

Gajin Fujita's 'Made in L.A.' at L.A. Louver: Sold-Out Show Continues Graffiti Artist's Rise to Blue-Chip Status

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Courtesy L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

East vs. West, from 2010

Gajin Fujita has email now. The Japanese American, Boyle heights resident and retired K2S graffiti crew member has finally come into the computer age, albeit rather reluctantly. Until now, the only way to reach the reclusive artist was by landline at his family home where he still keeps his studio.

But while Fujita may have been one of the last to jump on the Google train, he has been one of the very first of Los Angeles' graf artists to graduate seamlessly from tagging on the street (using the name Hyde) to selling art in international blue chip galleries. His first show in L.A. in five years, "Made In L.A." at L.A. Louver, showcases a record 13 new works, including a mural sized, 7' x 22' painting comprised of 12 panels called *East vs. West*. The gold- and platinum-leafed, graffiti-style Samurai portrait marks Fujita's largest work to date -- indoors of course.





Jeff McLane; Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

"I miss the thrill, of being able to pull something off on the street," Fujita admits. "I do get an itch when I'm awake at four in the morning -- there's an ideal place to catch a tag right across from where I live, but they come and buff it so quickly now."

Besides the sold out show in Venice, which runs through Nov. 12, Fujita has been working on his first ever print with master printmaker Richard Duardo. Not limited by the medium, the edition of 60 is a version of the new *High Voltage* painting currently on view. "I recreated the dragon for the print," explains Fujita. "The background is crazy, but there's no gold leaf."

The new prints join his stencil collages, another departure from the panel paintings. These beautiful, recycled patterns represent stripped-down studies of the paintings that follow, first shown at his breakthrough exhibit at LACMA in 2007. This work has collectors on a waiting list, but almost didn't survive. "I was throwing them in the trash after I was done with them," Fujita concedes. "My mom actually found the array of colors and was like, 'Are you stupid? These are pieces on their own', so she helped me work on them so they could be shown."





Courtesy L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

High Voltage, 2011

While the culture clash of Eastside graffiti vs. the Far East's Ukiyo-e style figures in Fujita's work hasn't changed much over the years, his craft has become noticeably more refined as his traditional Japanese references move closer to the originals. But he still has difficulty getting any response from collectors in Tokyo. "Young fans are into it, they can relate," says Fujita. "It'll take a little more time before they see my work as tasteful. I'm not worried. I'm busy enough."

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