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Gajin Fujita Explores the True Colors of Los Angeles

Art & Design

In his sixth solo show, artist Gajin Fujita exhibits striking and emotional paintings he created during the pandemic. Though artists are prone to isolation, the unprecedented confinement inspired art making that not only expanded his creative techniques but also criticized the problematic societal situation. A graffiti artist and Los Angeles native, Fujita began his investigation of society at street level and his insights and experiences are well honed in his latest exhibit, *True Colors*.

By Trina Calderón



Forget Me Not (Chitose Fujita)

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“I think what sticks with me is when my dad immigrated from Japan to L.A., he thought it was such a beautiful city, a city unlike any other in the world. It’s very unique. We got a lot of nature surrounding us, the mountains, the ocean, the valleys, and the desert. Maybe like an hour drive out of L.A. you’re in nature and I’m just super proud to be a native Angeleno. I love this place and I want to represent it right because when I look good, L.A. is going to look good, and when L.A. looks good, the world is going to look good,” he related it to his emotional ties to the city. Throughout the show, his paintings represent a hometown story with conflict and connection.

In his monumental *Game of Drones (GOD)*, a vulnerable samurai is confronted by a large white dragon drawn to him through a portal in the sky. Next to the aristocratic warrior is his surrendered drone controller, a gadget he has used far too much, a symbol of his desire for power. This painting is a warning, an image about humanity getting ahead of itself. Set against the backdrop of California’s Sierra Nevada mountains, painted in gold leaf to remind of the gold dug out for fortune, with corporate logos re-appropriated to show the impact of capitalism, and all covered with tags from many of Fujita’s close friends and fellow L.A. graffiti artists, it’s a story about twisted morality. The tags cross out the businesses, street symbols revolting against corporate greed in the community. In Japanese mythology, the dragon is summoned to answer one’s fate, here the creature scares the samurai, warning of his selfish behavior during a time the world needs empathy. “It can definitely be relative to what we had seen in our country during the pandemic, when our rulers weren’t doing their job, like they didn’t know what to do. The world turned upside down. Everybody was feeling it, but I think in our country we saw the true colors come out,” Fujita explained.



Game of Drones (GOD)



Home Field LA

In isolation, Fujita developed his ideas with new artistic techniques. Using transparent spray paint he added more depth to figures, and instead of using outlines as he had in the past, he let the effect add 3-dimensional qualities to edges. In *Forget Me Not (Chitose Fujita)*, Fujita paints the silhouette of the city, with a checkered background and street view from his mother's porch in Boyle Heights. Using silver leaf and platinum paint for the checkers, he deliberately reckons the risky, contrasting codes of his city. The sun sets on the next layer, with a perspective looking west, tagging again from his peers, and small Dumbo's flying

through. A portrait of Fujita's mother is in the foreground, using shadows to give her figure depth. She's wearing blue and holding a yellow-red hibiscus, a real-life moment Fujita captured in a photo when she was outside, visiting his studio. She wears a green ribbon on her shirt, for mental health awareness.

Fujita's mother has Alzheimer's and went missing in the summer of 2022, she had slipped out of her home unnoticed. While searching for her, Fujita sent the current photo of her to artist and close friend PRIME, who lives near her home and he drove around looking for her. Thankfully, she was found safe in less than an hour later, but the image now connects Fujita to the scary moment in time. Using symbols (Dumbo represents the only animal who never forgets) and new creative techniques, he brings his mother to life wandering out in the city, a bold story of memory told through his artistic language.

True Colors is on [view](#) at LA Louver March 29th – May 6th, 2023.

[Trina Calderón](#) @trinaluz is a film & TV writer/producer and journalist from Los Angeles. She cut her teeth in reality/doc TV with Authentic Entertainment and Pie Town Productions. Her first feature film, *Down For Life*, premiered opening night at the The Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival in 2009. She's also known for G4tv's *X-Play*, BBCAmerica's *The Nerdist* TV show, the AWM Gracies Awards show, the *Legend of the Cool "Disco" Dan* documentary, the *Wall Writers* documentary, and co-writing a massive book about the history of the 9:30 Club.

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