

MR.

Beyond the Alley, There...

New York, 24th Street

March 17-April 23, 2022



Mr., *Kumiko—Pink Spring Flowers—*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas mounted on wood panel, 78.74 x 26.5 x 2.01 inches (200 x 67.3 x 5.1 cm)
© Mr. / Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London

PRESS CONTACTS

Sarah Levine
Global Director of Marketing & Communications
slevine@lehmannmaupin.com

Alejandro Jassan
Associate Director of Press Relations
alejandro@lehmannmaupin.com

Allison Thorpe
Sutton Communications
allison@suttoncomms.com

Lehmann Maupin presents *Beyond the Alley, There...*, a solo exhibition of new work by artist Mr. (b. 1969, Cupa, lives and works in Saitama, Japan). This exhibition marks the artist's sixth solo presentation with Lehmann Maupin, and precedes a highly-anticipated forthcoming solo exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum, AZ, opening in November 2022.

Reflecting his long-standing commitment to critically examining how both images and desire circulate in global internet culture, *Beyond the Alley, There...* features new, large-scale paintings, shaped head and body paintings, and works on paper. Central to Mr.'s practice is *otaku*, an increasingly prevalent and popular Japanese subculture of fandom oriented around reclusion and retreat into immersive fantasy worlds, particularly manga and anime. Interested in bridging popular visual and high-art cultures, the artist has compared himself to a translator, positioning anime, manga, and other hallmarks of *otaku* in the realm of fine art for a global audience. Far from a dispassionate observer, Mr. is himself immersed in *otaku* culture, and has noted that his works are at times reflections of his personal interests in fantasy and imaginative world-building. As he reinterprets *otaku* aesthetics for an international art world, Mr. is simultaneously outsider and insider, reporter and diarist.

Mr. is particularly well known for his associations with Superflat, a contemporary postmodern Japanese movement that draws inspiration from the compressed treatment of space and bold planes of color that appear throughout Japanese art and culture—from 19th-century *ukiyo-e* prints, to pop art, to anime. Mr.'s influences are expansive and eclectic, and the artist also has a particular affinity for the Arte Povera movement for its use of unconventional materials and its reverence for the detritus of everyday life. Across his practice, Mr. has reinterpreted Arte Povera's central concerns for a contemporary context of environmental catastrophe, and prior work has responded directly to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami and subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster in his native Japan.

In *Beyond the Alley, There...*, Mr. conjures a fantasy world that is paradoxically inundated with the quotidian and the commercial, and emojis, fast-food logos, slang phrases, and other artifacts of the ordinary appear throughout this latest body of work. In *Sakura—The End of Summer, Toward Autumn—* (2021), a swirl of cartoon icons, social media notifications, and innocuous phrases in brightly colored bubble letters are reflected in the child's wide eyes. Enormous eyes with reflections painted on their surfaces are at the center of all of these shaped

compositions, subtly alluding to the complex inner lives Mr. creates for each of his characters. Other works in the exhibition reflect Mr.'s recently heightened interest in layered surfaces and urban spaces. In these compositions, central figures begin to recede, becoming integrated into a saturated visual field of graffitied surfaces and storefronts. Despite their fictive nature, the artist's many-layered, imaginative worlds are never disconnected from the real, and at every turn Mr. reveals commercial imagery and the visual culture of the mundane to be saturated with desire and fantasy.



Mr., *Kumiko—Pink Spring Flowers—*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas mounted on wood panel, 78.74 x 26.5 x 2.01 inches (200 x 67.3 x 5.1 cm) © Mr. / Kaiikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London.

Mr. (b. 1969, Cupa, Japan, lives and works in Saitama, Japan) approaches the visual language of anime and manga as a means of examining Japanese culture, fusing high and low forms of contemporary expression. Like his fellow Superflat artists, such as Takashi Murakami, Mr. utilizes otaku, the “cute” Japanese subculture that is marked by an obsession with adolescence, manga, anime, and video games. Alongside his interest in otaku is an engagement with the 1960s Italian art movement, Arte Povera. Inspired by these artists’ use of unconventional materials and purposeful amateurism, Mr.’s earliest magna-style paintings and drawings were on store receipts, takeout menus, and other scraps of transactional detritus.

Mr. graduated from the Department of Fine Arts, Sokei Art School in Tokyo in 1996. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at the HOW Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2021); Musée Guimet, Paris, France (2019), Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA (2014); and Musée d’Art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon, France (2006).

Select group exhibitions featuring his work include *MURAKAMI VS MURAKAMI*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2019); *Bishojo: Young Pretty Girls in Art History*, Museum of National Taipei University of Education, Taipei, Taiwan (2019); *Monsters, Manga and Murakami*, Musée en Herbe, Paris, France (2019); *Megane To Tabisuru Bijyutsuten*, Aomori Museum of Art, Aomori, Japan (2018); *Create Your Own Original Doraemon*, Mori Art Center Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (2017); *Islands, Constellations & Galapagos*, Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama, Japan (2017); *Murakami by Murakami*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway (2017); Animamix Biennale 2015-2016, Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, South Korea (2015-16); *Kyoto-Tokyo: From Samurais to Mangas*, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco (2010); *Animate*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (2009); *KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada (2008); *RED HOT: Asian Art Today from the Chaney Family Collection*, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX (2007); and *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, Japan Society, New York, NY (2005). Mr.’s work is in numerous international public and private collections, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; and Daegu Art Museum, South Korea.



Portrait of Mr. in his Saitama, Japan studio, 2022.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Exterior of Lehmann Maupin, 501 West 24th Street, New York. Photo by Matthew Herrmann