

PRESS RELEASE

Follow The Bunny, The First Solo Exhibition of AIKO in India

- First Solo Exhibition of the International Street Art Icon, AIKO opens on March 14, 2024
- Gallery XXL's first solo exhibition of an international artist at its new permanent gallery
- On display will be AIKO's canvases, *Bunny Maps*, new textiles, limited edition prints, and found objects

Gallery XXL is thrilled to announce the first solo exhibition of AIKO in India. *Follow the Bunny*, which opens on Art Night Thursday, March 14, 2024, marks the first time since 2018 that AIKO's body of work will be displayed as a solo show in Asia.

Her career in the arts began at Takashi Murakami's studio in Brooklyn, after which she co-founded the artist collective, FAILE. She was introduced to graffiti in the late 90s and met fellow street artists - Banksy, Shepard Fairey, BAST and Space Invader.

A prominent name in the urban contemporary and street art world, AIKO has been stenciling her signature *Bunny* which she first spray painted in Banksy's studio in London in 2005. Most recently, her works were shown at *City As Studio* curated by Jeffrey Deitch at the K11 Foundation in Hong Kong.

The exhibition *Follow the Bunny*, traces the multiple renditions of the *Bunny* that has accompanied AIKO across the globe. As she puts it: 'I paint hard and shout even louder,' this show is a moment for the Gallery's ambition to get deeper into the global urban contemporary art movement and its representation in India.

Having traveled extensively around cities such as Amsterdam, Istanbul, Saigon, Berlin, Johannesburg, Soweto, Copenhagen, Fukushima, Vienna, Dubai, Shanghai, Miami, New Delhi, AIKO now comes to Mumbai after being introduced to the country by Gallery XXL during India Art Fair 2023. The works part of the exhibition consist of newly developed canvases, the *Lady Butterfly* sculpture, *Bunny Maps*, a selection of photographs of AIKO's works clicked by Martha Cooper, textiles, and found objects that AIKO collected while wandering in the city of Mumbai.

About AIKO

Born and raised in Tokyo, AIKO moved to New York City in 1997 to pursue an MFA in Media Studies from the New School University. She left for the US with little knowledge of English, navigating her way through the congestion of the American city. She found graffiti while frequenting discotheques and being exposed to the subcultures through local street artists. With a fantasy to be able to express generously, graffiti became her language of communication. Her career in the arts began with assisting Takashi Murakami at his Brooklyn studio, which subsequently led her to form the artist collective FAILE with Patrick McNeil and Patrick Miller in 1999 which came to be known for wheat pasting and stenciling images around New York City.

One of the only female artists who was at the cusp of the street art movement in the late 90s and early 2000s, AIKO – as a member of FAILE met fellow street artists - Shepard Fairey, Banksy, Space Invader, BAST, Ben Eine

and initiated a network of artists who'd go on to put up exhibitions to substantiate their place in the larger art scene. Excited about the possibility of expressing such artistic freedom and how AIKO describes it 'to scream,' she dove right into it. However, in the post 9/11 era, graffiti artists were regarded as outlaws menacing the state and the growing hostility resulted in artists making their way to Europe.

During the period of breaking away from the FAILE Collective, in 2005 while in Banksy's studio in London, AIKO made the first stencil of the Bunny and tested it on his bathroom door. Born in the year of the Rabbit as per the Chinese calendar, the iconography of the Rabbit is something she always held onto. The Bunny became a symbol that embodies freedom, love, peace and independence.

Between 2005-06, AIKO established herself as an independent artist and was introduced to American curator and art dealer Jeffrey Deitch and photographer Martha Cooper. She identified with an unstoppable love and dedication Martha had for discovering and participating in street culture from far and wide. Since then, the two have become dear friends who have journeyed across countries, with AIKO painting murals and Martha documenting her. One such image is that of the historic Bowery Wall, also referred to as the Haring Wall located in New York City. Jeffrey was the one to curate the wall and asked Haring to paint it in the 80s. The wall was forgotten until 2008 when Jeffrey produced Haring's retrospective and commissioned a mural to revive the wall. Since then, Martha has played a crucial role in capturing the works of multiple artists who have continued painting over the same wall. And in 2013, AIKO was chosen as the first woman to paint the wall by Tony Goldman who was the proprietor of it.

The artist has stenciled her motifs on the streets, and an array of objects that she collected over the years. As an avid traveler, she'd interact with the local community learning about urban culture and crafts unique to them. She accumulates subway maps, road signs, advertisement boards, name plates and other objects that represent a tangibility affinity she has with the streets.

AIKO's murals and canvases further depict dynamics of sex work, eroticism, female figures embracing their sexuality, scenes inspired by red-light districts and Japanese *shunga*, a genre of 16th-century erotic art found in woodblock prints. Her progression into sculptural works in 2008 is also a celebration of Japanese craftsmanship which enabled her to produce a series of editioned *Lady Butterfly* sculptures. She conceptualized these sensual *Ladies* after seeing Baroque sculptures during a visit to Rome in 2009. AIKO in a 2011 conversation with sleepboy states in *Arrested Motion*: 'it is a fairy of the street... comes in the night and draws stories of love and romance with her spray paint.'

An acclaimed artist in the international graffiti, street art and contemporary art scene, her comprehensive exhibition history includes shows at many institutions. In 2008, AIKO participated in a two-artist show called *Brick Ladies* with Lady Pink. Few years later in 2010, she worked with Banksy on *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. Her large-scale works are installed across many cities including Miami's Wynwood Walls, 2009; New York City's Bowery Wall, 2013; and Coney Art Walls curated by Jeffrey Deitch in 2015, 2016, 2017. AIKO has exhibited in a collection of group shows such as 'Animamix Biennale' held at Shanghai's MoCA in 2009; 'Edo Pop' at Japan Society NYC in 2013; BEYOND THE STREETS in LA, NY, London, and Shanghai between 2018, 2019, 2023 and with Gallery XXL in India in 2023. She has shown her work through solo shows, "Sweet Heart" at The Outsiders Gallery in the UK in 2014 and Lady Go at Shizuoka City Tokaido Hiroshige Museum in 2018. On the commercial



front, AIKO has been commissioned to create works in collaboration with Louis Vuitton, FENDI, Coach, Apple, Microsoft, Estée Lauder, Kiehl's, The Standard, W Hotel, Sanrio Hello Kitty, Isetan, Warner Bros., RED, Pepsi, Reebok, as well as for the former First Lady Michelle Obama. In 2020 and 2023, AIKO completed two commissioned projects for the World Trade Centre. The artist is currently based in New York City where she is focusing on her studio practice and commissioned works.

About the Gallery

Established in 2023, Gallery XXL is an urban contemporary art gallery based in Mumbai, India. The gallery represents and showcases a roster of Indian and international artists whose practices are rooted in a variety of disciplines that broaden the understanding of established categories and catalyse diverse exchanges through processual exhibitions, treating the gallery as a fluid institution which presents dynamic negotiations to the idea of a 'white cube.'

With its name echoing Jean-Michel Basquiat's city walk from Downtown 81 (Dir. Edo Bertoglio,) when he described his medium as "extra large," Gallery XXL extends a desire for imaginations to be XXL, an abbreviation for 'extra, extra, large' and brings it to the city of Mumbai in order to examine the ambitious scale of visuals and conversations prevalent in urban art.

Arjun Bahl, Giulia Ambrogi, Thanish Thomas and Hanif Kureshi, the founders of St+Art India Foundation joined hands with Joe Cyril (Director, Gallery XXL) to start the space-time for Gallery XXL. Founded in 2014, St+Art India has been supporting street art in the country through public art projects. With the experience of creating artistic interventions in public as well as private spaces coalescing in order to widen engagement with urban art, aesthetics and culture work in the Indian context, St+art extends its vision to facilitate institutional representation for urban contemporary artists through exhibitions at the newly founded Gallery XXL.

Team

Giulia Ambrogi, Hanif Kureshi, Arjun Bahl, Thanish Thomas, Joe Cyril, Vidur Sethi, Sarah Malik, Faraz Khan, Akhil Kattamanchil, Manvi Vakharia, Guru Pednekar, Gaurav Kaushik, Ashu Khanna, and Babu Gundanoor.

Annexures

The attached annexure includes artwork captions and the drive consists of the invite and high resolution images of the artworks. For any more information, please contact sarah@galleryxxl.com.