

ARTnews

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Still Life, Updated



Ad Reinhardt's Comic Art

China's Trickster: **Liu Wei**

Photographers Turn Film into Art

Jan De Vliegheer

Mike Weiss

Walking into Jan De Vliegheer's show was like visiting an aquarium. The Belgian artist's recent series of nearly phosphorescent paintings depicting colorful, life-size koi (they can grow to three or more feet in length) was curious in its subject matter but nonetheless arresting, executed with vivacity and virtuosity. Swimming in darkness, the koi recalled Julio Cortázar's even odder story, about a character's fixation with axolotls and his subsequent metamorphosis.

The paintings, large enough to make the experience immersive, channel Monet's scenic repetitions in their obsessive investigation of color and light, although De Vliegheer's koi—Asian symbols of prosperity and perseverance—might have been more effective had the paintings been installed as one continuous work, like Monet's water lilies in the Orangerie in Paris.

But De Vliegheer had other artists in mind, such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, with his fish serving as surrogate brushstrokes or vehicles for brushstrokes, as they twist and turn, flashing through the blackness of De Vliegheer's paintings. At the same time, the fish provide an opportunity to indulge in brilliant oranges, reds, creamy whites, and yellows, and a streak of blue and silvery glints. The whole work shifts between the abstract and the representational, the uncanny and the matter-of-fact, the premeditated and the spontaneous. In movement, the paintings, all 2013 and untitled, mime the explosive trajectories and energies of AbEx canvases, although De Vliegheer completes his pictures in a single session, like a Zen calligrapher, attuned to their breath and the present moment, their exuberance irresistible.

The greatest strength of the works here, however, resided in their materiality, a tribute to the sheer, silky lushness of paint and its undiminished ability to provide pleasure.

—Lilly Wei



Jan De Vliegheer, *Untitled 14*, 2013, oil on canvas, 52" x 79". Mike Weiss.

KAWS

Mary Boone and
Galerie Perrotin

Last year was a banner one for KAWS and his signature figure, "Companion"—a forlorn character with a Mickey Mouse body, puffy skull-and-crossbones head, and "X"s on his eyes, gloves, and shoes. A huge inflatable Companion soared above the 2012 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and the figure replaced the venerable Moonman statuette at last year's MTV Video Music Awards. A tall fiberglass version squatted in a Philadelphia train station in conjunction with KAWS's recent show at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and Companion took the form of two 18-foot-high, immaculately carved wooden sculptures at Mary Boone.

There was a sense of déjà vu upon entering the gallery. Just a few months earlier, Paul McCarthy had erected his own Disneyesque wooden colossi at nearby Hauser & Wirth. But where McCarthy's creations were largely sardonic, KAWS's conveyed heartfelt emotion.

In one piece, *At This Time* (all works 2013), Companion covers his face with his hands in a gesture of sobbing. In the



KAWS, *Along The Way*, 2013, wood, 216" x 176" x 120". Mary Boone.

other, *Along the Way*, twin Companions comfort each other in a sympathetic embrace. KAWS made the "X"s on the eyes thicker at the bottom to underscore the characters' cartoonish sadness.

Hanging in a small room were three tondos in Day-Glo acrylics. For these, KAWS had painted cartoon eyeballs inside cartoon eyeballs, and the circular canvases themselves emulated eyes, most literally in *Afternoon Delight*, in which a single orb fills the canvas and a small orange hand reaches up to grab it.

The show at Perrotin continued the theme of painted cartoon pandemonium but in compositions that were fragmented to a point nearing abstraction. Here, KAWS had shaped his canvases into silhouettes of familiar animated characters such as Snoopy, Garfield, and Felix the Cat. Eyelids appeared where kneecaps should be; mouths took over entire heads. The paintings emulated the chaos of Saturday morning cartoons—without even moving.

—Trent Morse