

## Takashi Murakami Biography:

Murakami was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1962 and grew up in a household that placed a high value on art. Japanese popular culture informed his outlook, but he also felt the impact of Western society, particularly the popular culture of the United States. Murakami became exposed to some aspects of American life during a time when his father worked at an American naval base, and he also absorbed a great deal through imported movies and music. Murakami wanted to be an artist when he grew up. He was particularly interested in animation and comics, and he felt that studying art would help him improve his drawing skills.

He enrolled in the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in the early 1980s. There he studied “Nihonga”, a nineteenth-century style of Japanese painting that combines Japanese subject matter with European painting techniques. He earned his bachelor of fine arts degree in 1986 and then continued his studies to earn a master's degree in 1988 and a PhD in 1993.

Murakami began to wonder how meaningful that style was to modern day Japan and began searching for his own style. He had become increasingly drawn to the world of “manga” and “anime” and he was also fascinated by the concept of “kawaii”, a Japanese term that translates roughly to cuteness and sought ways to incorporate these popular trends into his work. Die-hard collectors acquire the merchandise and also accumulate detailed knowledge of the cartoons and comics themselves. This devotion to anime and manga and to collecting related merchandise is shared by a large community of fans referred to as “otaku”. That term, in combination with “pop,” as in pop art, has resulted in a new term, “poku” which could be used to describe Murakami's recognizable artworks.

These works, primarily paintings and sculptures, feature cartoon-like characters painted in bright colours with a shiny, almost plastic-looking surface. Murakami's best-known character is known as Mr. DOB, a mouse like creature with a round head and large, circular ears a character originally created in Hong Kong.

Murakami has been particularly praised for his public art having works displayed where they can be seen by all such as “Reversed Double Helix” at the Rockefeller Center plaza in Midtown

Manhattan, New York and “Wink” which delighted commuters in the Vanderbilt Hall, part of New York City's Grand Central Terminal.

While Murakami had become well known in art circles in Japan and the US by the turn of the new century, it was his astonishingly successful handbag designs for Louis Vuitton (created in conjunction with designer Marc Jacobs) in 2003, that helped cement his celebrity status, especially in Japan, where he suddenly achieved rock-star-like status.

Murakami's method of producing paintings results in works that have no depth or perspective, the images seem flat and two-dimensional. Murakami has dubbed this style "superflat," which is, in part, a tribute to the two-dimensional style of some Japanese cartoons. The term also reflects the smashing of distinctions between fine art and commercial art, between high culture and low. In “Interview” Murakami said “In Japan, there is no high and there is no low. It's all flat.”

From international exhibitions at the Louvre, MOMA and MORI museum, there seems to be no stopping the growing popularity of Takashi Murakami!