

'COMPANION' artist KAWS crosses boundaries

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mtravis@tulane.edu



KAWS, a popular artist whose work takes many forms, discusses the span of his career with Monica Ram rez-Montagut, director of the Newcomb Art Museum. KAWS is the alias of Brian Donnelly. The conversation took place Wednesday (Sept. 9) in Dixon Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

It's hard to miss: *COMPANION (PASSING THROUGH)* by KAWS is the 16-foot-tall outdoor sculpture in the Newcomb Pottery Garden in front of the [Newcomb Art Museum](#) on the Tulane University uptown campus.

KAWS is the alias of Brian Donnelly. He is an internationally acclaimed artist ? “one

of the most culturally influential artists of our time,” said Tulane [President Mike Fitts](#) as he introduced KAWS to an audience of more than 350 in Dixon Hall on Wednesday (Sept. 9).

“He’s extremely talented in getting people to think and spur dialogue,” said Fitts.

In his career, KAWS has branched into different realms ? from graffiti on freight trains and bus shelters in the early 1990s to toy design, fashion, graphic design, large-scale sculpture and paintings on shaped canvases hanging in art galleries.

“I’ve never had a game plan for what I do,” KAWS told Monica Ram?rez-Montagut, director of the Newcomb Art Museum and author of *KAWS* (Rizzoli, 2010), as they presented a slideshow of his wide-ranging work. “I just put the work out there.”

Ram?rez-Montagut praised KAWS’ work ethic.

The artist demurred. “I took opportunities and followed them. It’s a natural growth,” he said.

KAWS first designed a small version of “Companion” in 1999 as a limited edition toy with a Tokyo manufacturer. It became highly collectible.

“At first when I made “Companion,” I didn’t think it would have longevity,” said KAWS. “I didn’t picture something I would redo over and over. But it’s become a family member.”

[KAWS](#) has 381,000 followers on Instagram. Art is everywhere, he said. “Through social media, you find everything within five minutes. I think there is no excuse not to find inspiration somewhere.”

COMPANION (PASSING THROUGH) is part of the Newcomb Art Museum exhibition “[A Shared Space](#): KAWS, Karl Wirsum, & Tomoo Gokita.” It opened Sept. 9 and is on display through Jan. 3, 2016.