

Los Angeles Times

What to see in L.A. galleries: street-art ethos, a mesmerizing digital canvas, wild tapestries



Detail of Retna's "She's Got a Slight Grip on My Eye" (shown in full below).

By **David Pagel**

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Sometimes artists make the best curators. And sometimes galleries organize better exhibitions than museums.

Both happen with "Roll Call: 11 Artists From Los Angeles" at L.A. Louver. Organized by Gajin Fujita, the exhibition reprises "Art in the Streets," an overblown extravaganza that the Museum of Contemporary Art organized in 2011. In that half-baked sprawl, the art all but disappeared into City Walk-style displays and social events.

In contrast, "Roll Call" sticks to the basics: 35 works by 11 guys. Their paintings are potent. So are their sculptures. An enlightening balance between individual identity and group dynamics is struck.

Each artist has enough room to strut his signature stuff against an illuminating backdrop of his 10 compatriots. The quasi-symphonic whole is a pleasure to get lost in. It also suggests that friendship forms a solid foundation on which an exhibition can be built.

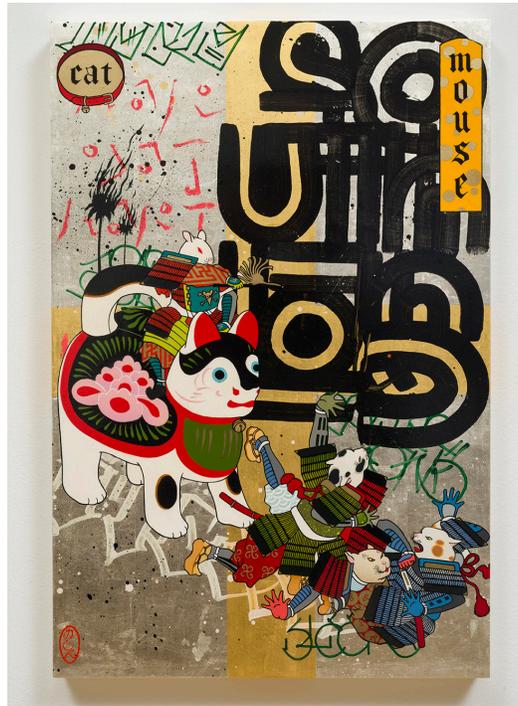
All but one of its artists live in Los Angeles. (Alex Kizu, known as Defer, lives in Hawaii.) Fujita, Jesse Simon and Defer attended junior high at Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies together. Along with David Cavazos (Big Sleeps), Jose Reza (Prime) and Slick, they were members of the graffiti crew K2S. Chaz Bojorquez has long been a mentor to most of the artists in "Roll Call," and Fabian Debora, Ricardo Estrada, Patrick Martinez and Retna represent a new generation of L.A. artists.



Ricardo Estrada's "Tezcatlipoca," 2016 acrylic and gold leaf on skateboard

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Think of the works in "Roll Call" as friends. They do not look alike. But they get on with one another, often splendidly, always intimately and sometimes contentiously. The texture and resonance of a time and a place are palpable. The same goes for the beliefs and convictions that can be seen in these well-crafted works, where style and pride are worth fighting for.



Gajin Fujita's "Cat & Mouse," 2016, spray paint, paint markers, markers, Mean Streak, 12k and 24k gold leaf on wood

Homemade cartoons, coded languages, recycled surfboards, futuristic Realism, revisionist histories, cultural mash ups, haunting memento mori and loaded abstractions come in all shapes and sizes. Diversity rules.

That's just another way of saying that individuality matters. Independence follows hot on its heels, along with the freedom to pursue one's dreams and ideals. That's as American as art — and life — can be.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice. Through Jan. 14; closed Sundays and Mondays. (310) 822-4955
www.lalouver.com



Patrick Martinez's "Los Angeles Flower Still Life," 2016, ceramic, neon and mixed media on panel with wall stucco



Retna's "She's Got a Slight Grip on My Eye," 2016, acrylic on canvas