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Pacific Rim State of Mind

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In 1939, the World's Fair in San Francisco, also known as the Golden Gate International Exposition, exhibited a transpacific unity that included West Coast modern design, Mexican and Asian artwork, and Pacific Coast goods. Stemming from xenophobic hostilities against Asian and Mexican minorities in California, the exhibition tried to bring awareness and understanding of outside cultural and artistic influences to the host country. Since these transpacific minorities helped change the social and physical landscape of the region, the fair sought to inform the world about this new "Pacifica," or Pan-Pacific cooperation. Sponsored by the Good Neighbor Policy within the Roosevelt Administration, it created the first Pacific Rim state of mind that extended from the Golden Coast, to Hawaii, to Korea, to China, to Mexico, to Japan and beyond. The highlights of the exhibition were the mural executed by Diego Rivera, and the 81 foot "Pacifica" statue by Ralph Stackpole meant to symbolize trade, travel, progress and understanding. Furthermore, in 1960 the incorporated city of Pacifica was named in reference to this statue in San Mateo County, California.

However, just two years later in 1941, Japan would bomb Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, which clearly highlighted the Pacific Rim conflict. According to Carey McWilliams, Japan and

California, specifically Southern California, were in a de-facto war from 1900-1941 due to their economic advances and geopolitical destinies, which were in direct opposition. The dark metropolis of Los Angeles is filled with this type of dubious history, but in today's post-recession era, life is different although the past is always recalled. In Gajin Fujita's latest exhibition, *Warriors, Ghosts, and Ancient Gods of the Pacific*, the master taps into historical conflicting narratives as expressed through iconography and title. This past week at the LA Louver in Venice, the new exhibition was revealed to showcase thirteen new works done over the past four years. In *Pacific Ghost*, the camouflaged cloak of the fearsome samurai conjures up a modern-day rebel in an urban setting engaged in combat. Similar to dress styles of numerous postwar periods, military clothes were often worn in everyday settings to represent adventure, courage, and defiance. Therefore, as you witness the samurai's patriotic symbolism of Los Angeles and California, it guides you along an ancient, yet contemporary encounter since it is a recreation of a naval battle between rivals. If you stare at the eyes long enough, you can see the terror and excitement as he contemplates death. The title itself could represent the ghost that haunts the Pacific Rim and its barbaric past, or perhaps a play on words like "Pacific Coast." Either way, Fujita's warriors, ghosts, and Gods transcend cultural boundaries as Joseph Campbell's *Hero with A Thousand Faces*.

No other artist throughout "Pacifica" captures the Pacific Rim state of mind better than Gajin Fujita. From his Japanese ancestry, to his experiences growing up in a Mexican American community, to his references of modern-day regional urban artwork and contemporary culture, the blend animates new life to traditional themes. In *Southland Standoff*, the fierce battle between opposing factions is riveting. From the dripping blood on their swords, to the splattered blood all over the walls, to the circulating silhouettes of helicopters, to the somber facial expressions, one can recall a street fight in the neighborhood or a military campaign in a war. The figures on the right represent the 213 area code of Los Angeles in Dodger "blue" and Raiders black and grey, while the ones on the left represent Orange County 714 area code warriors draped in Angel's red. Similar to other Fujita works, they are depictions of ancient battles set in modern settings. With eleven other paintings for observers to contemplate, you can search for subtle references that can connect with you significant Los Angeles history. Don't miss the opportunity to view this exhibition that goes on until July 2nd 2015. Gajin Fujita is set to appear in the upcoming documentary, *Dark Progressivism*, a social science research film about art in Los Angeles, out later this year.

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Photos courtesy of LA Louver, 2015