

Takashi Murakami. *Tan Tan Bo* (detail), 2001. Acrylic on canvas mounted on board. 141 3/4 x 212 5/8 x 2 5/8 inches. Collection of John A. Smith and Victoria Hughes. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo. ©2001 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Educator packet for the special exhibition

©MURAKAMI on view at the Brooklyn Museum, April 5–July 13, 2008

Tan Tan Bo

Characters in Art

Background

This painting is named after a character featured in *GE GE GE no Kitaro*, a *manga* (comic book) series from 1966 to 1970 written by one of Murakami's favorite authors, Shigeru Mizuki. In a video tour created for the ©MURAKAMI exhibition in Los Angeles, Murakami referred to this work as "my memory and my self-portrait."

Description

An oval face on a tan background spans the width of the painting. A set of concentric circles, midway down the canvas, form a pair of eyes. Straight white lines form the edges of large black teeth. Two circular objects filled with curved blue, yellow, black, green, and red swirling lines hover in front of the large face. Shapes such as eyes, flowers, and spirals are repeated throughout the composition in varied forms. Small figures populate the background and emerge from the face of the central character.

About the Artist

Born in Tokyo in 1962, Murakami is an influential artist with a wide-ranging body of work that consciously bridges fine art, design, animation, fashion, and popular culture. He received a Ph.D. from the prestigious Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, where he trained in the school of traditional Japanese painting known as Nihonga, a nineteenth-century mixture of Western and Eastern styles. Curated by Murakami, the *Superflat* Trilogy introduced Japanese artists, including cartoonists and animators, to a large international audience.

Questions for Viewing

What is going on in this painting?

Describe the main character. What do you notice about its expression?

Find two eyes in the painting. How are they similar? How are they different? What might they tell you about the character?

Many shapes in this painting are repeated. How many sets can you find?

This painting was inspired by a manga (comic book) character popular when the artist was a child. How is this character similar to or different from other comic-book characters you know?

Which word (or words) best describes this painting: calm, anxious, chaotic, happy, or excited? How does the artist use the elements of art (including shape, color, and scale) to create this mood?

What other characters can you find? Hint: Some of them are very small!

The artist refers to this artwork as "my memory and my self-portrait." Does this information add to your understanding of the image? How?

Activities

Art Activity

Divide several sheets of 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper vertically into three equal parts. Draw a series of self-portraits with the head in the top third, body in the middle third, and legs in the bottom third of the page (Diagram A). Cut the papers into three sections and staple the stack of heads, bodies, and legs between two sheets of heavy paper (Diagram B). Mix and match various combinations of heads, bodies, and legs to create new characters.



Diagram A

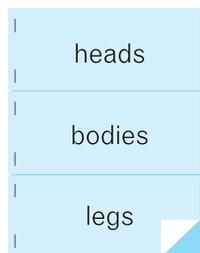


Diagram B

Language Arts Activity

Generate a list of adjectives that describe a range of feelings or emotions. Select a word and convey that feeling to a partner using only a facial expression or pose. Using close observation skills, your partner will interpret the expression you are communicating. Switch roles. Examine the facial expressions and poses of the characters in *Tan Tan Bo*. What are they feeling? What do you see to support your idea?

Science Activity

Identify a key anatomical feature in the painting to explore in more depth (such as eyes, ears, teeth, nose, or hair). Create a labeled sketch of two examples noting the size, color, location within the painting, and types of lines used to illustrate the form (curved/angular) in the margin. Compare and contrast the examples.

Resources

Murakami, Takashi, et al. © *MURAKAMI*. Exh. cat. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; New York: Rizzoli International Publications; Tokyo/New York: Kaikai Kiki, 2007. This is the © *MURAKAMI* exhibition catalogue.

<http://www.moca.org/murakami/>

This Web site for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, provides access to several multimedia highlights, including a video tour of © *MURAKAMI* hosted by the artist.

<http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/>

This is the official Web site for Kaikai Kiki, a company founded by Murakami in 2001. In addition to managing and supporting his artwork, the company also supports select young artists. The Web site includes Murakami's artist profile and several selected artworks.

© *MURAKAMI* is organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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