

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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MAN OF THE MOMENT



The Player

TWENTY YEARS AFTER BURSTING ONTO THE SCENE WITH THE FILM KIDS, HARMONY KORINE IS STAKING A CLAIM ON THE ART WORLD. BY MICHAEL SLENSKE

IT'S A STEAMY AUGUST AFTERNOON AND HARMONY Korine is sucking on the stub of a cigar while skateboarding figure eights around giant cement pillars in a cavernous factory in downtown Nashville. As it happens, Korine, 42, owns the building—once home to the Bill Voorhees air-conditioning company—and several others surrounding it in this up-and-coming section of town. When Korine—who directed the 2012 coed crime drama *Spring Breakers* and wrote the screenplay for *Kids*, Larry Clark's 1995 breakthrough film about the debauched lives of New York teenagers—recently snapped up the properties, his fans and local creatives were abuzz with speculation. At the moment, a curious couple is peeking through the glass front door. "It's like this all day: people staring in," Korine says as he skates by the entrance ramp, smoke rings curling over the bill of his Miami Dolphins cap.

At first, he had envisioned the warehouse as a kind of experimental contemporary art space and residency center where his

friends—"high-level motherfuckers," he calls them—could stay and create work. But he's scaled back that ambition for now, seeing it function more as a bridge between his punk past and his latest adventures in the art and film worlds, with skate crews hanging with artists and hip-hop stars like A\$AP Rocky.

To start, Korine and his wife, Rachel, an actress, will invite the public into the space in February to view their contemporary art collection. Korine began collecting in 1993 after a boozy walk in Manhattan with the late German artist Martin Kippenberger. "Martin made a drawing of my face and handed it to me, and I jokingly said I was disappointed because there was nothing offensive about it," Korine recalls. "He quickly drew a penis in my mouth." On this day, sprawled around the factory are paintings by the likes of Julian Schnabel, Jeff Elrod, Joe Bradley, and Rita Ackermann. "I don't want anything to get too big too fast," Korine says, noting he will probably receive visitors by appointment. "I get nervous any time something starts to become definable." »

Harmony Korine, in
Nashville, August 2015.

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“Every single thing he did was a work of art,” Chloë Sevigny says of Korine.

Korine himself is notoriously tricky to pin down. In some circles, he’s best known for his association with Larry Clark, but lately he’s become known for his association with another Larry—Gagosian, his dealer since 2014. “Harmony’s ambitious in unexpected ways,” says Gagosian, who gave him a show in his uptown Manhattan gallery last year and one in Beverly Hills shortly thereafter. “I don’t mean the artist as a wheeler-dealer. That’s a different kind of cat.” Gagosian added Korine to his high-profile roster after a friend recommended he take a look at a series of canvases Korine had made over the previous six years: hypnotic checks (which Vans put on limited-edition sneakers last spring), Magic Eye-inspired op-art grids (meant to mimic the hallucinatory effects of his films), and a wide swath of mixed-media figurative pieces featuring little ghouls, which Korine has been painting since he was a kid. “He’s an artist who doesn’t make the same painting over and over,” Gagosian notes. He and Korine, adds the gallerist, are kindred spirits. “I just love listening to the guy talk.”

Korine’s penchant for tall tales is legendary. “When we met, he told me he’d been an assistant on a Paul Schrader film,” Clark says. “And that in one scene, someone gave Willem Dafoe a real blowjob. I asked Paul about it, and he said these stories were total nonsense. But Harmony would say things that made me laugh so hard that my contact lenses would fall out.” The dealer Patrick Painter, who opened his Los Angeles gallery in 1997 with Korine’s first U.S. solo show, concurs. “The only way you can work with the guy is to not question his stories,” he says.

“A lot of people think the things that I say are not true, but they are,” Korine swears, as he takes me upstairs to view his new “Circle Paintings,” which Gagosian will show at one of his London outposts in February. (Korine’s work typically sells for between \$15,000 and \$200,000). Propped on cans of house paint, Korine’s medium of choice, the monumental canvases appear to vibrate like

1. Korine and Al Pacino, at the Toronto International Film Festival, 2014.
2. Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Benson, Rachel Korine, and Selena Gomez (from left), in *Spring Breakers*, 2012.
3. Werner Herzog, in *Mister Lonely*, 2007.
4. Korine and Lil Wayne, Tampa, Florida, 2012.
5. David Blaine and Korine, at a Jeremy Scott event, 2004.
6. Chloë Sevigny, in *Kids*, 1995.
7. Jeffrey Deitch and Korine, at a private reception for “Rebel,” 2012.
8. Korine and James Franco, Los Angeles, 2012.
9. Jacob Sewell, in *Gummo*, 1997.
10. Dakota Johnson, Emily Ward, and Korine (from left), at the exhibition “First Show/Last Show,” in New York, organized by Vito Schnabel, 2015.

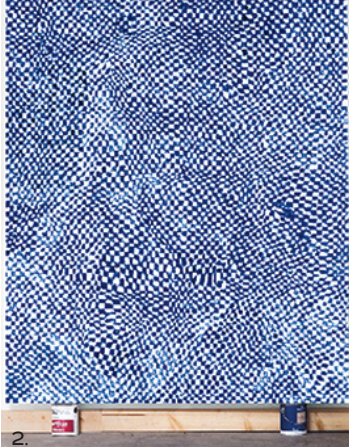
fluorescent fan blades spinning on high. Amid the paintings are bikes and toys belonging to Korine’s 7-year-old daughter, Lefty (named after the country music icon Lefty Frizzell), and a video console set up for a game Korine is considering developing. The building, dubbed Voorhees, after the company it used to house, is pretty spartan. Korine tells me he likes it when it’s really empty—working without distraction, he says, allows him to recharge.

“Harmony will do a great movie like *Spring Breakers* and then disappear,” says the actor James Franco, who starred in that film as a gangster-rapper who seduces a group of coeds (Selena Gomez, Ashley Benson, Vanessa Hudgens, and Rachel Korine) and brings them into his thug life. “Then, when the time is right, he will do something else.”

From an early age, Korine learned to embrace change. Born in Bolinas, California, to creative parents—his father was a documentary filmmaker for PBS, his mother taught karate and later opened a children’s store—he was raised on a commune, and then moved with his family along the hippie trail to North Africa. They finally settled in Nashville, when Korine was 7. There, he attended public school and made his first appearance in the local newspaper as a prepubescent, nonracist Jewish skinhead after a journalist saw him and his gang “in a fight with some rednecks and interviewed us,” he recalls. As a kid, he devoured Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin films. While a student at New York University’s film school, Korine handed out tapes of his work to any celebrity he managed to meet. “I remember a feeling of ‘I’m gonna do it now,’” he says. “I wasn’t gonna wait till I was 30 to make my films.”

One day Clark was sitting by the fountain in Washington Square Park when 18-year-old Korine struck up a conversation and told him about a script he’d written about a teenager whose alcoholic father gets him a prostitute for his 13th birthday. “He commented on my Leica and mentioned Robert Frank,” Clark remembers. “How many 18-year-old kids know Robert Frank?” The following year, Clark needed a script for *Kids* and gave Korine a call. The movie turned Rosario Dawson and Chloë Sevigny, Korine’s then-girlfriend, into stars. “Harmony has this sort of seductive nature that you can really get wrapped up in,” Sevigny says. “Any little note or letter he’d leave behind for me—from his

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1. Friends and assistants at the Voorhees studio. 2. Korine's *Blue Checker*, 2014. 3. With his wife, Rachel, at the Toronto International Film Festival, 2009. 4. and 5. Korine, playing and working in his studio. 6. With his painting *Morton Clowny Circle*, 2015.



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wording to the little drawing that he'd make in it—every single thing he did was a work of art.”

Through Clark, Korine met artists like Kippenberger and Christopher Wool, and through Painter he befriended the artist Mike Kelley. Korine's first show at Painter's gallery featured a series of reworked projections from his 1997 debut film, *Gummo*, about redneck youths in tornado-ravaged Ohio. After seeing it, the legendary director Werner Herzog called Korine “the future of American cinema” for his attention to quirky visual details. New Line Cinema promoted the exhibition, and it drew thousands—including the director Gus Van Sant, the actor Matt Dillon, and the rocker Marilyn Manson—and proved to Painter that “Harmony is a cult...It was like a riot.”

By that point, however, Korine was descending into a druggy haze. He had started shooting *Fight Harm*, a shelved film in which he provoked people on the street to fight him, with the illusionist David Blaine working as his cameraman. (Leonardo DiCaprio once showed up to watch.) In 1999, he was banned from *The Late Show With David Letterman* for reportedly rifling through Meryl Streep's purse in the greenroom. Korine finally hit bottom one snowy night, having spent several years in the company of street gangsters in Europe. When he awoke on a Paris subway, he realized his shoes had been stolen. “I was like, ‘It's time to go home,’” he recalls. Despite all that, Korine's artistic reputation remained intact.

Though he continued to make drawings, paintings, and photographs while directing films and videos, Korine had stopped publicly participating in the art world. But his friendship with the artist Dan Colen, which began when Colen called him out of the blue after reading a poem Korine had written about their mutual friend—the artist Dash Snow, who died of a heroine overdose in 2009—returned him to the fold. “He was in the art world and kind of exited it, and I think I was a big part of him coming back,” says Colen, who advises the Korines (“my family”) on the logistics of putting together exhibitions in their Nashville space. “I don't think that either of us would be doing what we are today without that relationship,” Colen adds. “I've really gotten into performative things. I've seen him do that in his films.”

In the story of Korine's reinvention, Rachel has played perhaps the biggest role. The two met soon after she graduated high school; she left her waitressing job to accompany him to a castle in the Scottish highlands, where he was filming 2007's *Mister Lonely* (she played Little Red Riding Hood). “When we met, I would come over and there would be a box of Hot Pockets and a liter of Coca-Cola in the fridge,” says Rachel, 29, as she gives me a tour of their West Nashville home, which is filled with midcentury furniture and works by Kelley, Colen, and Josh Smith. Now Korine's days are consumed with Lefty's soccer games and his five-mile runs. Rachel can also handle her husband's need to sometimes be on his own: When Korine was finishing the script for his latest film, she urged him to go to their house in Miami and be alone, so he could think.

What emerged from that retreat is *The Trap*, a forthcoming revenge drama about a yacht-robbing crew in Miami that Korine describes as “ultra-violent and very impressionistic.” The film, he says, will star Franco, Benicio Del Toro, Al Pacino, Robert Pattinson, and Idris Elba, and is meant to feel “like a drug experience.” After a rare pause, he explains that he is always trying to visually “assault” the viewer—whether in his films or art, or in his constantly evolving new obsessions that have yet to find a particular medium. “If I try something and it doesn't work out, what's the big deal?” he asks rhetorically. “I mean, I've never seen an opera, but I still feel like I could make one. I don't think there's a limit to what you can do.” ♦