

A Wild Ride Through Fujita's Sex and Violence

Art Reviews

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Sex and violence play such a big role in the movie industry that the last 50 years of film would be inconceivable without them. The same can't be said about the visual arts.

For all kinds of reasons, painters have focused on other subjects, leaving the spectacle of these supposedly base impulses to lowbrow entertainments as high art strives to occupy the moral high ground.

Gajin Fujita has no patience with such sanctimonious short-sightedness. At L.A. Louver Gallery, his first solo show in Los Angeles embraces sex and violence as if they were going out of style. Marshaling the raw physical power of both subjects for his own purposes, Fujita, 30, uses them to stake out a place for himself--and anyone with similar sympathies--in an art world long dominated by lifeless abstractions and bloodless Conceptualism.

Eight eye-popping paintings fill two pristine galleries with visual punch and graphic drama. When you enter Fujita's world you're in for a wild ride. The centerpiece of the exhibition, "Gold State Warriors," is a 5-foot-by-16-foot panel that depicts four sword- and gun-wielding samurai.

Strutting in front of a graffiti-covered wall whose brickwork consists of alternating squares of gold and silver leaf, the fierce warriors strike contorted poses that recall the formalized pantomime of Kabuki and the whip-lash animation of Saturday-morning cartoons. Nearly lost in



LA Louver Gallery

The 8-foot-by-4-foot "Dream" (2002), by Gajin Fujita: an avenging angel, demons and R.I.P. messages to friends who have died before their time.

he Pop excitement is another distant ancestor: The lavender and blue kimonos worn by Fujita's larger-than-life figures mimic the positions of the angled vertical forms in Jackson Pollock's "Blue Poles," whose allover energy generates a similarly dizzying charge.

"Dream" features an avenging angel about to decapitate a horned demon with fire-engineered skin. His fleeing companion looks back with no remorse as L.A.'s skyline rises in the background like the silhouetted gravestones in an old cemetery. The graffiti that animates every square inch of this 8-foot-by-4-foot image consists of R.I.P. messages to friends who have

died before their time, often in mindless street violence.

Fujita is a lot less ambivalent about sex than he is about violence. "La Damsel," "Libido," "Swell" and "Bangin'" combine the erotic acrobatics of traditional Japanese woodblock prints with the stylized forms of Edo screen painting and the lavish patterns of ornamental needlework. The explicit positions of the figures in these variously scaled paintings, which measure from 8 inches to 8 feet on a side, fit right in with the bold designs and graphic flourishes that are Fujita's forte.

He's at his best when he turns words into quasi-architectural

supports for decorative embellishments. Delicate flowers, puffy clouds, graceful birds and waves made of curlicues are integral to his vibrant pictures.

So is color, which he deploys like a pyromaniac in charge of a fireworks display.

When words made their way into contemporary art, they had all the visual dynamism of typewritten messages. Fujita makes playful fun of such image-and-text Conceptualism, turning its tactics into a form of rowdy street theater whose pleasures are all the more potent for being riddled with risk.

L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Oct. 12. Closed Sundays and Mondays.