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ON VIEW



Images by ©GAJIN FUJITA L.A. Louver, Venice

"TAIL WHIP," 2007, has elements of *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints that flourished in 17th- to 19th-century Japan) and street art.

Passion for *ukiyo-e*

By KAREN WADA

Dragons, graffiti, cartoon heroes. Gajin Fujita is known for mixing Japanese art with L.A. street and pop culture in paintings fueled by his eclectic imagination and experiences as a Japanese American from Boyle Heights.

The Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena is spotlighting a major influence on these East-meets-Eastside creations: Fujita's passion for *ukiyo-e*, the woodblock prints that flourished in 17th- to 19th-century Japan. "Gajin Fujita: Ukiyo-e in Contemporary Painting," which opened in April, is what curator Bridget Bray calls "a focused solo exhibition of five pieces in which you see parallels to the print tradition such as dynamic compositions, martial figures, attention to surface detail and dramatization of the natural and supernatural worlds."

Bray says the paintings, on display through Oct. 7, also offer "points of conversation" with a show of prints and drawings by 19th-century master Tsukioka Yoshitoshi that opens May 18.

In discussing his exhibition, Fujita notes that "Shore Line Duel" (2004) "directly references a popular print." In it, samurai battle before a graffiti-streaked background — layers of motifs and media being Fujita hallmarks. (To create his pieces, which range from intimate to mural-sized, he covers wood panels with gold, silver and platinum leaf, tags them and uses spray paint, stencils and paint markers.)

In "Golden Boy After Kuniyoshi" (2011), Fujita says he "did away with having the graffiti and title be the stronger imagery." He also experimented with spray paint to achieve different surface effects and gave the legendary boy "demon" and "L.A." tattoos. "I want my paintings to be contemporary and not just reproductions of *ukiyo-e*, so I insert bits of things that are contemporary."

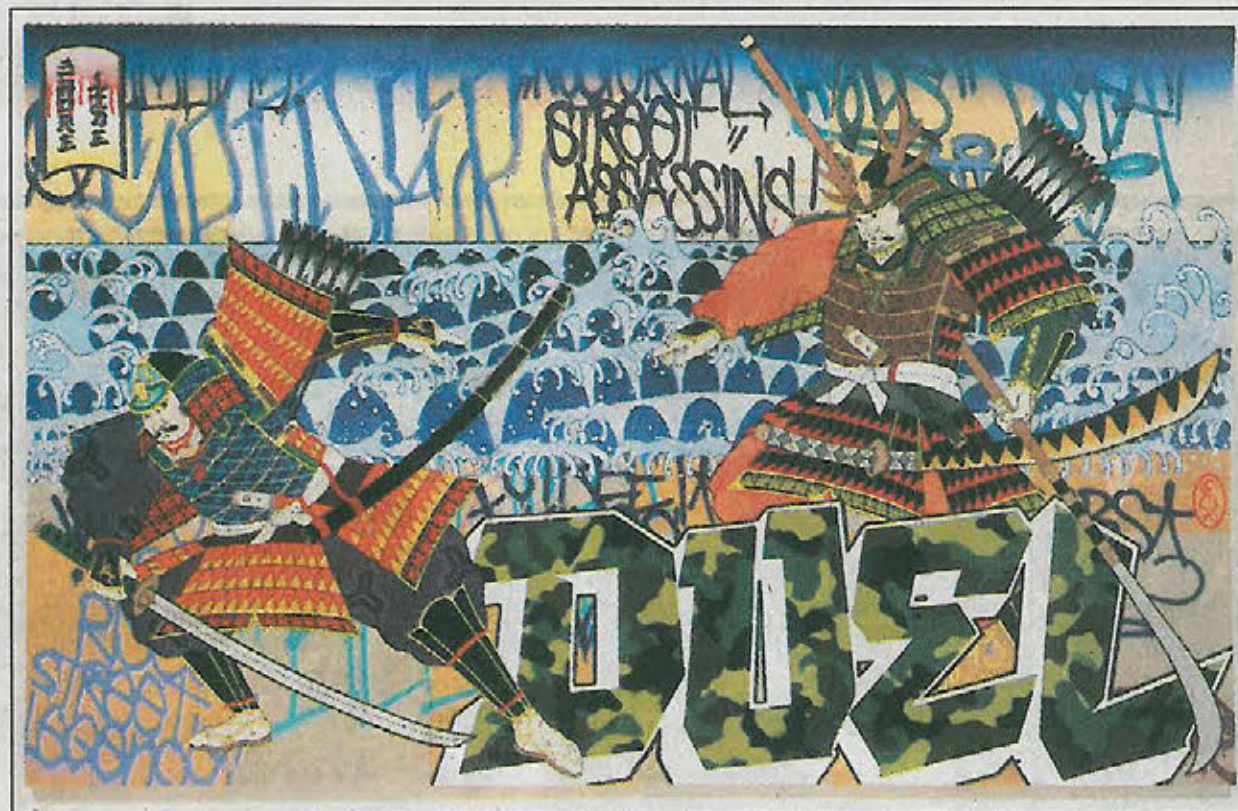
While graffiti is "something I once practiced myself," the artist says, his fascination with *ukiyo-e* began in his early 20s when he saw prints his mother, an antique restorer, brought home.

At 40, Fujita, represented by L.A. Louver, has seen his reputation continue to grow. (Last spring, Times art critic Christopher Knight wrote that his "paintings merging tagging with the 'floating world' of traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* are the most important 21st century iteration of graffiti's influence on art.")

"I like the direction my recent pieces are taking," Fujita says. "But any evolution has been subtle. My art is still based on my [interest] in woodblock prints." He can't predict where his work is heading. "But I'll try to keep honing my skills to get closer to being on par with the *ukiyo-e* masters. And I want to keep violating people's expectations."



"GOLDEN BOY After Kuniyoshi," 2011, by Gajin Fujita is in the exhibition.



"SHORE LINE DUEL," 2004, "directly references a popular print," Fujita says.

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Martinis and noir, a natural pairing

By CAROLYN KELLOGG

Musso & Frank, the famous steakhouse that served up cocktails to William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald and other writers at loose ends in Hollywood, hosted its second literary salon last week. The guest speaker was John Buntin, author of "L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City"; he was there to illuminate the true-life models for the fiction of detective novelist Raymond Chandler.

First, there was dinner — a three-course one, with a limited menu that, yes, included steak — and before that, cocktails. Musso's bartenders and wait staff came in to work on their day off — the restaurant is usually closed Mondays and was open only to salon attendees. Like the martinis, the Gibsons came with an overflow carafe. I'd like to think that's how Chandler used to take his drinks — with more drinks on the side.

The salon is co-presented by Musso & Frank, which displayed photographs and memorabilia of its history dating to when it first opened on Hollywood Boulevard in 1919. Tables were adorned with copies of a menu from 1939, which included canape of caviar for 90 cents, a special plate of filet mignon with mushroom sauce and vegetables for \$1, and lobster a la Newberg for \$1.15.

Under the auspices of the LAVA Salon, the event organizers are husband-and-wife team Richard Schave and Kim Cooper. They're the masterminds behind the Esotouric bus tours, which focus on L.A. history, often with a literary bent.

This literary salon, the second, was focused on Chandler but in an oblique way. The first post-dinner speaker was Howard Prouty, acquisitions archivist at the Motion Picture Academy's Margaret Herrick Library, who spoke about bookseller Jake Zeitlin, who was a major cultural force in early 20th Los Angeles.

Buntin's book "L.A. Noir" focuses on the 1950s, on the pull between Police Chief William H. Parker and mobsters Bugsy Siegel and Mickey Cohen. Buntin read from the early pages of his book, which swiftly summed up a long history of corruption and (usually ineffective) reform efforts in the city.

It was not too insider a conversation — in fact, someone who didn't know any L.A. history would have found it to be a robust and welcoming introduction.

Tickets for the LAVA literary salon at Musso & Frank are \$100. Planned as a quarterly event, the next salon will be centered on the writers F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker. It's scheduled for July 23 — which is, coincidentally, Raymond Chandler's birthday.

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BRET HARTMAN Getty Images

LAVA's literary salons find a home at Musso & Frank.