Fukushima. A real wake-up call for the artist, this catastrophe deeply influenced her work. Preferring oil paint, which is more natural, to acrylic paint, for example, Aya Takano seems to pursue a new artistic quest, both humble and spiritual, influenced by a unique interest in science and guided by an absolute respect for nature and human life.



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### TENGAONE

TENGAone (born in 1977) is a street artist based in Tokyo. His alias derives from the notion of "Ga ga Tenshoku (TenGa)", which translates to "Art is My Calling."

TENGAone grew up in a neighborhood near an American military base where he frequently encountered American-style graffiti such as tags and throw-ups done by the personnel who had brought their home country's art movement over to Japan. This firsthand exposure to graffiti culture had a profound effect on the artist, and at the age of 14 he began creating his own graffiti using spray paint.

His practice encompasses a wide range of genres including street graffiti and murals on commercial and public facilities, as well as sculpture and graphic design.



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### YUJI UEDA

Yuji Ueda was born in the Shiga Prefecture of Japan in 1975, and currently lives and works in Kamiasamiya, Shigaraki, Shiga. Through his experimentation with firing techniques, Ueda has created a unique process in which he employs whole blocks of Choseki feldspar, or builds up irregular clay surfaces that can be fired in anagama ("cave kilns"). The resulting works incorporate cracks and chips that, in conventional pottery, could be dismissed as imperfections, but in Ueda's works are a symbol of respect towards the beauty of natural clay.

## MORE ABOUT TAKASHI MURAKAMI'S COFFEE FILTERS CALLIGRAHY



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Iconoclastic, cutting-edge, close to pop idols and high-end aspirational fashion brands, Takashi Murakami is, surprisingly for some, in constant dialogue with Japanese ancient art, both classical and folk. Be it ceramics or painting, calligraphy or religious and folk symbolism, Murakami fills his work with references to ancient poetry, reworked yokai (Japanese supernatural spirits, that can be both benign or less so, and must be ingratiated by humans not to incur their mischief and wrath) characters and reimagined classical themes.

But given the high-energy and creativity of the artist, this is no conversation with the dead: rather, it's a constant engagement with what makes the past contemporary, and what lingers in today's awareness of yesterday's greatness.

In these imaginative calligraphic works on used coffee-filters, Murakami brings together a number of his key concerns into an innovative form. As he says in his main Instagram account @takashipom (one of the most frequent and direct channels through which he communicates to his followers), the artist studied calligraphy from when he was five to when he was seventeen – mostly at the insistence of his mother, who is passionate about calligraphy and talks about it “in every conversation that we have”, as Murakami himself says.

The five used Chemex coffee-filter calligraphies have a strong poetic and Zen Buddhist quality: the work displayed in the middle is the character for “beauty” (either *bi* or *utsukushi* in Japanese pronunciation) surrounded by an Enso, the freehand circle drawn with a brush that followers of Zen Buddhism paint as a form of spiritual practice, and of free, unencumbered motion. For Murakami, born in 1962, it is also a reminder of the way in which technology, and computer culture more specifically, grew hand in hand with the rise of a New Age form of philosophy, in which both high-tech and meditative practices were getting popular. The pair of work on the left hand side of the Bi-Enso painting can be seen as calligraphic observations of one moment in time (the characters in the first one mean “Blue Flower”, while the second has characters for “Blue White Summer Sky”). The fourth painting from the left, with the characters for Snow Moon Flower, or *Setsugetsu Ka* in Japanese, refer to a Chinese poem by Bai Jiuyi, a Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet, a devout Zen Buddhist practitioner, who has had a very strong impact on Japanese literature, and became particularly en vogue in the Edo period (1603-1868). The last piece has the characters “Snow Bird Plum” written on it, and the melding together of high and low has seldom been so explicit: a normally discarded material, like used coffee-filters, which, on a second look (and careful cleaning and priming) produce aesthetically compelling effects like a spontaneous ink painting, together with brush-paint calligraphy and classical references.

Murakami seems to say that Healing, as this show is called, has to happen by treasuring waste, our past and our present, in ways that are different from what we have done so far.

Ilaria Maria Sala  
October, 2020

## MORE ABOUT SHIN MURATA'S KOMAINU



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Shin Murata, born in Kyoto in 1970, received a Master in ceramics at Kyoto Seika University. After some years working on more commercial wares, he decided to devote himself fully to achieve “the ultimate in ceramic art”: a longing for an ineffable communion with a practice that involves everything from geology to physics and chemistry, to creativity and artistic inclination.

The sets of komainu presented here are Murata’s most recent work, which he turned to after a series of small Amabie figures, legendary mermaids believed to have the power to stop plagues. Murata had entered this fraught year with high hopes – after undergoing cancer surgery and debilitating post-op treatment in 2019. All this is reported in detail in his Instagram account, @muratashinwolf - including the painful days when his cancer treatment made him unable to use his body and hands for weeks at a time. However, as his body healed, and his ceramic exploration got into full mode again, the world started to get sick. Which is when Murata turned to traditional Japanese mythology and started producing Amabie. The project, which consisted of many small pieces of playful and creative figures, allowed him to experiment with many new sets of glazes, some of which he has applied also to these other mythical creatures, which are believed to protect homes, shrines, and temples.

Komainu’s origins are not clear, but they are quite certainly the grandchildren of the Chinese guardian lions (which may have been inspired by earlier guardian lions in India). They arrived in Japan via Korea (Komainu means probably “Korean dog”, from an ancient name given to Korea) likely in the VIII century – and are today particularly popular in Okinawa. Murata’s komainu come as the classic pair A and Un: one slightly smaller than the other, with an open mouth, showing a full set of teeth.

The Japanese komainu is nearly always represented squatting on its hind legs, while its front legs are erect: to build this shape, the artist has to prevent collapse by reinforcing the hollow forms (which cannot be filled, otherwise they would be extremely heavy, and explode in the kiln) and building a support for the chest before the firing. Murata uses a method known as coiling to build the animals: by adding long strips of hand-rounded clay (coils), the potter can keep the highest control of the shape that is being created, while maintaining the overall piece as light as possible. Once the form is complete, Murata decorates the komainu with different types of glazes and slips (liquid clay, to which pigments may have been added): the most traditional ones are in blue and white on porcelain or very white ceramic, a style called sometsuke in Japan, created by painting the clay with a cobalt oxide wash. Others have thicker glazes made from ash, or glazes with high levels of iron oxide, that gives a reddish color. Then, he turns them over to the kiln Gods in his studio in Kumogahata, north of Kyoto, where he chops wood and mixes locally excavated soil to prepare his clay and glazes, which he then fires in a wood kiln of his own construction.

These have been complicated times, for Murata as for many in the world: battling illness and loss, while watching a pandemic unfold, and seeing the effects of climate change – painfully obvious in the woods and mountains that surround Kumogahata. The charming komainu that stare at us with their fierce yet friendly eyes, remind us that without preserving the harmony of nature there is no health, no art, and no beauty.

Ilaria Maria Sala  
October, 2020

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**Ilaria Maria Sala** is an award winning writer and ceramic artist based in Hong Kong.

She has been living in Asia since 1988 - first in Beijing, then Tokyo and Hong Kong, with long detours in Shanghai and Kathmandu. Her byline has appeared in Le Monde, the New York Times, the Guardian, ArtNews, El Periódico and La Stampa, among others. Her latest book is Pechino 1989, published by Una Città in 2019.

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