

KAWS *THERAPY*

13 June – 9 August 2025

Bleibtreustraße 45 & 15/16, 10623 Berlin

Opening: Friday, 13 June, 6 – 8pm



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Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *THERAPY*, a solo exhibition of new works by **KAWS** at Bleibtreustraße 45 and 15/16 in Berlin. This is the artist's inaugural exhibition with the gallery.

Drawing inspiration from the vast fields of popular culture and art history, KAWS' artistic lexicon revitalises figuration with big, bold gestures and playful intricacies. His prolific body of work straddles the worlds of fine art and consumer culture to include paintings, murals and sculptures, as well as graphic and product design. In the present exhibition, KAWS' iconic hybrid cartoon characters populate a series of paintings and one larger-than-life sculpture. At once humorous and empathetic, these characters offer entryways into complex emotions and serve as prime examples of KAWS' exploration of humanity.

Installed at street level in the gallery space at Bleibtreustraße 15/16, the stainless steel sculpture *SPACE*, 2023, presents an iteration of KAWS' *COMPANION*, the original three-dimensional character first created by the artist as a small vinyl toy in 1999. Characteristically playful yet melancholic, *COMPANION* is here depicted as a towering space explorer, clad in an astronaut suit and wearing an oxygen tank on its back. Yet, instead of carrying a flag, it covers its eyes with gloved hands, suggesting a state of resignation or perhaps denial. *COMPANION*'s gloves carry the artist's iconic 'XX', usually employed to stand in for his characters' eyes. The sculpture's striking scale enhances its subtle commentary on the human condition – reflecting both our captivation with progress and space exploration, and the deeper implications of leaving Earth behind.

In his new body of paintings, KAWS continues his longstanding exploration into seriality. Against paint-stippled backgrounds, the works depict variations of KAWS' popular *CHUM* character, developed in the late 1990s. While the figures' outlines are meticulously delineated – a hard-edge quality that speaks to the artist's characteristic emphasis on colour and line – a sense of spontaneous texture is introduced through specks of paint scattered across the canvases. Recalling the immediacy of spray paint, KAWS imbues his characters with a shimmering, transcendent quality, while painted shadows lend them a near-sculptural volume.

Several compositions depict *CHUM* holding up a canvas, creating an image-within-an-image that seems to frame the act of artmaking itself. In others, *CHUM* is subjected to more existential situations, as he drowns in water or clings to the edge of a cliff. Elsewhere, he raises his palms toward the viewer – a gesture that is at once protective and apologetic. This Warholian seriality is contrasted by the plurality

of emotions CHUM expresses. Facing the uncontrollable forces that surround him, he seems to embody a sense of vulnerability.

A monumental triptych, the largest painting in the exhibition, shows a group of eleven CHUM characters each holding up a canvas, like pupils in an art class. Depicting a repeating series of undulating waves, their artworks unite to form a continuous seascape. Drawing from the artist's own experience of working in Japan, the triptych conjures a range of art historical associations, from Hokusai's seminal *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*, 1831 – one of the most reproduced images in history – to Romantic depictions of water as a source of emotional tumult and the sublime. Here, as much as in historic Japanese imagery, water may serve as a symbol with which to consider the cycle of life.

In his unique and universal style, KAWS articulates complex emotions in his mutable characters, among them fear, loneliness, vulnerability, and love. At once sculptural and flattened, depersonalised and distinctly human, his subjects collapse conventional distinctions, encouraging viewers to identify, empathise, and find common ground.

KAWS (b. 1974, Jersey City, New Jersey) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. The artist's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions in renowned institutions including Crystal Bridges Museum, Arkansas (2025); The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2024–2025); Parrish Art Museum, Watermill (2024); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2023–2024); Serpentine Gallery, London (2022); Mori Arts Center Gallery, Tokyo; The Brooklyn Museum, New York (both 2021); The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Fire Station, Qatar Museums, Doha (both 2019–2020); Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2017); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2016–2017); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton (2016); CAC Málaga (2014); Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia (2013–2014); High Art Museum, Atlanta (2012); and Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield (2010–2011), among others.

KAWS' work is in the collections of major international institutions including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; CAC Málaga; City Museum, St. Louis; Hall Art Foundation, Reading; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; K11 Musea, Hong Kong; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno; Pizzuti Collection, Columbus; and the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, among others.

Further Exhibitions and Events

BERLIN

Leilah Babirye
Ekimyula Ekijankunene (The Gorgeous Grotesque / Die prächtige Groteske)
1 May – 28 June 2025
Goethestraße 2/3
1 May – 4 June 2025
Bleibtreustraße 15/16 2025
10623 Berlin

Sergey Kononov
Celso and the past
1 May – 4 June 2025
Bleibtreustraße 45
10785 Berlin

Thomas Struth
25 April – 1 June 2025
Potsdamer Straße 77-87
10785 Berlin

PARIS

Sarah Crowner
Tableux en Laine, Pierres en Bronze
26 April – 21 June 2025
46 & 57, rue du Temple
75004 Paris

LONDON

Jake Longstreth
California Landscapes
24 April – 8 June 2025
41 Dover Street
London W1S 4NS

MARFA

Richard Prince
Posters
17 May – 7 December 2025
1976 Antelope Hills Road
Marfa, Texas

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