

PRESS RELEASE

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Gajin Fujita: Wicked Beauty

September 12 through October 12, 2002

Reception for the artist: Thursday, September 12, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Venice, CA -- L.A. Louver is pleased to announce the inaugural West Coast exhibition of the Japanese American L.A.-based artist Gajin Fujita.

In his art Fujita combines traditional Japanese imagery and painting techniques, with contemporary themes and spraypainted graffiti.

The artist's parents -- his father a highly regarded painter; his mother a noted conservator of Japanese art, antiquities and textiles -- instilled Gajin Fujita with a deep sense of his Japanese heritage. Mrs. Fujita encouraged her son to make art, sharing with him the exquisite treasures on which she worked so that he could understand the way in which the artworks were made. However, the strongest draw to historical Japanese imagery for Fujita was the lush visuals of traditional Japanese tattoos. Through researching tattoos, Fujita came to learn and understand the iconography of screen painting from the Edo period, and achieved a deep appreciation of Japanese woodblock prints by ukiyo-e artists such as Ando Hiroshige and Kitagawa Utamaro. The hybridization of images in the prints, which blend high and low culture, popular and fine art, with seductive, lush printing techniques, resonated with the young artist. As such, the prints offered Fujita an early template for the effective synthesis of disparate themes and art making methods.

Contemporary Japanese cartoons, broadcast on American television for the first time in the 1970s, also proved alluring to Fujita. But it was *The Lone Wolf and Cub* film series starring Shintaro Katsu that told the story of a former Shogun executioner's quest for vengeance, that Fujita considers a particularly potent force. These films were based on the comic books ("manga") by Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima published in 1970 that were wildly popular in Japan, and which combined restrained realistic visuals with unrestrained stories of violence and Samurai heroics.

Growing up in Boyle Heights, a rough, mainly Latino section in East LA, and traveling by bus to Fairfax High (a magnet school located in a comfortable, predominantly Jewish, neighborhood), Fujita experienced a rich and diverse visual culture. A profound and continuing influence was the graffiti that abounded in the streets that surrounded Fujita's home. Fujita connected with graffiti's striking vibrant forms and content, and during the early 1990s he developed his painting skills on the street with a crew of taggers. Fujita, and his crew of eight or so multi-cultural taggers from around the city, sought out sites for their work in Little Tokyo and downtown Los Angeles. Evading police and other graffiti crews, Fujita worked at night "graffiti bombing" vacant walls in desolate parts of the city. Few of these murals remain, although glimpses may be seen in the music videos *To Live and Die in LA* by Tupac Shakur, and *I'm Real* by Jennifer Lopez, featuring Ja Rule.

Fujita's rich variety of influences was channeled through formal art training at Otis College of Art

and Design, where he honed his skills by working in a variety of media. At Otis, Fujita came under the guidance of artist Scott Greiger who recommended that he continue his formal training at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. There, Fujita studied with noted writer, critic, curator and social commentator Dave Hickey, graduating in 2000 with a MFA.

In the past two years Fujita has captured the attention of an international audience through his inclusion in several important group shows including *New American Talent*, at the Texas Fine Art Association, Austin, Texas and *Radar Love* at the Galleria Marabini, Bologna, Italy, both curated by David Pagel, 2000; *Ultra Lounge*, Las Vegas, Nevada, curated by Dave Hickey, 2000; *Hard Boiled Wonderland*, Luckman Gallery, Cal State, Los Angeles, curated by Julie Joyce, 2001; *Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitanism*, Site Santa Fe's 4th International Biennial, Santa Fe, New Mexico, curated by Dave Hickey, 2001, and *Casino 2001*, Stedelijk Museum Voor Actuele Kunst, Gent, Belgium, curated by Jeanne Greeneberg-Rohatyn, 2001.

Gajin Fujita had his first European solo show at Rolfe Ricke Gallery, Cologne, Germany in 2001. He is currently exhibiting with internationally renowned artist Yasumasa Morimura in *Floating World Redux: Gajin Fujita and Yasumasa Morimura* at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC, August 11 - October 13, 2002.

All the paintings included in the exhibition *Wicked Beauty* have been made by Fujita over the past twelve months, and reflect the breath of subject matter and ongoing interests of the artist. The tour de force *Gold State Warriors*, 2002, which features four Samurai warriors against a heavily graffitied background, is the largest painting Fujita has completed to date. The lush, sexualized *Swell*, 2002 and *Libido*, 2002 draw upon imagery of erotic Japanese prints; while *Dream*, 2002 pays homage to former members of Fujita's crew who have met early, violent deaths.

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