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ALBERTINA

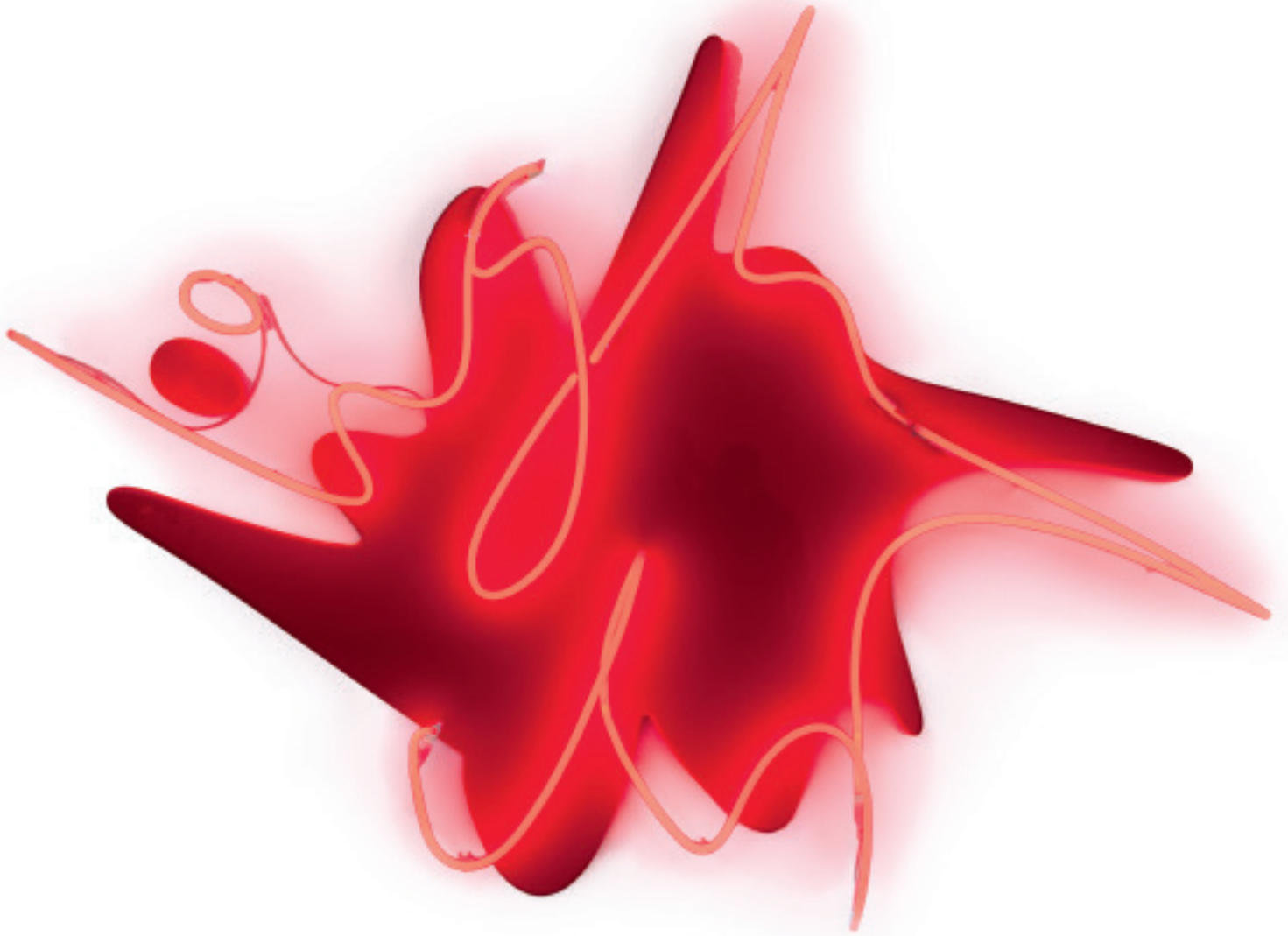
PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York

KAWS. ART & COMIX

CONTENTS

Ralph Gleis FOREWORD	7	JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT	116
Angela Stief KAWS. ART & COMIX	13	KATHERINE BERNHARDT	132
Carlo McCormick COMICS AND ART: CONFLUENCE AND THE APPRECIATION OF DIFFERENCE	51	COSIMA VON BONIN	83
Florian Waldvogel KAWS AND MODERNISM	109	MISLEIDYS CASTILLO PEDROSO	73
Andreas Platthaus WHAT ART HAS TO DO WITH DISNEY	183	ELIZA DOUGLAS	137
		ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM	4
		FUTURA 2000	121
		RED GROOMS, MIMI GROSS & THE RUCKUS CONSTRUCTION COMPANY	65
		BLALLA W. HALLMANN	44
		KEITH HARING	160
		GOTTFRIED HELNWEIN	143
		ISOLDE MARIA JOHAM	21
		KAWS	6, 9, 19, 42, 47, 57, 62, 79 90, 130, 158, 196, 200, 210
		MIKE KELLEY	208
		MICHAELA KONRAD	92
		BRIGITTE KOWANZ	3, 61, 115
		ROY LICHTENSTEIN	189
		A. R. PENCK	178
		JOYCE PENSATO	152
		RAYMOND PETTIBON	96
		AD REINHARDT	191, 197
		PETER SAUL	36
		KENNY SCHARF	124
		TSCHABALALA SELF	86
		MAGDALENA SUAREZ FRIMKESS & MICHAEL FRIMKESS	141, 145 146, 149
		H. C. WESTERMANN	25
		MICHA WILLE	205
		SUE WILLIAMS	170, 182
ARTISTS	215		
With texts by Lorenz Ecker, Elsy Lahner, Melissa Lumbroso, Constanze Johanna Malissa, Angela Stief and Sophie Wratzfeld			
LIST OF WORKS	229		



BRIGITTE KOWANZ
Light Up, 2010
Neon, wood, lacquer
175 × 245 × 9 cm

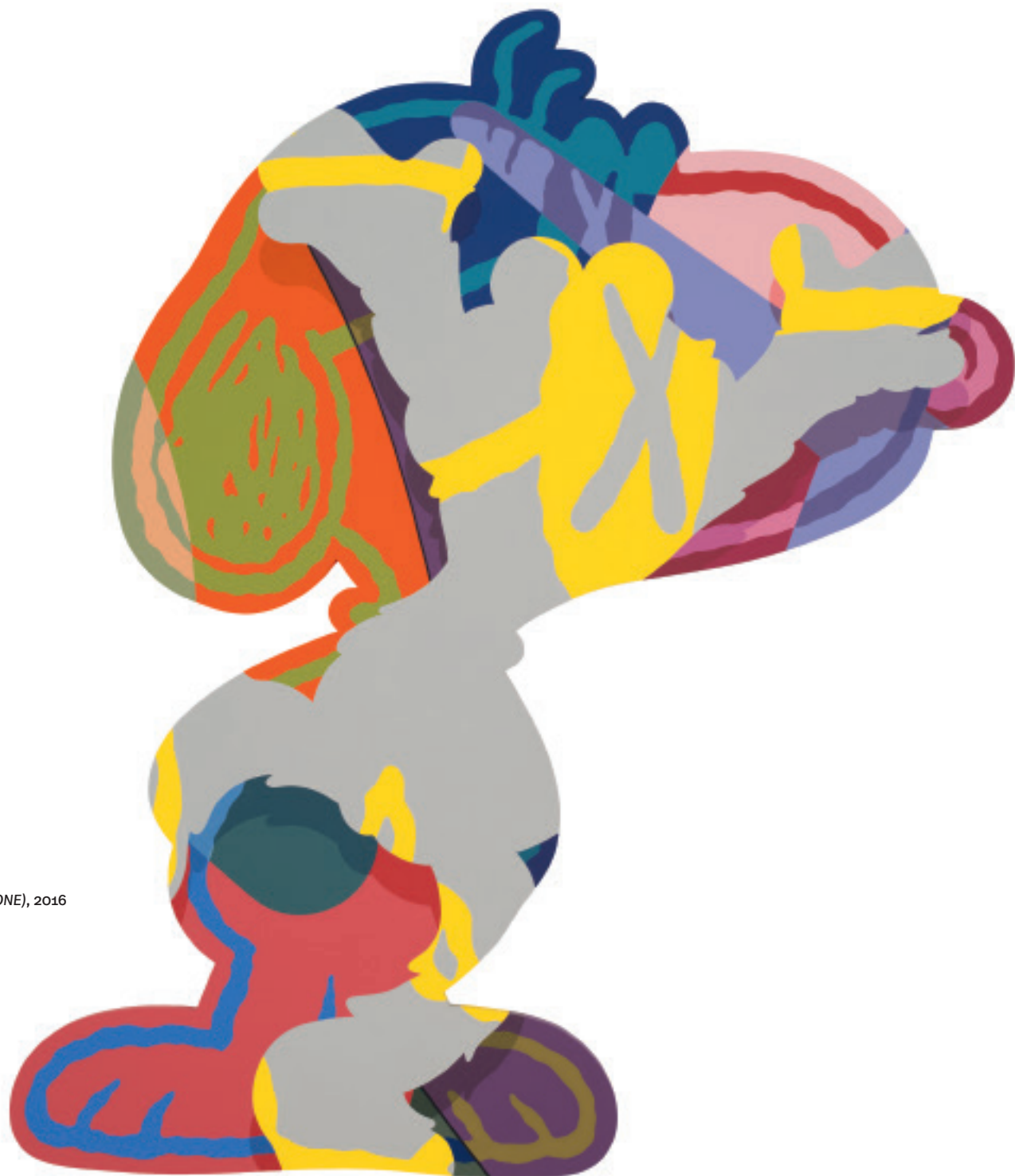
61
115

ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM
Meatball Curtain (for R. Crumb), 1969
Installation made from enamel on metal,
Plexiglas, magnets, and nylon thread
Dimensions variable





9
19
42
47
57
62
79
90
130
158
196
200
210



KAWS
FIVE SUSPECTS (#ONE), 2016
Acrylic on canvas
213 x 185 cm

Ralph Gleis
Director General of the Albertina Museum

FOREWORD

KAWS is undoubtedly one of the most popular figures in contemporary art. His works, which are inspired by well-known comic book characters and are instantly recognizable by the X symbols in place of eyes, can be found in a wide variety of contexts: in museums, as sculptures in urban settings, in fashion and design, and in the digital realm on social media platforms. However, KAWS is also intensely engaged with art history, cleverly incorporating art historical references into his work and transforming them into his own unique visual language and artistic practice. His work is thus a prime example of the connection between popular and high culture, drawing from one and transferring it to the other. |

The exhibition at the Albertina Modern, his first in Austria, also references the many artists and artistic methods dealing with the theme of comics since the 1950s. By then, comics had already become an integral part of everyday culture. Through their characters, comics reflect social conditions and influence the perceptions and values of their readers. But where is the boundary between pop culture comics and high culture art? Do mechanisms such as mass distribution make art more compatible with the general public, or simply more commercial? |

Art and comics are the two poles that form the conceptual and thematic framework of this exhibition. Their interrelationship is complex. A comic is essentially a story told through a sequence of images strung together. Fine art practices were a central prerequisite for the development of this medium, whose visual language is characterized by simplified, stylized forms, clear lines and surfaces, and the use of bold, unshaded colors. Over time, comics have become increasingly integrated into the institutional and discursive context of the visual arts. The work of numerous influential artists from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day can be situated at this permeable border between high and popular culture. KAWS's oeuvre can also be located within this zone of tension. |

KAWS began his career as a graffiti artist and quickly embraced the aesthetic characteristics and mechanisms of comics. Their immediate visual presence has a rapid and easily accessible effect on viewers. Their directness lends the medium a special urgency that is understandable and accessible across cultural and linguistic boundaries. This is the basis for the mass appeal of comics, which has predestined them as a vehicle for popular cultural phenomena. As a result, they continue to exert a powerful and lasting appeal on many artists to this day. |

The exhibition at the Albertina Modern places the artist's work in dialogue with influential artists of the second half of the twentieth century, as well as with important contemporary movements, conveying a variety of artistic approaches to comics. For example, it shows how, from the 1960s onward, comics became a particular focus of pop art artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, who took up their clear visual language, adapted it, and transferred it into the canon of art. In the 1980s, artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat—initially drawing on street art—incorporated formal characteristics of comics into their works. Works of contemporary artists such as Joyce Pensato and Katherine Bernhardt build on this, highlighting painterly qualities in their adaptations of characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and the Pink Panther, and showing alternative ways of combining comics and high culture. Juxtapositions such as these illustrate how KAWS's oeuvre can be situated at the intersection of comics and contemporary art. The exhibition also presents

artists whose work is included in KAWS's own passionately assembled art collection, showing his intense engagement with art and art history. Time and again, KAWS's work features subtle references to classical pictorial traditions, such as Christian iconography like that of the Pietà. With great sensitivity, KAWS demonstrates in many ways how popular culture and art history can be productively intertwined. |

The great popularity of KAWS's comic-like figures in both the institutionalized art world and everyday commercial life shows that his artistic practice has established itself as a proven model for success. KAWS has enjoyed great popularity for years, especially in the Anglo-American and Asian regions, where comics traditionally have strong cultural roots. He has now also arrived in the major European art capitals. The exhibition at the Albertina Modern will make his work more accessible to a wider audience in this country as well. |

Putting together an ambitious exhibition project like this would not have been possible without the tremendous and indispensable support of the artist himself. My special thanks therefore go first and foremost to Brian Donnelly, alias KAWS, and his studio, who worked with us from the very beginning in a lively exchange to conceive this outstanding presentation and made it possible not least through significant loans. I would like to thank the curatorial duo Angela Stief, director of Albertina Modern and chief curator for contemporary art, and guest curator Florian Waldvogel for the outstanding exhibition idea and multilayered concept. In successfully carrying out the project, they were supported by assistant curators Lorenz Ecker and Melissa Lumbroso, whom I would also like to thank here. An exhibition of this magnitude also presents organizational challenges. I would therefore like to thank Christiane Steinbichler-Schranz on behalf of Exhibition Management for her prudent project management, and the Conservation Department, headed by Eva Glück, for the necessary care of the works. My sincere gratitude goes to the lenders, especially Lio Malca, Ute Onnasch, and Liu Shiming, for their trust and valued support. This compelling volume has been produced to accompany the exhibition, with Sandra Maria Rust from the Albertina overseeing its production, for which I am very grateful. I would also like to thank the graphic designer Yvonne Quirnbach for her successful layout design, as well as the authors Carlo McCormick, Andreas Platthaus, Angela Stief, and Florian Waldvogel for their valuable contributions. |

I hope you enjoy reading this catalog and that it contributes to a deeper understanding and enrichment of the subject matter beyond your visit to the exhibition. |



KAWS
FIVE SUSPECTS (#TWO), 2016
Acrylic on canvas
213 x 185 cm

6
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62
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90
130
158
196
200
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KAWS
FIVE SUSPECTS (#THREE), 2016
Acrylic on canvas
213 x 185 cm





KAWS
FIVE SUSPECTS (#FOUR), 2016
Acrylic on canvas
213 × 185 cm

6

KAWS
FIVE SUSPECTS (#FIVE), 2016

Acrylic on canvas
213 x 185 cm

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