

whitehot | October 2011: Gajin Fujita at LA Louver

The New York Times



Bewitched, 2010
 spray paint, paint marker, platinum leaf on wood panel
 six panels: 72 x 108 in. (182.9 x 274.3 cm) overall

Gajin Fujita,



Art in America



Gajin Fujita: *Made in LA*

[LA Louver Gallery](#)

October 13 – November 12, 2011

It's an awesome and sometimes perilous undertaking to isolate a multiplicity of painterly styles and co-mingle, or rather, slam them head-on into one another, without pretense; and few artists could pull it off, let alone do so with fanfare, but Gajin Fujita is not just any artist -- as his most recent exhibition at LA Louver proves. Working in a variety of styles from traditional Japanese Ukiyo-e to contemporary manga, American pop culture iconography, and East L.A. street-life tagging and graffiti, Fujita continues to investigate and expand the relationship between high and low brow art historical movements while also creating a dialogue between genres.

Working with familiar Japanese motifs including water, the rising sun, dragons, koi fish and the archetypal image of the Samurai warrior and the perverted lover of Japanese Shunga print fame, Fujita approaches these traditional themes with an almost lighthearted abandon, often inviting members of his longtime graffiti crew, K2S ("Kill to Succeed") to tag larger-scale paintings which he then embellishes with his own paper stencils. The combination of participants invited to work, or "tag" inside these paintings coupled with the duality of imagery creates a larger spectacle that transcends the monumentality of the paintings themselves. Fujita's democratic approach to the process by which these images are created lends even more power and presence to these already exemplary paintings.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the painting *Feel Cool*, which shows a pair of Japanese koi or "brocaded carp" as they are also known, referring to the large, colorful fish that have been bred and kept in ponds as part of Japanese culture for centuries. Historically, they are also an integral part of Japanese mythology and are symbols of strength, perseverance and courage. In myth, the very strong koi swims upstream and leaps waterfalls, being rewarded at the end of the journey by being turned into a dragon. Fujita conflates the symbolism of these sacred fish transcending into the heroic figure with the more modern and popularized aesthetic of graffiti art, though in the case of this work, the words *Feel Cool*, do double duty, referring both to the fish in their watery palace and the cultural phenomenon of hipness, i.e. the artist as strong, self-sustaining warrior/hero.

Fujita's great strength here is this continual conflation of cultural histories, whether Japanese or American, with the more popularized aesthetic vernacular of present day culture. Other works like the *Year of The Rabbit (Bugs Bunny)* recast a Japanese Samurai in the role of Elmer Fudd (parodied by the "Spring-crawling wabbit." This painting in particular proposes a ubiquitous kind of cultural clash as Bugs Bunny operates here

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terrorized by the wise-cracking wabbit. This painting in particular proposes a ubiquitous kind of culture clash as Bugs Bunny operates here as a strangely taunting and irascible figure, as though American culture was thumbing its nose implying “catch me if you can Japan.” We’ve long since been left behind in the dust, economically and technologically, and thus the image becomes ironic, Bugs a throwback to a more fertile time in American cultural history. His presence is part of a serial tribute the Year of the Rabbit in Eastern astrology.

Finally, Fujita understands the complexities inherent in any country’s cultural progress, and all of the characters in these paintings operate as heroes, most of whom are doomed to fail, yet all are fiercely committed to their particular journey. The fact these paintings showcase an array of painterly styles becomes its own ironic gesture where history itself collapses.

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Becky Hunter



Gajin Fujita, Year of the Rabbit (Bugs Bunny), 2011
spray paint, paint marker, gold leaf on wood panel
two panels: 10 x 16 in. (25.4 x 40.6 cm)





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Gajin Fujita, East vs. West, 2010
spray paint, paint marker, Mean Streak paint stick, gold, white gold and platinum leaf on wood panel
12 panels at 84 x 22 in (213.4 x 55.9 cm)
overall: 84 x 264 in (213.4 x 670.6 cm)



Gajin Fujita, High Voltage, 2011

white gold and gold leaf, spray paint and paint marker on five wood panels
48 x 80 in. (121.9 x 203.2 cm)



Gajin Fujita, Rabbit Season, 2010
spray paint, paint marker, Mean Streak paint stick, gold leaf on wood panel
two panels: 10 x 16 in. (25.4 x 40.6 cm)



Eve Wood is both a critic and an artist. She was represented for five years by Western Project and before that at Susanne Vielmetter; Los Angeles Projects. She has exhibited her work at numerous galleries including Angles Gallery, The Huntington Beach Museum of Art, The Weatherspoon Museum of Art etc. Her art criticism has appeared in many magazines including Flash Art, Artnet.com, Tema Celeste, NY Arts, Angelino Magazine, Art Papers, Bridge, ArtUS, Art Papers, Artweek, Latin Arts.com, Art Review and Artillery. She is also the author of five books of poetry and one novel.

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