

CRITICAL PUBLISHING II

SUPERFLAT

manifesto

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TAKASHI MURAKAMI



- Takashi Murakami
- Born in Postwar Tokyo 1962
- Murakami's father was a taxi driver, and his mother was a homemaker. His mother, who studied needlepoint and designed textiles, had a tremendous influence on Murakami's interest in the arts.
- His parents often had him write reviews on exhibitions he had seen. If he refused, he was forced to go to bed without dinner.
- Murakami received his BFA, MFA, and PhD from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, where he studied Nihonga (traditional Japanese painting).



Flattened Aesthetic and Cultural Space:

Superflat refers to the literal flatness in traditional Japanese art, like ukiyo-e prints, and also metaphorically to the “flattening” of boundaries between high and low culture (fine art vs. pop culture).



Influence of Otaku Culture:

Murakami draws on otaku subculture (anime, manga, video games), seeing it as a key example of this “superflat” world where fantasy and reality blur.



1996

Combination of Manga and traditional Japanese Wave paintings

- *Combination of High and low art*
- *Referring to High art = the west and low art the east*
- *For a Generation with no future, all Things are becoming flaty, infantil, reduced childish.*
- *You see on the Canvas the Figure Mr DOB Murakami developed. He is Integrating this figure since then in different ways (Sculptures, Silkscreens, etc)*

During the modern period, as Japan has been Westernized, how has this «super flat» sensibility metamorphosed? If that can be grasped clearly, then our Stance today will come into focus.

- *During the Allies occupation (1945-1951), Disney Comics and animations (Bambi, Mickey Mouse, Snow White, ...) were sold and distributed in Japan*
- *Their large childlike Eyes and Figures influenced the Japanese Style*
- *Manga has been influenced by Disney Figures*



- Vibrant colours, Reduced Forms, playful Forms

«Poku»
the Basis of
«Superflat»

Murakami explains that POKU is the Basis of Superflat

Poku= Pop + Otaku (Otakuculture= Japanese Youth obsessed with Manga and Anime)

Murakami saw Potential in this culture because it typically and uniquely Japanese

There is the saying that the term «Superflat» was a selling argument of his art in the US-Galleries



*The Superflat Manifesto as Published in 2000 in an exhibition catalogue for his Show «Superflat» at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles
Murakami says that Society, customs art, culture are all extremely two dimensional.*

Postwar Consumerism:

Murakami links Japan's post-WWII culture to this flatness, where consumerism and mass media dominate, making distinctions between art, commerce, and entertainment almost nonexistent.



In the final sentences of his manifesto, Murakami reflects on the concept of "Superflatness" as both a critique and a vision for the future. He states that "Superflatness" is an original concept rooted in Japanese culture, even though Japan itself has become heavily Westernized. By saying that within this concept, "seeds for the future have been sown," he suggests that Superflatness holds the potential for a new way of thinking or creating art that transcends its current state.

The closing lines—"Let's search the future to find them. Superflatness is the stage to the future"—call for a forward-looking exploration, encouraging people to seek out these seeds of innovation that could shape the future of art and culture. Murakami positions Superflatness not just as a critique of contemporary superficiality but also as a platform or starting point for future developments in the artistic and cultural landscape.



Commercialization of Art:

Superflat highlights the commercialization of art, particularly in Japan, where the lines between consumer products and art have become blurred. Designer toys and other consumer goods are intertwined with artistic expression, effectively flattening the distinction between the two.



This phenomenon is further emphasized through collaborations with major brands and celebrities, such as Louis Vuitton and Kanye West, showcasing how art has become deeply embedded in commercial culture.



Global Relevance:

Although Superflat is deeply rooted in Japanese culture, Takashi Murakami extends its concept to a global context, illustrating that superficiality in art and consumer culture is a worldwide phenomenon. His large studio, staffed with many assistants, operates more like a production factory, emphasizing the industrial scale of contemporary art-making. Murakami's estimated net worth of around USD \$100 million highlights his commercial success, and the rising value of his works in today's market further underscores his significant impact on the international art scene.



To resume

Takashi Murakami's Superflat manifesto explores the "flatness" of Japanese art and culture, both visually and conceptually. It connects Japan's traditional aesthetics, like ukiyo-e, with modern pop culture, including anime and manga, focusing on the lack of depth in both media and societal values. Murakami critiques the postwar consumerist culture, highlighting how this superficiality has shaped Japan's identity. Superflat emphasizes the blurred line between high and low art, reflecting how contemporary art and consumer goods coexist in Japan and internationally.

There is also an other side to the colorful approach, leaning towards the somber tones seen in Murakami's art. This shift is rooted in his original history, which is accompanied by themes of anxiety and depression.

Let's search the future
to find them.

«Super flatness»
is the stage to the
future.



Last sentences out of his Manifesto

« Super flatness» is an original Concept of Japanese who has been completely Westernized. Within this Concept seeds for the future have been sown.

Let's search the future to find them. Super Flatness is the stage to the future