

KAWS ART & COMIX

3.4.2026 TO 27.9.2026

ALBERTINA modern



Exhibition Facts

Duration	3 April 2025 – 27 September 2026
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN
Curators	Angela Stief Florian Waldvogel
Works	192
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KAWS. ART & COMIX

3 April 2026 until 27 September 2026

KAWS. Art & Comix explores the interplay between comics, comic strips, cartoons, and fine art since the second half of the twentieth century. The exhibition at the Albertina Modern juxtaposes KAWS with selected contemporary artists and highlights the artistic autonomy of his figures that combine elements of fine art, pop culture, as well as commercial and public art. The emotional power of KAWS's characters contributes significantly to their international success.

Comics are characterized by a universal language and exist in many cultures as an accessible way of telling stories graphically, in words and images. Transcending boundaries both national and otherwise, comics address all age groups and social strata. Jean-Michel Basquiat and Ad Reinhardt were artists who created comics in a near-classic vein. Starting in the 1960s, artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Keith Haring radically questioned the distinction between high and low art. Their works are featured in the exhibition alongside prominent figures of contemporary art, ranging from KAWS and Joyce Pensato to Sue Williams and Peter Saul.

KAWS, who started out as a graffiti artist in the 1990s, altered posters and advertisements in public spaces by painting over the faces with his signature markings, crossed-out eyes. He is especially well known for his monumental figurative sculptures in public space realized in various materials from bronze and wood to inflatables. His *COMPANIONS*, as he calls some of them, exhibit self-confident, shy, or sad demeanors. Sometimes they hug each other and other times they just sit there alone, covering their faces with their hands as if ashamed. They frequently appear alone, isolated and melancholy, though one also encounters them in groups or even as families.

Structured as a dialogue, the exhibition juxtaposes KAWS with historical icons such as Roy Lichtenstein, Öyvind Fahlström, Red Grooms, Mimi Gross & The Ruckus Construction Company, as well as Katherine Bernhardt, Raymond Pettibon, and Cosima von Bonin. The featured artists take up different stylistic elements of comics—for example, its graphic, flat visual language, the relationship between image and text, as well as individual characters from comic culture, while also exploring their expressive gestures.

The exhibition traces a form of art whose motivation is directly rooted in the aesthetics of comics: The graphic impulse, the immediacy of drawing on paper, the engagement with everyday life, the emotionality of fictional characters, and storytelling all play a central role. Comics exist in many cultures as an accessible way of narration in pictures. With a universal and readily legible visual language, comics engage audiences across generations and social class.

Artists:

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT, KATHERINE BERNHARDT, COSIMA VON BONIN, MISLEIDYS CASTILLO PEDROSO, ELIZA DOUGLAS, ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM, FUTURA 2000, RED GROOMS, MIMI GROSS & THE RUCKUS CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, BLALLA W. HALLMANN, KEITH HARING, GOTTFRIED HELNWEIN, ISOLDE MARIA JOHAM, KAWS, MIKE KELLEY, MICHAELA KONRAD, BRIGITTE KOWANZ, ROY LICHTENSTEIN, A. R. PENCK, JOYCE PENSATO, RAYMOND PETTIBON, AD REINHARDT, PETER SAUL, KENNY SCHARF, TSCHABALALA SELF, MAGDALENA SUAREZ FRIMKESS & MICHAEL FRIMKESS, H. C. WESTERMANN, MICHA WILLE, SUE WILLIAMS

Exhibition Texts

Please Mind the Gap

In 1976, Red Grooms, Mimi Gross, and The Ruckus Construction Co. created a “sculptural comic book” of urban life that humorously alludes to the ruckus of Manhattan. Visitors are invited to step inside the subway car and embark on a brief journey through a world with various manifestations of contemporary art in this exhibition. The warning “Please mind the gap” is familiar from public announcements in the subways of major cities around the world. In this exhibition, however, the opposite holds true: the gap—that is, the boundary between fine art and comics—is constantly being undermined. This exhibition does not aim to simply elevate comics to the status of art. It explores how contemporary artists have drawn inspiration from popular culture since the 1960s. The aesthetics of the consumer world and the alluring appearance of surfaces have become a cult phenomenon in Pop Art. This art draws on the stylistic methods of graphics and design and frequently takes up the preferences of the masses: bright colors, sharp contours, and flat representations characterize, as in the work of Misleidys Castillo Pedroso, a reduced visual language reminiscent of advertisements and garish neon signs in big cities. Easily and quickly comprehensible, eye-catching visuals promise light entertainment, while affordable multiples bring the world of beautiful appearances into the living rooms of ordinary consumers. Comics from childhood become visually compelling subjects, and artists use them as a reference to create museum-worthy works of art.

Uncanny Encounters

Artists develop various strategies for working with comic book source material. This involves not only appropriating well-known characters but also engaging with images and media of popular culture. The works of Joyce Pensato, Eliza Douglas, Gottfried Helnwein, and KAWS reveal significant reductions of the original comic stories. Rather than complete narratives and images combined with text, these works focus on individual characters, many of which are well known, such as Donald Duck, Goofy, and Mickey Mouse. These characters originally come from the world of children’s entertainment, and for many people, they are associated with early memories. At the same time, major media companies and the international entertainment industry, such as Disney, have transformed them into globally recognized brands and symbols. When artists incorporate such characters into their work, they draw on images that are both familiar and commercialized. Through their artistic reinterpretation, these characters are detached from their original stories and placed in new and, above all, critical contexts. The works thus also highlight the tension between personal memory, popular culture, and the global media and consumer world. Cartoon characters appear here not merely as harmless heroes from the children’s bedroom, but as powerful symbols of modern visual culture. These are met with skepticism in contemporary art and sometimes even transform into uncanny figures.

The Pink Panther Strikes Again

TIME OFF depicts KAWS's BFF figure in recline, rooted within a long art-historical tradition. The pose, propped up on one arm with a slightly bent leg, recalls reclining figures from throughout art history, specifically drawing on the visual tradition of Venus. By combining this familiar pose with the bulky, cartoon-like figure characteristic of his pop-cultural aesthetic, KAWS creates a compelling contrast. This contrast feels both humorous yet also invites viewers to reflect on familiar aesthetic and iconographic traditions.

In this gallery, KAWS's sculpture is juxtaposed with Pink Panther paintings by Katherine Bernhardt and Micha Wille. In one of the large-format paintings, the Pink Panther strikes the same pose as *TIME OFF*. This work, like many others in the exhibition, can be understood as an expression of complex emotional meaning that goes beyond the mere depiction of familiar pop figures. Artists take up gestures and postures and translate them into the visual language of pop culture. Their simple, easily understandable, and reduced formal language as well as the bold use of color allow the works to evoke moods and feelings—ranging from irony and humor to quiet melancholy and even dark, almost apocalyptic undertones. Through their emotionality, viewers can universally identify with these figures. At the intersection of pop culture and contemporary art spaces, emerge where questions of belonging, community, and emotional experience come to the fore.

Kool Killer – The Insurrection of Signs

In the 1980s, artists such as Keith Haring, FUTURA 2000, and Kenny Scharf brought their art—inspired by the universal visual language of comics—to the streets and to the people, for it was intended to be widely accessible and approachable. Haring sought to achieve this participation both through a simple and easily understandable visual language and by making multiples—or merchandising items designed by him—available for a few dollars at the *Pop Shop*. The artist offered prints, T-shirts, toys, posters, and magnets featuring his signature linear style and recurring symbols, including dancing silhouette figures, beaming babies, UFOs, and barking dogs. The inclusive nature of the *Pop Shop* meant that even the smallest purchase set in motion an exchange process aimed less at commerce and more at interaction with art enthusiasts—or chance visitors. This sociopolitically motivated art—Haring was an activist for gay rights, environmental protection, and AIDS awareness—is art for the public. KAWS's work has its roots in Haring's anti-elitist understanding of art: "When I was a kid," KAWS recalls, "my first introduction to art came through graffiti, skateboarding and the *Pop Shop*... I remember the way Keith Haring's art made me feel comfortable walking into a gallery or a museum."

Art & Comix

The “x” in comix was introduced in the 1970s to distinguish these publications from those of mainstream publishers. Comix were printed in black and white, were more expensive, and addressed countercultural themes such as ecology, feminism, pornography, and gay culture. Öyvind Fahlström’s expansive installation, *Meatball Curtain (for R. Crumb)*, is based on Robert Crumb’s four-page comic, *Meatball*, which appeared in 1967 in his *ZAP Comix*, an underground magazine that sparked a cultural revolution in America at the time. The comic tells the story of people who are struck by a meatball and become happy as a result. In the story, the incident becomes a media sensation, as everyone wants to be happy, and it reaches its climax in a meatball-rainstorm over downtown Los Angeles. In the final frame of the comic, a winking character says, “Meatball doesn’t work that way!”—and with that, the miracle comes to an end. Unlike Crumb’s work, Fahlström’s environment has no linear narrative structure, sequentiality, or image-text combinations. All the figures are crafted as cutouts, albeit larger than life. The key feature is the interweaving of the figures. Only by walking around *Meatball Curtain* in a semicircle can you see a small figure racing through the purple sequence of the pin-up. Its head shrinks to a tiny dot while its body expands many times over: the “Keep on Truckin’” figure from the Crumb empire, which naturally alludes to experiences with speed and LSD.

Artists

In the late 1970s, **Jean-Michel Basquiat** appears on the New York graffiti scene with the tag SAMO©. Together with Al Diaz, he sprays poetic, enigmatic messages on building walls in downtown Manhattan. This practice evolves into a distinctive visual language where words, symbols, and gestural painting converge to create raw compositions that repeatedly address themes such as racism, police brutality, social inequality, and his own cultural background. At the same time, his images are permeated with references to pop culture, music, sports, and art history. Stylistically, his oeuvre is characterized by comic-like figures, schematic bodies, and expressive lettering—an echo of his childhood dream of becoming a cartoonist. The combination of everyday culture and personal experience results in a powerful, multilayered visual language that captures the urban zeitgeist of the early 1980s.

In her large-format paintings, **Katherine Bernhardt** elevates figures from pop culture to central motifs. The Pink Panther, in particular, appears repeatedly as a protagonist in her work. In bright neon colors and with a rapid, gestural style, the cartoon icon appears alongside everyday objects such as cigarettes, pizza slices, and fruit. The Pink Panther becomes a symbol of consumerism, nostalgia, and the emotional attachment to pop culture icons. Against tropical backgrounds with palm trees or monstera leaves, Bernhardt stages the figure confidently, filling the pictorial space. The repeated motifs are reminiscent of advertising posters, graffiti, or textile patterns and condense into overloaded, rhythmic compositions. Bernhardt creates her “pattern paintings” in a quick, intuitive process using spray and acrylic paints. Her paintings celebrate the seductive visual power of popular symbols while at the same time reflecting their close connection to consumer culture and media overproduction.

A central group of works by **Cosima von Bonin** consists of what she calls “Lappen” (rags): textile pictures made from found fabrics, cloths, and scraps assembled like patchwork. In her art, she uses everyday materials to question their cultural meanings and attributions. The individual textiles bear traces of previous uses which the artist combines to form colorful, often deliberately irregular surfaces. Hand-embroidered figures, comic book references such as Mickey Mouse’s hands, and text fragments from films or cartoons overlay the fabrics, creating a tension between image, language, and material. In her “Lappen,” the artist intertwines handicrafts, pop culture, and conceptual art. The seemingly banal becomes a vehicle for complex meanings, while humor and trivialization serve as subversive means to question consumer culture, role models, and notions of authorship.

For **Misleidys Castillo Pedroso**, painting has become the most important means of expression and communication due to a congenital hearing impairment. Since childhood, her larger-than-life, cut-out figures have populated her immediate environment. Created with gouache on paper and affixed to walls with brown tape, these figures serve as a substitute for absent social relationships, forming their own visual community. The focus is on bodybuilders who combine female and male attributes. With their tense muscles and self-assured poses, they appear as personal protectors or superheroes. Their clear contours, strong colors, and simplified gestures are reminiscent of comics, giving them an iconic presence. These figures embody fluid gender identities and challenge rigid role models. Powerful

visual worlds emerge between personal mythology and pop aesthetics, in which bodies appear as expressions of individual strength and self-determination.

Through her paintings, **Eliza Douglas** explores questions of authorship, identity, and cultural appropriation. Many of her works take as their starting point printed T-shirts from the artist's own collection featuring popular motifs from the music, fashion, and entertainment industries. Disney characters, such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy in particular, serve as subjects that she removes from their familiar context and exaggerates in her paintings. The fabrics are draped, photographed, and digitally altered before being transferred to canvas. Folds and distortions make the familiar characters appear fragile and vulnerable. Douglas uses our emotional attachment to these pop culture icons to highlight their mass distribution and economic exploitation. Her paintings transform these seemingly harmless figures in the mirror of a present shaped by consumption and notions of identity.

In the 1960s, **Öyvind Fahlström** developed a cross-media art form that combines elements from comics, language, performance, and installation. His works are conceived as interactive environments in which image fields, figures, and texts come together to form moving, narrative structures. In 1969, as part of the project *Art and Technology* at the Los Angeles County Art Museum he produced the work *Meatball Curtain (for R. Crumb)*. Inspired by Robert Crumb's underground comic, *Meatball*, Fahlström created a colorful, variable tableau made of metal, Plexiglas, and plastic. Silhouetted figures and shapes are suspended on strings or attached magnetically and can be rearranged for each new presentation. The installation combines Crumb's subversive iconography with Fahlström's own visual language. Between comic aesthetics and kinetic sculpture, a playful yet politically charged environment emerges that translates the raw, exuberant spirit of counterculture into three-dimensional space.

In the 1980s, **Futura 2000** was one of the first artists to paint an entire subway car, moving away from classic tags in favor of abstract, painterly surfaces. He is considered one of the pioneers of the New York graffiti scene of the early 1980s. His spray paint technique combines gestural traces, color fields, and fine lines to create dynamic compositions. Futura 2000's visual language is characterized by science fiction-like, cartoonish figures and atomic forms that symbolize movement and energy. In particular, the recurring figure of "Pointman," a robot-like character reminiscent of extraterrestrial beings, embodies the artist's fascination with technology, space travel, and computer games. Futura 2000 deliberately moves between street art, design, and pop culture. His collaborations with musicians, the fashion industry, and international brands underscore his goal of dissolving the boundaries between high art and everyday culture.

In 1975, **Red Grooms**, together with Mimi Gross and the Ruckus Construction Company, realized the expansive installation *Ruckus Manhattan*—what he calls a "sculpto-pictorama" staging a scene of the metropolis of New York as a garish, exaggerated panopticon. Rather than a conventional cityscape, it creates an accessible picture theater where painting, sculpture, and stage space intertwine. Subways, platform scenes, stockbrokers, and other passengers appear as distorted, comic-like figures in bright colors. The installation condenses everyday urban life of the 1970s into a polyphonic choreography of a fast pace, noise, and social tension. Balancing humor with critical observation, Grooms translates the energy and contradictions of Manhattan into an immersive scenario. The visitors are invited to experience the pulsating life of the big city by walking through the subway.

Blalla W. Hallmann developed a visual language that oscillates between folkloric charm, art brut, and radical social criticism. Through irony and cynicism, his works challenge political and religious power structures by deliberately transgressing social taboos. This is particularly evident in the series of reverse glass paintings on display here, which Hallmann has integrated into discarded, white-painted window frames. Within these individual image fields, characters from Disney comics, such as Mickey and Minnie Mouse or Donald and Daisy Duck, are incorporated into scenes from Christian iconography: The Nativity, the Adoration, and the Crucifixion thus appear in deliberately provocative and often grotesque reinterpretations. By combining comic figures, religious motifs, and imperative texts, Hallmann breaks with traditional visual formulas. His works address the ideological structures behind familiar icons, transforming them into sharp, subversive commentaries on faith, power, and authority.

Keith Haring's artistic goal was the democratization of art. In the early 1980s, he transferred his clear, comic- and graffiti-inspired visual language to public spaces. For example, he created quick chalk drawings on empty billboards in New York subway stations. Through his reduced outlines and distinctive graphic signs, he developed a universal visual language combining sociopolitical themes with joy and solidarity. In 1986, Haring opened the first *Pop Shop* in downtown New York, followed two years later by the *Pop Shop Tokyo*. The artist imagined the store not merely as a retail space, but as an artistic project that blurs the boundaries between art, everyday life, and commerce. T-shirts, posters, skateboards, and tableware bearing his motifs make his work accessible to a wide audience. The *Pop Shop* featured in this exhibition becomes a manifesto for Haring's idea of bringing art out of the exclusive confines of the art market to make it a tangible part of everyday life.

Mickey Mouse is a central motif in the work of **Gottfried Helnwein**. As a child, the artist was fascinated by Disney comics, which provided him with a colorful counterworld to the dreary realities of postwar life. The character opens up an imaginary space for him that offers comfort, escape, and identification at the same time. Since the 1990s, Helnwein has been devoting himself exclusively to Mickey Mouse in a separate body of work. He removes the familiar character from its harmless context and shows it in disturbing, uncanny, and often threatening guises. With bared teeth, exaggerated proportions, and a dark aura, the friendly icon is transformed into an ambivalent being. Helnwein uses Mickey Mouse as a projection surface for repressed fears and social abysses. The familiar comic character becomes a symbol of a reality in which innocence and threat are inextricably intertwined.

Isolde Maria Joham begins her artistic career as a pioneer of glass art. From the 1960s onward, she develops her own unique visual language, combining abstraction, photorealism, and socially critical themes. From the 1980s, she increasingly focuses on the tension between nature, technology, and artificial living environments. Pandas emerge as central figures in her later works. Paintings such as *Puzzle Panda* take up motifs from the Panda-Z of Japanese anime and manga culture and combine them with futuristic pictorial spaces. The familiar animal figures appear embedded in mechanical, modular, or otherwise constructed forms, referring to the increasing technologization of contemporary life. The pandas oscillate between childlike icons and technological beings. Behind their playful appearance lies a profound reflection on artificial intelligence, robotics, and the fragile balance between nature and culture, humans and machines.

KAWS, whose given name is Brian Donnelly, works at the intersection of popular culture, the consumer economy, and contemporary art. His works draw on pop art strategies of appropriation, seriality, and repetition. Not least through their universalizing and reduced formal language, they refer to a collective visual memory. Comics, cartoons, and icons of the entertainment industry and everyday culture are the starting points for KAWS's works, which function as projection surfaces and create an affective bond as identification figures. Unlike classic comics, KAWS does not embed his characters in a narrative context. They often appear lonely and isolated. Straddling the line between familiarity and alienation, the artist raises questions about identity, loss, and melancholy within a visually overcoded present. KAWS deals with the conditions of contemporary image circulation and visibility. His works exist simultaneously in public space, in the white cube of the museum, in commercial contexts, and on social media. In this way, he renegotiates the relationship between original and reproduction, between aura and technical availability. The physical presence and monumentality of the works stand in productive tension with their mass digital distribution. Visibility no longer functions exclusively as a consequence of institutional recognition but also increasingly as a result of global distribution and popularization mechanisms.

Influenced by youth subculture, skateboarding, and graffiti since the late 1980s, KAWS, who was already known for his graffiti work, studied at the legendary School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York in the 1990s. During a brief stint at the animation studio Jumbo Pictures, he learned celluloid painting, which he used as a graffiti artist for his nocturnal passion. He **altered advertisements**—such as those for Diesel—at bus stops and phone booths in such a way that they were just as appealing as the advertisements themselves. It was the middle of the 1990s, a time when a new generation of artists, from Shepard Fairey to Banksy, were redefining street art. With this illegal, consumer-critical work, KAWS launched his career as an artist and achieved immediate success.

In the late 1990s, KAWS began producing figures in the form of **vinyl toys**. The first sculptures were produced in 1999 in collaboration with the Japanese streetwear brand Bounty Hunter and were particularly popular in Japan among a community of collectors of limited-edition designer toys. For KAWS, these figures were art from the outset. With this medium, he discovered a way to make his work accessible to a wide audience without having to rely on the exclusivity of the art market. His interest in toy figures aligns with the tradition of merchandising products in the comic book world—from Mickey Mouse figures to mochi toys. KAWS's toys are a conceptual blueprint of his artistic practice, produced in numerous variations, sizes, colors, and limited editions.

Part of KAWS's artistic practice is centered around the iconic figure he calls **COMPANION**—an endearing buddy figure whose resemblance to Mickey Mouse and early American rubber-hose animation is clearly recognizable: white gloved hands, shorts with two circles at the waist, and feet in clunky clown shoes. The ears resemble the ends of bones protruding from the head on the left and right like the cross bones of a pirate flag. Instead of eyes, KAWS's figures—whether drawn, painted, or sculpted—have crossed lines, which also often appear on their hands and feet, evoking associations with Christian stigmata. These X's are reminiscent of the quick inscriptions of graffiti artists, which are a form of signature on the one hand and an ambivalent sign of negation and erasure on the other.

For his **MONSTERS**, KAWS brings characters such as Franken Berry, Count Chocula, Boo Berry, and Frute Brute—which adorn American cereal boxes from General Mills and allude to horror characters from literature and film—to life as light blue, pink, orange, and brown painted bronze sculptures. In

KAWS's art, these childlike figures with a background in merchandising emancipate themselves as independent characters marked by a striking quality familiar from pop art—the aesthetics of commodities and their auspicious appearance of surfaces garnered cult status in the 1960s. During that period, art incorporated stylization methods from graphics and design that appealed to popular taste. KAWS also designs wall coverings based on cereal boxes, which in turn are reminiscent of Andy Warhol and his legendary *Brillo Boxes* from 1964.

KAWS is widely recognized for his large-scale sculptures installed in public spaces. These monumental inflatable, bronze, and wooden works can reach heights of up to ten meters and are installed on buildings, in parks, city centers, the open countryside, on bodies of water, and even floating in the air. As temporary interventions, they address the boundaries between art and non-art and challenge viewers to develop a new perception of scale, visibility, and accessibility in contemporary art. KAWS's *FINAL DAYS* is reminiscent of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), which the philosopher Walter Benjamin described as the “angel of history”: a backward-looking figure staring at the ruins of the past, while a storm called “progress” drives it inexorably into the future.

Influenced by counterculture, punk, and conceptual art, **Mike Kelley** combines influences from comics, religion, pop, and minimalism to create a critical examination of memory, trauma, and social structures. Across his work in different media, Kelley repeatedly explores the myths and imagery of everyday American culture. In the series *Missing Time Color Exercise*, Kelley draws on issues of the erotic magazine *Sex to Sixty*, which he arranges in strict, grid-like compositions. He replaces missing issues with monochrome color fields. These empty spaces refer to the psychological phenomenon of “missing time,” which stems from repressed or fragmentary memories. By combining trivial comic images with minimalist seriality, Kelley undermines the separation between high and popular culture. The series reveals how cultural hierarchies, memory gaps, and social norms intertwine.

With *EMBRACE THE FUTURE*, **Michaela Konrad** develops a fictional image campaign that approaches the future as a mirror of current ideologies. Her drawings and prints reference the visual language of advertising to reveal its strategies of seduction and persuasion. Clear contours, bright colors, and flawless surfaces are reminiscent of the optimistic consumer aesthetics of the postwar period, the economically prosperous 1950s. The focus is on staged renunciation. Reduction, restriction, and rationing are presented not as deprivation, but as desirable ideals. Konrad uses the familiar visual language of advertising and propaganda to reveal the mechanisms of social control. Without moralizing, she questions which images we believe when we are promised a future. Her works demonstrate how easily both consumer promises and their critique can be packaged aesthetically.

In the neon objects *Poetry of Openness*, *Light Up*, and *Anything Goes*, **Brigitte Kowanz** takes up the form of speech bubbles from comics and translates them into luminous, colorful contours. However, she removes these signs from any narrative context, transforming them into autonomous, aphoristic statements. The words, set in a circular form, appear as light drawings in space, combining line, surface, and text into a single visual structure. Drawing on neon signs and urban typography, Kowanz reflects on the presence of logos, slogans, and information in public spaces. Through her work, she explores the relationship between light, language, and space. Light functions not only as a material, but also as a vehicle for meaning. Kowanz renders the immaterial visible and examines how language, signs, and light converge to create an open, ambiguous space for communication.

In the 1970s, **Roy Lichtenstein** expands his visual language, which refers to the aesthetics of comics, into space and begins working with sculpture. A notable example is *Lamp*, a large sculpture that translates an everyday object into the clear, graphic aesthetics of his visual vocabulary. The sculpture appears like an enlarged advertising illustration, whose superficiality is counteracted here. Its hard contours, smooth surfaces, and limited colors make the heavy material appear surprisingly artificial. Though made of aluminum, *Lamp* resembles a printed image translated into three dimensions. With *Lamp*, Lichtenstein transports the imagery of everyday culture into a new dimension. The everyday object becomes an icon that oscillates between painting, sculpture, and advertising, deliberately scrutinizing the boundary between high and low art.

In the 1970s, **A. R. Penck** develops his so-called *Standart* paintings, which become a central component of his work. Using a limited color palette, often consisting of only black and white, he develops a visual language of stick figures, signs, letters, and symbols that are evenly distributed across the canvas. Reminiscent of prehistoric cave paintings, graffiti, or art brut, these pictorial signs do not follow any classical hierarchy. Instead, they form a dense network of figures, eyes, crosses, and animals that function as a visual sign system. Penck understands this painting as a kind of universal language intended to make fundamental social structures and human relationships visible. The *Standart* paintings condense complex worldviews into simple, immediately legible signs. With their anti-academic aesthetics, the paintings represent Penck's pursuit of artistic freedom and his vision of an open, democratic society.

In the late 1980s, **Joyce Pensato** turned to cartoon characters, finding in them her distinctive visual language. Mickey Mouse, in particular, becomes her central motif. Starting with the character's simple, circular shapes, Pensato developed large-format, expressive paintings in which the familiar icon takes on a new and often disturbing presence. Pensato covers the canvas with black and white enamel or metallic paint, blurring contours, removing layers, and rebuilding them. The once clear outlines dissolve, and the figure seems to tremble, sway, or fall apart. Her extensive collection of toy figures, found among discarded junk on the street or purchased at online auctions, served as a point of departure. The comic character, who is usually portrayed as cheerful, becomes an emotionally charged being whose face reveals anger, despair, or exhaustion. Pensato transformed the smooth surface of the comic icon into a relentless psychogram, exposing the fragile side of a seemingly flawless symbol.

Raymond Pettibon's roots lie in Southern California's early 1980s punk scene. He first gained recognition for his record covers, posters, and fanzines for the band Black Flag, in which his striking, comic-style drawings are combined with provocative texts. Themes such as violence, power, religious fanaticism, and the dark sides of American history characterize his visual worlds. Typical of Pettibon is the tense relationship between text and image. Short slogans, literary quotations, or fragmentary sentences appear alongside the drawings, undermining their seemingly clear statements. This creates open, often irritating spaces of meaning. One of his recurring characters is "Vavoom," borrowed from the *Felix the Cat* cartoon series. In Pettibon's work, the figure with the screaming mouth becomes a symbol of pent-up, eruptive energy—an iconic image of rebellion, emotion, and the raw expression of punk culture.

Throughout his life, **Ad Reinhardt** collected cartoons, illustrations, and newspaper clippings, which he arranged, combined, and placed in new contexts. In the 1940s, this results in his detailed comic tableaux and collages, in which he intertwines motifs from art history with contemporary visual culture. Starting in 1946, the New York newspaper *PM* publishes over twenty of these works as full-page Sunday comics under the title *How to Look at...* Each issue is devoted to a new theme—from “Iconography” and “a Cubist Painting” to “Modern Art in America.” With wit and analytical acuity, Reinhardt deconstructs art-historical developments and translates them into an accessible, comic-like format. His tableaux combine collage, typography, and drawing to create complex pictorial diagrams. Balancing satire and art-historical commentary, the works demonstrate how popular visual forms can serve as instruments for critically reflecting on art.

In his paintings, **Peter Saul** combines the imagery of comics and advertising with sociopolitical themes. Since the 1950s, he has been taking up the themes of war, abuse of power, and social conflicts and translating them into exaggerated, often grotesque scenes. His images initially appear colorful and humorous, but they reveal themselves to be biting commentaries on reality. Typical for Saul is his use of well-known comic book characters, which he places in disturbing situations. For example, the Three Little Pigs appear as perpetrators of violent acts. Speech bubbles, garish colors, and deformed bodies evoke the aesthetics of popular comics; however, these aesthetics are confronted with violence and political corruption. Through this deliberate reversal of familiar heroes, Saul exposes the absurdity of social conditions. Behind the dark humor of his images lies sharp criticism of war, power, and the images with which the mass media gloss over reality.

Since the early 1980s, **Kenny Scharf** has been making a art that combines painting, installation, and performance to create colorful, experiential spaces. He counters the seriousness of the established art world with humor and a playful visual language. Scharf brings the spontaneity and immediacy of graffiti to painting, while at the same time expanding it with references to art history and pop culture. His canvases pulsate with images reminiscent of extraterrestrial landscapes or futuristic game worlds. Scharf’s paintings celebrate the energy of pop culture and the escapism of television, while at the same time reflecting the exaggerated consumer fantasies of a society shaped by media and excess. Characters from cartoon series, science fiction, and advertising populate his works and merge with psychedelic patterns to create exuberant fantasy worlds.

With a keen sense of materiality, **Tschabalala Self** creates figures from fabrics, paper, and found objects that radiate self-confidence and presence. In her works, she combines painting and sculpture to create powerful representations of Black bodies and examines ethnocultural stereotypes and society’s perception of People of Color. For her installation at the Albertina, Self focuses on the small neighborhood stores in New York City, particularly those in predominantly Black and Latinx communities. For the artist, these stores are central places of memory from her childhood. Using bright colors and simplified forms reminiscent of comics, Self depicts customers, goods, and store situations. The series *Bodega Run*, which is composed of various materials, is a multilayered portrait of these social spaces. Self shows bodegas as places of community, consumption, and identity formation, while also revealing the political and cultural significance of everyday life.

Since the late 1970s, comic book characters have shaped the ceramic work of **Magdalena Suarez Frimkess**. Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Popeye, Felix the Cat, and the South American hero Condorito appear on vases, tiles, and sculptures—familiar figures that she transfers with tender irony onto the surfaces of traditional vessel forms. Together with her husband, Michael Frimkess, who shapes some of her vessels, she paints the ceramics by hand, combining classic forms with images from mass culture. The comic characters function not as mere quotations but as surfaces for emotional projection. They reflect everyday comedy, nostalgia, and the contradictions of modern consumer culture. With empathy rather than ironic distance, Suarez Frimkess transforms popular characters into small narrative scenes. Her ceramics combine craftsmanship, personal memory, and global imagery to create poetic miniatures of everyday human life.

H. C. (Horace Clifford) Westermann developed an early enthusiasm for comics and cartoons and applied to Walt Disney Studios as a teenager. The imagery of popular characters remains as influential to his later work as his experiences as a soldier in the Second World War and the Korean War. His works combine technical precision with symbolic and often enigmatic motifs. In the sculpture *Death of Cracker Jack*, Westermann condenses personal memories and traumatic war experiences into a quiet, tomb-like ensemble. Under a glass bell jar, a copper mouse head appears, surrounded by root-like forms. The figure oscillates between childlike cartoon aesthetics and existential threat. Despite their oppressive themes, Westermann's works remain imbued with a quiet optimism. Through his carefully crafted objects, he transforms personal experiences into poetic visual symbols that mediate between popular culture, craftsmanship, and memory.

In *I Am the Egg Man*, **Micha Wille** draws on the Pink Panther, which she stages with exaggerated accessories and absurd details. The figure presents egg-shaped golden tennis balls instead of testicles, caricaturing male self-expression and status symbols. Humor serves as a subversive means of critiquing hierarchies and role models in the art world. In this way, Wille combines pop-cultural lightness with precise observations of social particularities. In her painting, analog gestures meet the visual worlds of a digitally influenced present. With rapid, color-intensive brushstrokes, she explores themes such as self-staging, competition, and alienation. Icons from pop culture, fashion, and comics comprise the artist's visual vocabulary, which she condenses into trenchant visual statements. She describes her figurative paintings with abstract sprinklings as "Predicate Pop."

Sue Williams develops her painting from drawing and references the visual language of comics early on to address themes such as sexual violence, power relations, and male dominance in the art world. In the 1980s, she combines cartoon-like figures with text passages and provocative speech bubbles containing direct, often sarcastic comments. In the course of the 1990s, the figures increasingly dissolve. Lines, shapes, and intricate contours condense into pictorial spaces reminiscent of crowded comic panels. Occasionally, body parts emerge from the web, and bulbous shapes resemble speech bubbles, albeit without legible words. Williams thus transfers the expressive energy and directness of comics into a more abstract visual language. Her works retain the tone of cartoons but transform it into a visual field that oscillates between figuration and abstraction.

Art Education

KAWS. Art & Comix Programme

Public Guided Tours

Sunday, April 5 | 3 pm
Sunday, April 12 | 3 pm
Saturday, April 18 | 10:30 am
Sunday, April 19 | 2 pm
Saturday, April 25 | 2 pm
Saturday, May 2 | 2 pm
Thursday, May 14 | 4 pm
Sunday, May 17 | 10:30 am
Saturday, May 23 | 4 pm
Sunday, May 24 | 10:30 am
Saturday, May 30 | 2 pm
Sunday, May 31 | 3:30 pm
Thursday, June 4 | 4 pm
Saturday, June 13 | 10:30 am
Sunday, June 14 | 2:30 pm
Saturday, June 27 | 2 pm

Accessible Programme for Blind and Visually Impaired Visitors

June 10 | 4 pm

Accessible Programme for Deaf Visitors

Thursday, June 11 | 5 pm

Private Group Tours

Introductory tours

Art talks (in-depth discussions)

Languages: German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian

Families & Children

Children's Vernissage

Thursday, April 2 | 4:30–5:30 pm

Junior Tours

Saturday, April 11 | 3 pm

Sunday, May 17 | 11 am

Saturday, May 23 | 3 pm

Monday, May 25 | 10:30 am

Thursday, June 4 | 2:30 pm

Sunday, June 21 | 2 pm

Family Sundays

Sunday, April 19 | 3:30 pm

Sunday, May 10 | 3:30 pm

Sunday, June 7 | 3:30 pm

Holiday Programme – FUN WITH KAWS

Thursday, July 9 | 10:30 am

Friday, July 10 | 10:30 am

Monday, August 3 | 10:30 am

Tuesday, August 4 | 10:30 am

Wednesday, August 12 | 10:30 am

Thursday, August 13 | 10:30 am

Tuesday, August 25 | 10:30 am

Thursday, August 27 | 10:30 am

Private Children's Tours

60 or 90 minutes

Languages: German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian

School Programme for Primary, Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary Levels

Press images

The following images are available free of charge in the [Press section](#) of the Albertina.
Legal notice: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



KAWS
TIME OFF, 2021
Bronze, paint
135 × 188 × 99 cm
Private collection © KAWS
Photo: courtesy KAWS Studio



KAWS
SPACE, 2023
Stainless steel
244 × 89 × 99 cm
Private Collection
© KAWS
Photo: Courtesy KAWS Studio



KAWS
SHARE, 2021
Bronze, paint
178 × 84 × 62 cm
Private Collection
© KAWS
Photo: Courtesy KAWS Studio



Raymond Pettibon
No Title (Runs with a), 2004
Watercolour and ink on paper
45 × 60 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection
© Raymond Pettibon, courtesy the artist and David Zwirner
Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Magdalena Suarez Frimkess
Untitled, 2024
Glazed ceramic
24 × 10 × 8 cm
ALBERTINA, Vienna
© Magdalena Suarez Frimkess
Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Micha Wille
BAM, 2024
Oil on canvas
210 × 150 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Acquisition
with funds from the Gallery Subsidy Program of
the BMWKMS 2025
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Red Grooms, Mimi Gross & The Ruckus Construction Company
Ruckus Manhattan: Subway, 1976
Installation of polystyrene, straw, foam, gauze bandages, plaster, Caparol tinting paint, PVC foil, canvas
274 × 564 × 1,128 cm
Private collection © Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: Lepkowski Studios, Berlin



Öyvind Fahlström
Meatball Curtain (for R. Crumb), 1969
Installation made from enamel on metal, plexiglass, magnets and nylon thread
Dimensions variable
Collection of Sharon Avery-Fahlström, courtesy Aurel Scheibler
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: Rocco Ricci / Courtesy Aurel Scheibler, Berlin



Kenny Scharf
Bombascritchit, 1997
Oil and acrylic on canvas with artist's frame
165 × 236 cm
Courtesy of Lio Malca
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: Courtesy of the artist



Isolde Maria Joham
Puzzle-Panda, 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
310 × 270 cm
Prof. Gottfried Höllwarth
© Isolde Maria Joham
Photo: Nicole Wiedenbeck



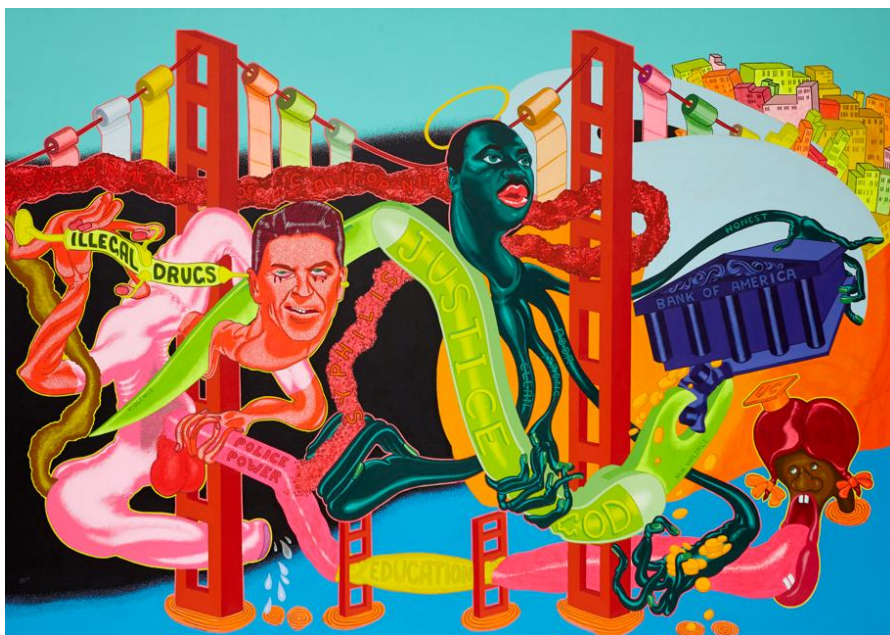
Joyce Pensato
Donald, 1997
Enamel on canvas
229 × 183 cm
Private collection, Europe
© Joyce Pensato Foundation/Courtesy Petzel, New York
Photo: Jason Mandella



Keith Haring
Outdoor Painting (from Pop Shop Tokyo), 1988
Enamel on metal
182 cm diameter
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Enrico Navarra
© Keith Haring Foundation
Photo: Courtesy Gallery Enrico Navarra



Brigitte Kowanz
Anything Goes, 2014
Neon, wood, lacquer
142 × 180 × 15 cm
ESTATE BRIGITTE KOWANZ, Courtesy Galerie Krinzinger, Wien
© Estate Brigitte Kowanz / Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: Peter Hoiß



Peter Saul
The Government of California, 1969
Oil on canvas
173 × 244 cm
Collection of KAWS
© 2026 Peter Saul / Bildrecht, Vienna 2026
Photo: Courtesy KAWS Studio



Eliza Douglas
Untitled, 2022
Oil on canvas
210 × 160 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen
© Eliza Douglas, courtesy Air de Paris, Romainville, Greater Paris
Photo: Marc Damage