

GAJIN FUJITA

WARRIORS, GHOSTS AND ANCIENT GODS OF THE PACIFIC

27 May – 2 July 2015 // Reception for the artist: Wednesday, 27 May, 7-9pm



Pacific Ghost, 2014, spray paint, acrylic paint, paint markers, mean streaks, 24kt. and 12kt. gold on wood panel, 6 panels, overall: 72 x 120 in. (182.9 x 304.8 cm)

Venice, CA -- L.A. Louver is pleased to present a solo exhibition of 13 new paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Gajin Fujita, created over the past 4 years. This is the artist's fifth show with L.A. Louver.

“Studying the *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and their intricacies, I strive to get closer to the Japanese masters, and I want to keep violating people's expectations.”

- Gajin Fujita, 2014

Recognized for his painting style that merges traditional Japanese iconography with Los Angeles street culture and American pop references, Fujita's recent works display refinements of technical skill and subject matter.

Using a stable of materials and methods, including

spray paint (applied loosely and through intricately hand-cut stencils), paint markers, and gold leaf on wood panels, Fujita has created some of his most complex and ambitious paintings to date, that range in size from diminutive to muralesque.

Based on a deep interest in traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* wood block prints, Fujita breathes new life into samurais, warriors and folkloric beings – extracting them from the old world and transporting them into the 21st Century. In *Drunken Demon* (2014), Fujita reinterprets a print dating to the early 1700s by Nishimura Shigenaga (1697-1756). The decapitated head of a demon makes a vicious attempt to devour the warrior whole; the words “Kill to Succeed” (the name of Fujita's graffiti crew and occasional collaborators) are scrawled behind the demon's thorns. Drawn to the original print's crude portrayal of figuration, this is the earliest Japanese print that Fujita has referenced.

Pacific Ghost (2014) draws inspiration from an 1895 print by Kokunimasa (1874-1944), which commemorates a historical naval battle between two rival clans. The painting's central figure illustrates the fearless samurai who refused defeat by attaching an anchor to his body and plunging into sea – his spirit forever roams the ocean floor. Taking liberties with color, pattern and ornamentation, Fujita reanimates this mythological figure: his armor is embellished with gradient hues of yellow and green, his hands bear emblematic “LA” logos, and his body is blanketed with a camouflage-patterned cloak.

The largest work, *Southland Standoff* (2014), is the centerpiece of the exhibition. Measuring 84 x 176 in. (213.4 x 447 cm), this monumental painting references a print by Kunimasa (1823-1880) that portrays the historic Battle of Okehazama (c. 1560). The warriors in combat are dressed in full regalia adorned with the Southern California area codes 213 (Los Angeles County) and 714 (Orange County) as ornamental motifs, while silhouetted helicopters circle overhead. Fujita spares no detail; each of the five figures are rendered with a painstaking amount of intricacy; pattern and ornament cover every article of clothing and armor. “But these details and codes, though fun to find, are not what make the painting compelling,” writes



Southland Standoff, 2013, 12k and 24k gold leaf, spray paint, paint markers, mean streak on wood panels
8 panels, overall: 84 x 176 in. (213.4 x 447 cm). Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Justin Paton, Head Curator of International Art of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, in an article written for *Art and Australia*. “What holds you, rather, is the stand-off between different kinds and orders of imagery, between hard lines and sprayed ones, action and stillness, elegance and aggression.” (Paton, Justin. “Gajin Fujita: Street Theatre.” *Art and Australia* Issue No. 52.1 (2014): 104-111. Print)

Southland Standoff resides in the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and is on loan to L.A. Louver for inclusion in this exhibition.

Gajin Fujita (b.1972) received a BFA from Otis College of Art and Design, followed by a MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2000. Museum exhibitions include *Conversations through Asian Collections*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia and *Gajin Fujita*, Hunter Museum of America Art, Chattanooga, TN (2015); *Gajin Fujita: Ukiyo-e in Contemporary Paintings*, Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA (2012); *Zephyr: Paintings by Gajin Fujita*, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas, MO (2006); and *Floating World Redux: Gajin Fujita and Yasumasa Morimura*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC (2002). Fujita’s work has also been featured in *Gold*, Museum of Belvedere, Vienna, Austria (2012); *Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, The Minneapolis Art Institute, Minneapolis, MN; and *Beyond Bling: The Influence of Hip Hop Culture in Contemporary Art*, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, FL (2011); *Prospect. 1*, curated by Dan Cameron, New Orleans, LA (2008); *Contemporary Projects 9: Gajin Fujita and Pablo Vargas Lugo*, curated by Ilona Katzew, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2005); and *Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitan*, curated by Dave Hickey, Site Santa Fe’s 4th International Biennial, Santa Fe, NM (2001).

A new film on the artist that follows the production of Fujita’s newest painting *Demon Slayer* (2015) can be viewed at: www.lalouer.com/fujita.

Concurrently on view in the Second Floor Gallery:

Sculpture – Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Joel Shapiro, Peter Shelton, Sui Jianguo, Matt Wedel