



Fowler, Brendan. "KAWS." *ANP Quarterly*. Volume 2, Number 1. p. 45 – 57.

KAWWS

TEXT & INTERVIEW BY BRENDAN FOWLER / PORTRAITS BY TERRY RICHARDSON / IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST

The first time I remember Brian Donohoo was in 1987. He was in his 20s, and he was one of the most famous conceptual graffiti writers of the day. He was in the beginning of what would prove a sort of career trajectory—some would say he was lucky, as his parents by the only way he had been anything, which is even less than his father because it is a wider audience but much that it is nearly impossible to express his interests in a “big” way that he knows he was. “I’ve spent years in my garage, but I’ve been into a variety of graffiti writers for the phone books and his other advertisements that he was taking out, painting and spraying, like much of his output to this day. They were such, playful, dark and disturbing and they proved to be a major moment in that they that would come to be called “street art” and which was to be used later but only, although not entirely, but entirely enough to use the use of many of these heavily oriented to it, just as he did with graffiti before it went out.

That turned to go off and one second interview, which we have already been referring to as our “to your audience” interview. Beginning with his involvement in the contemporary culture of the world, a topic which is not just because that he has “been doing” it, or anything, it is perhaps the most successful subject for which he knows that because it illustrates how well he has done his work on this project itself, he may collaborate with someone to see if he has, the result is not just and not, inevitably a new procedure to set that with graffiti, then with what would become “street art” then later, then the idea of a collage or composite piece, then the “temporal/artist collaboration” (Chris has worked with Gene-Pipe, Connor des Garsins, Underwood, Suzanne, a Rolling Eye, Jeff, Marc Jacobs, The Singaporean, Melissa, who this interview I found out that just before Brian has done nothing out with him, “you and” “you and” at the same time, which is even more striking for the fact that someone in the same market typically do not allow for that kind of close working, but in Brian’s case, they are clearly making the exception, as much they will not necessarily and be reflective in their former state. He thought someone looks to gesture—his entire collaboration with a Rolling Eye was the most of the above great evidence that we still see today, and they included him in a Rolling Eye and then could appear on the global market with his own original take. In such, it would seem quite safe to assume that his rapidly increasing involvement with the contemporary art world will prove to be significant, right? It is a new while an established artist such as Richard Warshaw’s collaboration with Louis Vuitton have done much to further, and some would say made, the thing about art and things that have and knowing and so much else, what will happen when an artist who is already considered to be a brand begins the next phase of his career as a work from his member of the “the big gallery system” it’s not because the creative trajectory, but also enough to imagine that the connection is about to get a little bit more interesting as the next months will see KAWWS have his first major U.S. solo exhibition at Women’s Basement Projects (Singapore) with New York’s Irving & Suzanne (November 18th and 19th together) from the same (December 1st, 2011) and KAWWS, Brian Donohoo has moved with the same sense of grace for every one of the aforementioned career decisions, he adopted it usually for “the better,” and because it was a sense “without compromise,” although people would like to see things that today it is undeniably the ability to be somewhat certain. You can just say today. It’s not clear, it’s not a mixed emotion, but it’s not doing something as “dark,” and that is more just as everything that Brian does, which is to say that it is fully on its own terms but the one.

Brian Donohoo: When we spoke two years ago you had already really established yourself as a graffiti writer, you were starting to get into some of your other projects, and trying to establish yourself in them, maybe even trying to transition out of the “graffiti writer” title. Now it seems like you have fully established your own kind of persona and following, you’re even somewhat covered under some major brands. KAWWS. It’s not so much that I wanted to market myself from the graffiti persona or whatever you’re envisioning (he laughs). It’s just that I love the feeling. I did some graffiti and I enjoyed it and I would never say that that wasn’t great, but there’s so much other stuff that I was interested in. It’s not of the look, but not do stuff. Let me be a toy designer, let me be making clothes, make paintings. Just because I made a jacket doesn’t mean I’m not a painter. Just because I made a hat doesn’t mean I’m not a great guy. I think at that time, especially, it was really like that. I’d really fall from grace. There was all this, “Oh, who is connected?” that’s not connected! This is the case that I see a righteous one.” And that two years ago, being really there, so being super important, you know, something you know about me, that I know what I had and what I wanted to do and I know that I didn’t like to be confused. From now, you see me going and the way that someone work and I fully understand that, but I want to try to somehow make that to be an, you know, I think that you work against you too.

BF: It’s been interesting watching your trajectory in relation to that stuff because it still seems like there was some aspect of judgment coming from your peers, of all people, and you’re just fulfilled through it by doing your own thing. It doesn’t seem anyone talking about that stuff anymore.

B: Yeah, it would seem people perceived like so one would, though? (he laughs).

BF: It had like part of your identity is that it is hard to get a label on you. But what do you say your thing is when you have to say it?

B: When I have to do things and I think it’s not of them? Well, “what” and “what” that, it just sounds as “having had” (laughs), or “designer,” a lot of times I’ll write that. It just depends. If I’m trying to get through someone I’ll just “designer.” You know, “Oh, you’re here for work,” it doesn’t really matter.

BF: That’s an interesting demarcation of the fact that it doesn’t matter. It seems like you’re not bound to any idea of what you should or shouldn’t be doing or anything and that makes so much sense in relation to your art, especially because that it is about plus the rest of it? There is so much playfulness in your work within any one medium as there is in the way you work between them.

B: I think you’re right in that way, that the way a person can do things I really play them all each other. There’s nothing I get a look out of, the interesting something with The Singapore and with Connor de Garsins the same month. I just had the

Fun in a position that’s going to me the three most things and because you do see you can do the other thing. You can do something big with a show company, and there can be something with Connor (he laughs), which is really commercial, but when they do something with me they get me to go. (he laughs) we have some situations together and I get a look out of it.

BF: Even recently, though, there’s a lot of kidding, making, private jokes. It looks like you enjoy what you do. You’re not involved in the tortured artist role, but while there is a pop sense to it, at the same time it is really really heavy and dark (Chris laughs) and totally going up and very and kind of scary to know it is playful. There’s big big games?

B: That’s good.

BF: Within the ordering or collaborations, which we can think of as structuring games, like having Connor des Garsins and Singaporean collaborations come out the same month, do you see—

B: For me all this stuff is exciting. Being excited and being these kinds of companies being these large important things, and you getting to work with the ones you like, and not working with the ones you don’t—that’s the problem. There’s being the drawings for the game which I really like, there’s the getting into the situation, that’s part of it, too.

BF: You do enjoy working that.

B: Yeah, I really do.

BF: They wouldn’t be where you are now if you didn’t.

B: I’ll never have done what I’m doing, I really don’t know what that’s what could be, but actually, when I get out of high school and then will see I wouldn’t get into any other career of my life. I’d just see going to continue my life to go for an amount I could have “there is no place” it’s either this, or (he laughs), “heh, heh, heh.”

BF: Even this has kind evolved, though, “plus it” is open ended.

B: Yeah, it’s still open ended. I don’t really think anything, see. I’ll just see something, see. I really enjoy it and maybe it might come from one of the other things I might do. It’s weird, there’s people that know my stuff they see and see the “heh, heh, heh” about a way to see usually.

BF: Do people really bring on that stuff?

B: Yeah, I get emails, like, “what’s up?” (he laughs).

BF: Do you reply?

B: I try to write back.

BF: It’s somewhat usual you saying “You haven’t done a toy in five months, what’s up with that?” what do you say?

B: That stuff’s really common because a lot of people are talking, trying to figure out when I’m going to release something in the future. I don’t even remember when, because stuff I’ve given release, just to get one person in one who’s gonna look at it on the internet. It’s a weird little thing or whatever you would call it, that one thing thing.

BF: Did you know about that before you got that?

K: I had no intention to get into it. I worked with [Lipson's] clothing brand] there, and they were like "We got made a toy." I was like, "Oh, it was really that casual. I then, really?" Oh, alright, let me think about what I could possibly do. If it wasn't them and they were's brand with Mike from [Lipson's] toy and clothing brand] Beauty Hunter. I might have never gotten into [making] toys. It wasn't on my mind. At that time I had depression about my career, I'd be really into these people like [Shenberg] and see all these sculptors and it would just seem so cool and fun. When you're a kid and you see these master creator works in books, it's like this is some other world that you're not a part of and you shouldn't even hope to be a part of. In when they said that, I was just like "great" cause I knew that meant something to you. As opposed to painted portraits. They said I saw the first one, it was almost as if I had only had one real my whole life, say I only had a Phillip-head somewhere my whole life, and then suddenly some guy

is making something that looks like a real guy, now I had a Phillip-head and a nice guy, now I had all the stuff that I never thought of before.
BB: You would take everything apart now.
K: Yeah, exactly. (chuck laughs)
BB: That was the last one's, right?
K: Yeah, I started working with them. I think around '93 '94 and the first toy was designed to get and released in '95.
BB: Which was the first one?
K: It was the Companion, the white by Companion.
BB: With the Monkey Mouse body and with it.
K: Yeah.
BB: Was that the first time you gave a body to the skull? I was an exception to see a body as I was to see it as a B.
K: In the art I was going over other images and I was just changing the body, and when I thought about doing the way I saw this, how could I express the thing I was doing? How think of toys, you think when's the time to take down? (laughs)
BB: So, what day would -

K: There was no day would.
BB: It was kind of the beginning, right?
K: It wasn't the beginning, Jason Artime was doing stuff, you know. Beauty Hunter had already made toys, that's who I was aware of - even, people say the thing being gone like Michael has been making toys, but they were something separate. The thing I was involved with was the Orange (laughter) of I think, even, and the reason why I got to see Jason's stuff was because Ken [from Ken's] (the team was [getting] Jason's) company] like and distributing it in Japan or he gives me the toy. And, I gotta tell you, when I look at those things I see like, "Woah looks like a toy? You gotta be kidding, kidding me." (chuck laughs) I thought they were cool as shit, but not sure that would be very thing.
BB: How much did the Companion cost when it first released?
K: They were \$15.
BB: Had there money that you made?
K: Almost gone of each other way, and there were those other ways, so there

was about those beautiful pieces.
BB: They were gone within a year, right?
K: Yeah, I did a mixture of the New Museum, that's where I sold them in New York and it was kind of a end to to that looking and that world.
BB: Had they approached you?
K: No, I had a book that I had and there before with I think and something and my deal with it was that I didn't want payment. I just looked a large amount of the books, maybe half the way I got so it would sell them personally. Bring them to New Museum, Working and Frank Miller and just try to generate the world of books and things that I enjoyed that I could like to be so. It was literally me going to and saying, "Oh, can you arrange? Yes? Thank you." It's probably like when you did see the dolls [Shenberg] create again.
BB: Yeah, what was my really like everything.
K: Yeah, you got an idea of how it all works, you get an idea of business. The New Museum was gone, that was another thing. Oh, it's still there doing the book thing - right from



COMPACTION, 1995 (black edition), edition 1/50
 ACCOMPANYING, 2002 (pink edition), edition 1/50
 COMPANION, 2002 (black edition), edition 1/50
 ACCOMPANYING, 2002 (pink edition), edition 1/50
 COMPANION, 2002 (black edition), edition 1/50
 ACCOMPANYING, 2002 (pink edition), edition 1/50



the beginning she was someone. She looked like she'd be a whole window and they were selling the silk screens that I was publishing myself, so they kind of made it semi-official for me to be in that little area.

RF: Were you ready for the next big thing?

K: I didn't even think there was a next big thing. The next big thing was when I did The Glass and The Acropolis around the same time. The Acropolis was the one I used to stand off any sort of stand-off that I could. (Laughs) Like, "What can I make that's really graphic and really sell?"

RF: Was that the idea?

K: Yeah, I mean, look at her status. She really, it's almost a little Companion to a rabbit outfit.

RF: It's really cool.

K: The Glass was based off the Michelle Key, so I kind of modeled their status, their status, their "Yeah, I'm the fucking Michelle Key" status. But the Acropolis was one of the only toys I made that wasn't a derivative of another toy. I just had this thing that I was not in. This meant that I needed to make it.

RF: It felt like a big departure. It was so real and kind of selling to the scheme of you creating this set of characters who were all very sensitive, even to you and reacting to them, and now here in this kind of psychologically and character, I remember thinking, "Whoah, this is more complex than I thought." Like you were revealing a whole new potential layer or stage of emotion in your work.

K: All the way and all the marketing characters that companies use to sell shit, it's always, "Yes, I'm real-life, I'm real. They're—" you know, and the toy was just kind of like "Yes, I'm just selling here." (Laughs)

RF: And around that time was

when that toy world was starting to exist.

K: Yeah, 2004, 2005 people in the U.S. started doing stuff and it kind of turned into this bubble thing that it was.

RF: Was that community played a big role in it?

K: Politics did before me, in terms of people in the U.S. doing stuff. I looked at how and how the gallery stuff and graphic stuff and he had the mystique, but then he was doing all this great shit like [Kawachi] stuff, all this product but it was just as cool as any books—and I love print-of-thing, so I was always looking at whatever kind of novelty thing the big guys were making, whether it was, and how was looking [printed] doing things that were interesting that weren't geared towards an art market at all. It was made for the people that loved this music.

If there was a person that I wanted to associate—the way doing it, so far as the U.S. Other than that, the guys in Japan—what was going on with BAPF early on was just totally against making money at all. Everything had really amazing packaging—inserts. Who knows how many people got that stuff, or how many of their customers got sent over their heads.

RF: The T-shirts that came in the like spray paint ones.

K: Those things were amazing. You think of that, man, you think of companies in the U.S.—who would have done that? Nobody. They would have been like, "N.Y. 90-sets more, huh?" You know? If they were on it and they were doing it. It afterwards, it worked out for them, I mean, look.

RF: Walk, because we got into BAPF, what was the idea with second Companion toy?

K: They never gave, they never got old. The second Companion was five years later and he got bigger, he got better than the first toy. It's called "Was Was"

Larry Yonker because he gave a little (Laughs) to put on some weight, and hopefully I'll be able to just make him older and older and just tell him at night (Laughs). I always thought of the character having a lifespan.

RF: Just for people who don't know about the toy thing—what, I'm not really so sure about myself—companies like Beauty Standard or Howard Stern will make a toy in a way of like, how much, at something, in a few different color ways each, and then people buy out and collect them and then maybe resell them for a bit, right?

RF: It's a collector's market, right?

K: Yeah, there's that aspect, and there's people that just like the stuff. I mean, I used to get really burned out to the beginning when I'd see people re-selling it. "I'd think, 'Why the fuck did they buy it in the first place?'" But then it eventually gets to someone who wants to live with it, so it that has to happen.

RF: That's a market thing if there is money to be made, then people are going to keep on to get the thing to resell.

K: Yeah, that's that. Before that I'd have to think, "I hope this piece makes some stuff, so I can at least make my cost back and then doing that (the shit) was just like, 'Fuck everyone.'" (Laughs) I'd

mean there's people I want to sell it to and places where I want to sell other markets, but I know I can at least cover for myself and handle it on my own. If I want to do this thing I don't need to involve any companies to fund me at all.

If I want to do this toy and merchandise it's right now, because I know, I want to be around and do something else for eight months, you can do that and then you just put it on the site and...

RF: It goes.

K: Yeah, I found out about it whenever someone else did, when the price release

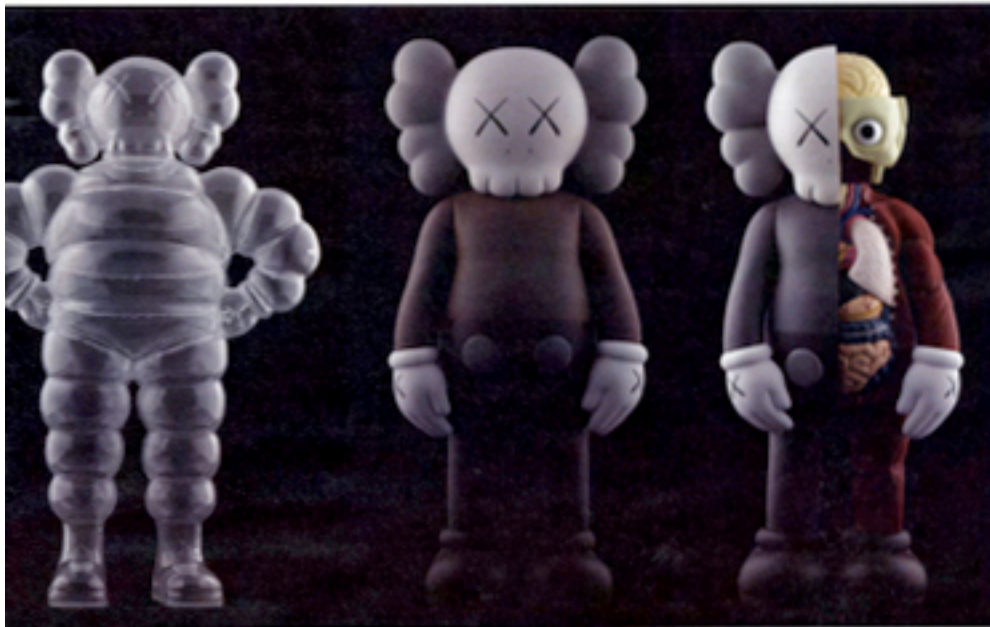
came out. But I think there are a lot of things being made in the name of "toy" that are just a bullshit company trying to have a shock. When you keep selling about "toy" thing I don't think of it like that. I see a few artists that are making toys and that's the stuff I like to follow. There is a high collectability for some. I mean, on the site you can tell you can't maybe have a million. The reason it even takes that is because the fucking site just (Laughs) it's crazy you get from getting so into getting money, something, thirty-thousand hits in a day, just the [online shopping market on the table], so since I set up the website just to sell, I had nothing else, and even now I don't offer any information about me—sell in the last two weeks we've expanded and now it carries Original T-shirts and like a thing, but before that it was just the site, and that's it, nothing else and when it sells out, it says like that for a month or two months, and the next thing. The only reason I wanted the site was just for the reason of selling stuff, and when I did the first toy on it, it completely killed me from having to care about any of that stuff. Before that I'd have to think, "I hope this piece makes some stuff, so I can at least make my cost back and then doing that (the shit) was just like, 'Fuck everyone.'" (Laughs) I'd

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BP: How did working with RAFFI come about?

K: I did a show in Tokyo—I made these postage paintings and Nigo helped me produce these big poster prints that had original paintings and then he also made this machine for the printing. That was the first thing I did with him. And then in 2002 is when I started working with Madonna and I did the first sketch for her, the large poster, and that kind of led into everything else I did then to start producing my own for me. I was totally funding it, paying for production, but they were handling all the production. That led into me wanting to do a big every year or whatever where I'd handle all the distribution. It's holy

shit you make this and I'll buy it from you. If they distributed any thing would buy them back from me. Some thing when I would sell them to Sarah (Ivan Cohen) and different people.

BP: The bellows where you started working on keys with them and when you launched Original Fake—

K: Okay, to take it back, first as far as with production stuff, there was the stuff I made with Nigo, then in 2002 I did a whole collection with [Dais] "Dais" Takahashi's brand, Undercover. I did everything patterns, kids' clothes, everything from sneakers to silk shirts, it was an awesome full-on collaboration. And then there was sort of a quiet period

but everyone was still supportive, Hertz and Supreme and those guys, and there might be around 2003 or 2004 Nigo started commissioning me for large paintings. That show in 2002 was the first time he had purchased paintings. I had sold painted over ads to Justin and Ken from Hertz, but Nigo was more into the Kingpins thing that I did so he started asking if he could commission me for larger pieces.

BP: Were those the first paintings?

K: Yeah, they were. I did some other stuff but they were the first ones I started really getting into on canvas. Before that, canvas, to me, was sort of not approachable, but I was

much more into the idea of going over something or taking the baggage of the ads and that sort of stuff and combining mine with it.

BP: Yeah, should we hook up a B&B?

K: It's hard because it's going to keep going like this [imitates someone rolling backwards down a slope].

BP: I think it's okay.

K: The art stuff started—well, before that, which was great, early music, just doing fill-ins, throwups, tags, starting to learn how to piece, doing pieces, getting into doing these elaborate pieces. At the time, early '90s, there was sort of a coming back of doing the large walls and productions, and I started going up to Washington Heights, Bronx, meeting

with kids doing big murals. And then around '93 is when I painted my first billboard. I grew up in Jersey City (New Jersey), and Jersey City is billboard-accessible billboards—of course, and it wasn't because I wanted to go over an ad, it was just because it was a great spot. So I was doing it I decided to incorporate it— you probably have this verbatim in your last interview, you could just cut and paste it [laughs]. I was doing these big walls you'd spend two or three days on, but then I would do a billboard in forty minutes and the Bill I'd get back I'd like ten times more than this thing that I labored over. It opened my eyes to different ways of working. Then around '94, '95 I met Dais (Takahashi) and he





Canal Billboards, San Francisco, 1996

Paddington Station, London, 1997

MTA Bus Station 3, New York, 2002

Opponent
David Rock Selections

Kingsmen Package Paintings, 2002 artwork
on canvas in various paint displays



you see a line for a phone booth, for the temper pool beds, for the phone booths and that just got me thinking about breaking into other things. I started getting into and making beds for the Master beds on the bus shelters. Eventually I had a ring of beds for almost the whole city.

RP: One key would open multiple bus shelter beds, right?

A: Yeah, there would be such. One key would open it? Because for a certain stretch, but there were infinitely different lock systems.

RP: And you were getting them any way you could.

A: [Laughs a little] Yeah, and I mean that was just an interesting for me as doing the paintings and the ads, that kind of the "Master keys" part. A little bit later on I got into learning how to cut pick locks—I spent so much time with these Master keys that I thought I should know how to open them. I just got really into lock picking and I thought I'm gonna tell how to work pick locks, just so people can and try to see what where to actually. I got my own little workshop in where they helped themselves out of their house [laughs]. Any lock, reading this also are interested in picking locks, just look online. It's really easy.

RP: When you first started doing stuff, the internet wasn't really around, it's interesting to think about the internet developing alongside your work.

A: I mean, one good thing with graffiti is that there's this weird global community and when I was in high school I was getting letters from Germany, Spain, all over, and I would trade photos.

RP: So, the phone booth ads were the first art that you showed, right?

A: When I grew up I thought that it was made art you were supposed to show it, and at the time I thought, "Well, that's what I make, I should show it." In hindsight I think it was really fucking stupid to show that stuff [in a gallery context]. Maybe if you're doing a re-visit on what I did, but it was kind of weird to show them there.

RP: And you got back for taking them out of the phone booths to show and sell these kind of, right?

A: No, I didn't take them out.

RP: At some point you did take them out, didn't you?

A: There were a few that I took out. I even knew the museum, towards the end they were starting to buy and buy, they were getting stolen and glass was getting broken.

RP: People that didn't know about graffiti knew about them.

A: Yeah, I don't really know, but because I was painting over these bulletin competitive ads it made it so easy thing for magazines to talk about because it was fucking with their world, so they wanted to talk about it. It got me a lot of press. I was thinking, "One day these dudes are gonna break out," and even doing the show at Collette, I was surprised that the response was good. I wasn't going over that stuff because I was like, "Oh, I know this world," you know what I mean? There wasn't a letter afterwards out of nowhere—these dudes would show interest, actually, and it was not my world, the political, anti-art scene—it wasn't what I was doing. I liked the photographs [laughs] and the idea of fucking with the street's but reaching people through it. So when I did the three shows that I showed but a lot of the stuff I showed wasn't stuff I put in the street. It was additionally painted. I used to steal some steps, so I still have stacks of bus shelter ads, phone booth ads that are unpainted and painted ones.

RP: So you didn't usually pull them out.

A: There was one time that I made them in France, I made these posters when I was in Paris, painted over them, but installed them on houses in Paris [laughs] and they were taking them out and I was done and grabbed the last one that was left and I took it back. [Laughs] Peter Dinklage had an interview with the dudes when a job it was to take them out, trying to explain why they kept some of them, [imitates Mark New York accent] "Cause it's like art."

RP: And you painted them with animation cell paint so they looked totally flat, right?

A: Yeah, I was never an animator, I went to school for illustration, and when I got out of school there were jobs to paint backgrounds for animation and compared to doing business it was a great check and I had that right side of it. One of my early jobs was at MTV and when they would show a show, a new guy would come in with a new show and wear all new pants, so there would be all this great pants that was still there. I would take it and I started using it. I still use it. It's a water based acrylic so you can paint it with water in this case and just if up.

RP: When you looked at the ads, even close up, it was hard to tell that your image had been painted over the ad.

A: I think that's why I went in that direction with painting, I wanted there to be some confusion. I wanted people to be able to get their nose to it and be like, "What the hell is this one like this?" I wanted to make it look seamless. It's not at all now I'm like, "Whoah, what's looking fucking messy and crazy." [Laughs] but, you know, at the time I was trying to be behind glass, "Maybe this is real, maybe it's not," sort of a larger thing.

RP: So the Kingsmen paintings were the first painting paintings.

A: Pretty much. Towards the end of the advertising stuff I got really bored of painting over the ads and when I started getting press for it and found out that the companies were kinda into it [laughs] I was like, "Fuck," so I started painting over white paper, painting out black with white line art because the light could come through the paper. I wasn't using ads at all, I was just buying rolls of heroku canvas, heavy weight, just painting it and putting those in. That was sort of the trickling out of it.

RP: They looked like they were glowing.

A: They would glow for three weeks, you would just see this (imitates light glowing). And I started doing these abstract things of the same image, this, overwriting all parts so there would be a great white line.

RP: And totally alienating out graffiti people, I bet, right?

A: You know, I had already been just the point of "Fuck it," so [laughs]—I really liked doing all that stuff and even now, the idea of doing a piece or whatever, I'm not against it, but who set a boundary on it.

RP: It's crazy how self-aware that are so "back the law" have the tightest rules, right?

A: Yeah, it's like, "The whole reason why I got into this shit was so I could go outside on stuff, and to be doing and suddenly there's rules?"

EP: So, the *Kingsmen* was literally you putting customers of *The Kingsmen*...

K: Yeah, buying *Kingsmen*. [laughs]

EP: How did that—

K: Well, I started doing these really large ones for Vigo and there was a few years that I just did, like, commissions for Vigo, you know?

EP: [Laughs] But these were really big, right?

K: The biggest were eight by nine feet.

EP: Did you suggest the scale?

K: He did. He had just gotten this massive penthouse apartment in Kippings Hills when they had just built the building, and he saw the pictures of the place and then pictures of the outside of the building and you could see the wall and there was an illustration across, like, "Painting goes here." He's a specific dude, but he'd be specific about the size, and then he's open, so that was really awesome because I gave me some mobility. It was pretty much like every time I stopped one, the next time he would come in New York he would

be, like, "I have this space, what do you think?" So he really gave me a great stability—he sort of set me up.

EP: And then how long was it before you started contributing to *NYPL* with posters and graphics? Was it pretty quick?

K: No, I think it was two years. The first collection we did came out in '03, so we were working on it in '02, the second one, "I wanted to know if you could do this thing?" He wanted me to do posters, and I had never done posters before. I did patterns where people took me stuff, like the stuff I did with *Contemporaries*, but I had never created repeat patterns.

EP: So you had to figure out how to make them.

K: I was just like, "Dude, man, totally." They basically told me, "We need four patterns, five main shirts, five main-line graphics that will be applied, we're going to make shirts." Suddenly I went from only ever doing a few collab things to really getting to work and big on an all that stuff. At the time they were doing this really sort of cut-throat

stuff, but when you couldn't really make anything else, he was up for it. I did a whole pattern that was like cut-up *Contemporaries*, all body parts, and his character cut up and I was a kind of wondering and they were grateful. They were up for whatever I was doing.

EP: That was the time at which they really started the all-over print, right? You created some of the first all-over print patterns that would go on to be so influential in hip-hop and streetwear.

K: They did their own's and—yeah, honestly I'm not really sure, but I know that that collection, that first collection, that I did, was where that stuff was of it's first major visibility here. There were other people in the U.S. that were handling and purchased it, but they were bringing into this music world sort of vision.

EP: *Midwestman* rug.

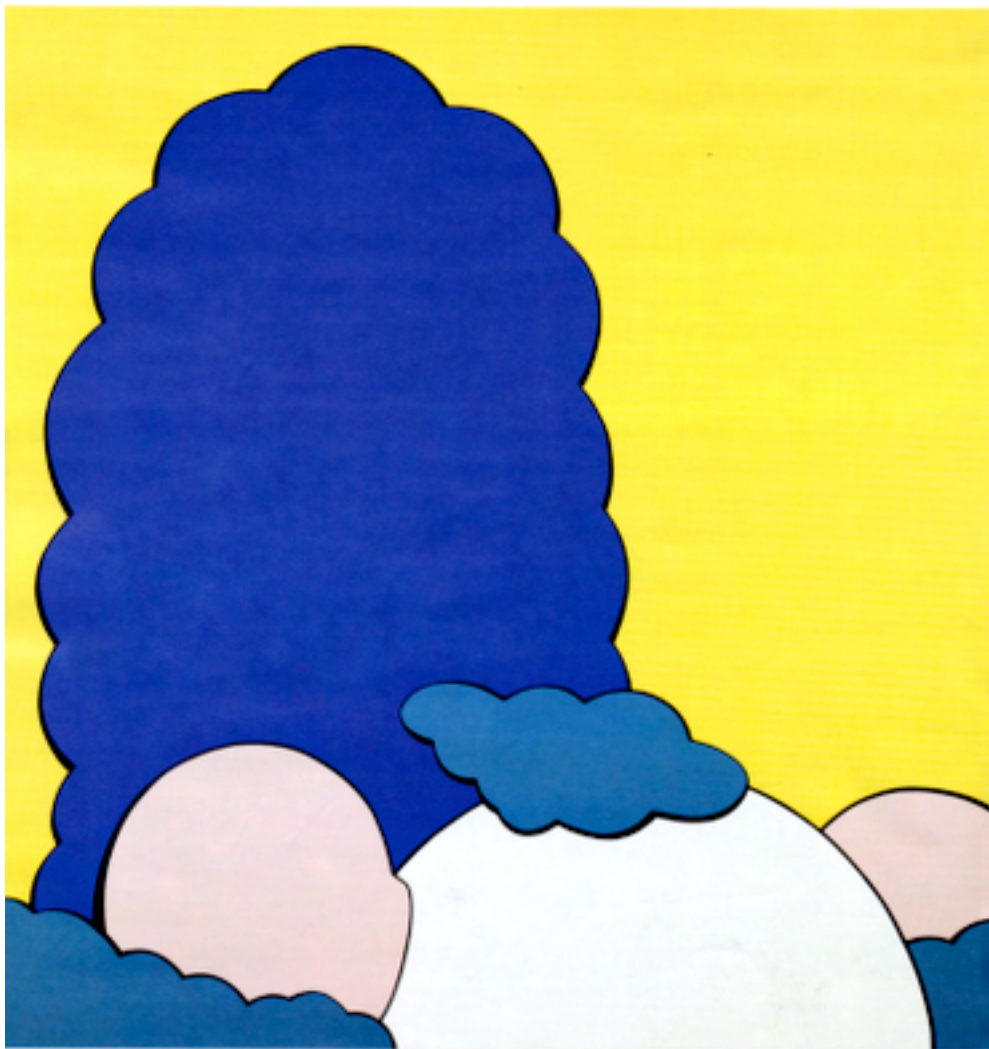
K: Yeah, and Dave Green's whipstitch, you know what I mean, that did was, like—you know, I'd be sitting home and you'd see these videos pop up and it's

like there is someone. Dude! Working with my jacket, I shirt and shoes on, dude! crack up! Or, there's Jay-Z in the *MTV* and he's wearing my shoes, with my neck and it's on it. It was sort of weird, in a cool way. I liked it, it's so weird because so many people are grateful, just like we were saying with anything else, streetwear has its own kind of life's and Dave's and Vigo just kind of said, "I don't care about any of your dude's," and all these people would be like, "What! He did what?" so first it might seem strange, and then it's just like, "Oh, shit, man, that's working!" [laughs]

EP: Suddenly it's what everyone does.

K: And he's done it, supposedly, from his first show, he took it seriously, built out these amazing spaces when, with streetwear, who else was doing it? It wasn't common.

EP: With that particular moment in hip-hop and the American market, your collection with *Rolling Age* coming out when it



Kingpins #1, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 60x60"
 Kingpins #2, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 60x60"
 Kingpins #3, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 60x60"
 Kingpins #4, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 60x60"

A Bathing Ape 2005 3/7 catalog cover
 KAWS designs for A Bathing Ape 2005

supported
 Great 881 Landscape 2001, acrylic on canvas, 60x60"

Did it all sort of happen at once, right?
 K: Yeah, it was a good timing. I see Nike in your and we had this relationship. It was really something that I knew was an Japanese thing, all these brands I've always thought about as being more there [Japan]. And suddenly I'd see kids in Brooklyn with a messenger bag I designed, or hoodies. I see kids all the time with destruction of destructions of my work, from a series photos of hoodies.
 KP: Do you recall?
 K: Yeah (laughs) for sure.
 KP: Do you buy it every time you see it?
 K: Not always, it has to be really interesting, but I did a close every when it first was full on on Canal St. I dropped like, hats on all these old hoodies and bags.
 KP: Did you tell people you designed the original stuff they were selling knowledge of?
 K: It's totally honest. I had the assistant buy it. I was like, "Yeah,

but I got really weird if people ever have any doubt on around me. I get really secretly."
 KP: So there has to be it got to be the Original Fake stuff?
 K: I did the stuff with Hicks, and Underwood, the Connor the Gimpson stuff with Sarah [Joan Collins], we did hoodies with Larkin Ball, Fink, and the KAPF stuff, which was super successful—we did three seasons, and we made a lot of stuff together. The whole time I was doing was with Madonna and honestly the Original Fake thing came up because they had the place that made great customers and I wanted to do those customers and we talked about doing some hoodies and some more bags and I was like, "We should just open a store," and they said "Yeah," I realized they were into it, and I was kind of just like, oh shit and I kind of stopped talking. As that was at our dinner, and then six months later I had thought about it and I brought it up again at another dinner in Japan

and I said I would be into it and I thought we should do it with this girl Katayama [Joan Woodhouse], they said, "Yeah," and the next morning I called him and said, "Yes, these guys might want you about this store," and he was like, "Oh, come let's see," and literally six months later the store was open. They wanted to do it three months later, but —
 KP: It's so elaborate.
 K: Yeah.
 KP: Where did the name come from?
 K: Actually, I used the name for an exhibition title in Tokyo but I kind of stuck with me. I felt attached to it. I didn't want the store or the company to be KAWS or anything, I wanted it to be for others after we opened and got it off the ground we could invite other artists to come in and do things from though it's very visually KAWS now, we're doing things with Mark Dean Veeva and Paulson, and we're doing—we have a bunch of that coming up.





RP: It kind of places you in Nike or Pat Falstad's role, where you are asking other people to do things.
K: The thing is I would go to Japan and have all these opportunities and come back to New York and have all these talented dudes that didn't have the context, or the link—it's just as easy as putting it together. I'd see these opportunities and I'd want to somehow get other people together and hopefully make good shit together, a win-win situation.

RP: When we did that interview a long time ago, I remember being struck by your mention of being really into "technical clothing." At the time I didn't know what you were referring to, but then you specified that you were referring to things like Northface. You have always been really interested in that world and now with the Original Fake stuff, you are making some clothes that are actually very

technically functional and now in their use of materials and such.
K: In some ways started making stuff we were making stuff with Gore-Tex—I just think that such these designs, it's awesome that the shit works. It's functional, it's not just like, here's a shape and otherwise say stuff on it and sell it to somebody. We have to be doing it this way. It's this or nothing.

RP: Where did you find the designers?
K: The first season was all to do with Westons, and then the next season we were friends with this guy, James who has a company, Nerve?—he's an awesome technical dude. A materials fucking geek—the way you can outlast water. Oh, this single was derivative of this, did-did-did, and it was like you did this. (Heh heh heh, he's like that with Gore-Tex and Levi's and—) he's developed Gore-Tex denim, he developed a material where Gore-Tex is never in denim—just a coating—he has a patent. He just developed a denim that is totally blue, indigo denim, that you can rub on your white pants or whatever shoes and it will not rub off. And then some brand new and he's becoming it by Levi's. The new Levi's that we're releasing is made with his denim, licensed to Levi's. He's just really fucking into it. I appreciate all that stuff, but I don't totally know my way around it, so to have him doing that and me being all "but designs now we can do

this," that's how it started. We started him to work with us, the shit for his computer, spreads, everything, and he does our line too, so he's all the cut and sew. We kinda locked out.

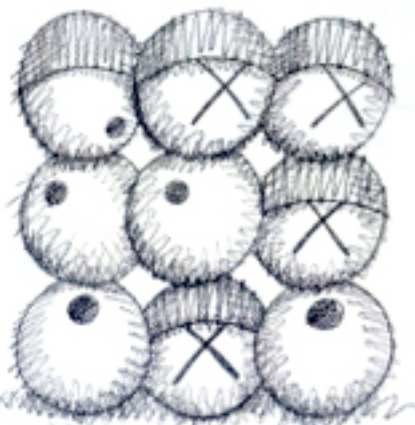
RP: The stuff is amazing.
K: Thanks.
RP: And it seems like the brand is allowing you even more room to play and experiment in terms of illustration, which then filters back into your line art practice.

K: It definitely inspires paintings and work. People are always like, "There's a work of it takes time away from painting." But not really, because it gives me a nice balance. I paint almost every day and I get to these little design things, where I'm working on the design work, but the whole time I'm painting what might come to me. I'll make a note, and then when I'm working on the design work I get ideas for painting. I think it helps. I go back and forth.

RP: So, with the paintings, you're getting ready to have some first major solo shows in the U.S. at Emmanuel Perrotin.

K: Yeah. I'm going to show at Emmanuel Perrotin in Milan in September, and then at Living & Lopez in New York in November.

RP: Both are solo painting shows.
K: Painting and sculpture—that's why I'm here, to meet with a founder to see about making stuff. In the past I've done bronze



Corinna de Gooze, *aphorisms*, 2008

ink & graphite drawings, 2008

unlabeled

Original Fake Store, Tokyo, Japan, 2006, photo by P&G.com

Unlabeled Original Fake Store, 2002, original on canvas over panel, 100x100"







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in Japan, but I'd like to be able to do stuff here.

RP: It seems like it's been a natural thing for you, this transition into more showing with these pop-art galleries. It doesn't remember you ever showing out, like, "I need to have a show at Dutch," or even wanting to show in this kind of context before.

K: It really seems like now is a good time. You know, I did the stuff with Nigo and then I started doing the same thing with Pharrell after Nigo.

RP: You did sixteen large paintings for Pharrell last year?

K: When I'm done the one I'm working on now it will be sixteen new large works. They're pretty big, but at the same time, in three years, the paintings haven't had much exposure. A lot of people don't know that I do these paintings except for the occasional thing that hits the internet, but then they're only even seeing JPEGs. I started thinking I really need to get paintings in front of people. I want to show. I think doing the same size is big benefit, cause I've kind of taken it to a point where it's the one thing now, it kinda works on its own, and I can take some time now and focus on painting. Definitely I'm excited, so—of course

I would have always loved to have shows that whole time, and I think the only reason I'm having shows now is because someone asked me to be in a group show at Living & Lapis and it went well. I always felt like having galleries was strange, and I don't really like to have to deal, it's kind of like if I'm already selling it to people who I think are cool, and talented, why deal with the headache for a job that where I'm selling to someone who normally I would want to sell to, it's like, I don't know.

RP: You've been operating on the traditional patron/commissioner model.

K: It's just what it is and it's about, and it's at my schedule, but at the same time I see that there's a bigger picture and I want to reach a larger—I think it's not cause it's not me up with my house and my studio, but now I have that and I can really try to get out and focus and take it somewhere else.

