

# ROLL CALL

**11 artists from L.A.  
curated by Gajin Fujita**

16 NOVEMBER 2016 – 14 JANUARY 2017

Opening reception: Wednesday, 16 November, 6-9pm

**Media preview: Tuesday, 15 November, 11am-1pm**

**Artists will be present. Light refreshments served**

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**Chaz Bojorquez**  
**David Cavazos (Big Sleeps)**  
**Fabian Debora**  
**Ricardo Estrada**  
**Gajin Fujita**  
**Alex Kizu (Defer)**  
**Patrick Martinez**  
**Retna**  
**Jose Reza (Prime)**  
**Jesse Simon**  
**Slick**

Venice, CA -- L.A. Louver is pleased to present a group exhibition curated by Los Angeles artist Gajin Fujita. “Roll Call” refers to tagging all of the names of a graffiti crew who work together to make a piece. Fujita’s inspiration for both the show and its title is in this same spirit, recognizing individual contributors that create an overall picture — a vision of L.A.

“Los Angeles is the city that raised me, its streets guided me, and graffiti was my transport. Graffiti took me all over the city, seeking out prime real estate to stake my claim, tag my name and flex my skills. It’s how I came to know all the artists in this exhibition; some of us go back almost 30 years. Graffiti is the foundation on which we built our artistic practices. But beyond graffiti, Los Angeles is what unifies us. We sharpened our skills on its walls and structures.”

— Gajin Fujita

Fujita grew up in the East L.A. neighborhood of Boyle Heights. As a teen, he became fascinated by the graffiti and hip-hop movement coming out of New York when the movie “Style Wars” was released in the ’80s. **Alex Kizu (Defer)** shared in his enthusiasm. He and Fujita were both from Boyle Heights and attended the same junior high school in Mid-City (an hour bus ride from home). Together, they pored over and studied pictures of graffiti they collected, which in the pre-internet age, were their only access to that world. Kizu developed his own intricate lettering style, and now makes paintings that emphasize the letters’ gestural qualities in a practice he refers to as “spiritual language.”

At school, Kizu introduced Fujita to **Jesse Simon**, a surfer kid and talented writer who would later translate his graffiti skills into creating polished, abstract sculptures from broken surfboard remnants. The three of them, along with a few others, gathered to form the graffiti crew KGB (Kidz Gone Bad) in 1984. “Back then, there were only a handful of crews on the scene,” describes Fujita. “We were lured by the potential of street fame and notoriety, and fueled by the adrenaline rush of breaking the law – working covertly and on constant alert, our heads on a swivel.”

By 1985, the graffiti movement was gaining momentum. Kizu went on to form K2S (Kill 2 Succeed), a crew that dominated the scene. K2S hailed from Downtown L.A., Pico-Union and East L.A., and was known for appropriating gang culture into their pieces. Fujita eventually joined their ranks with artists like **Jose Reza (Prime)**. His lettering hybridized angular “Cholo” writing with East Coast “Wild Style” into an aesthetic that became synonymous with the Los Angeles graffiti scene. **David Cavazos (Big Sleeps)** developed letters based on Chicano writing (a tradition rooted in L.A. since the 1920s) that have launched his career as an internationally renowned tattoo artist. **Slick**, a top figure at the Belmont Tunnel (the legendary, now defunct graffiti yard), was the first to incorporate shading and dimensionality into his pieces, and is recognized the world over for his iconic cartoon hands, a trademark that continues in his paintings, murals and graphic works today.

By the '90s and '00s, more and more crews were on the streets. The competition for wall space grew thicker as pieces became larger and more complex. **Chaz Bojorquez** played a leading role in putting Los Angeles on the map. An early advocate for graffiti, he began painting on the cemented L.A. River beds in the '60s, creating his first spray paint stencil motif in 1969. Bojorquez maintained an unwavering devotion to graffiti, and now creates paintings that pay homage to his street practice, while embracing the fluidity and gravitas of written language. He paved the way for the K2S crew, and other artists like **Retna**, from LTS (Last to Survive) and The Seventh Letter, who gained international recognition for his hieroglyphic-like letter forms with commissioned murals all over Los Angeles and the world.

“Graffiti gave us a voice and a sense of identity,” explains Fujita. “It was our entry into another world beyond our neighborhoods, and we never thought what we were doing then would have such an impact not just on the cultural landscape of Los Angeles, but on the generations to come. It’s exciting to see the new school of artists coming out of the L.A. graffiti scene that are breaking away from letter forms, and taking the movement to the next level.”

**Ricardo Estrada** and **Fabian Deborah** use portraiture and figuration to merge their distinct connections to Mexican culture and East L.A. identity with the Chicano muralist traditions that resonated in their neighborhoods. Born and raised in the San Gabriel Valley, **Patrick Martinez** makes mixed media works that provide insightful socioeconomic observations of his suburban upbringing, and which also open a colorful, at times critical window to the minority experience in the United States.



“To me, these artists are a cross section of generations and geographies of graffiti,” says Fujita. “This show is a reflection of the people that have impacted my life, and the city of Los Angeles.”

**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. 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; and *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. I*, curated by Dan Cameron, New Orleans, LA (2008); *Zephyr: Paintings by Gajin Fujita*, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas, MO (2006); *Contemporary Projects 9: Gajin Fujita and Pablo Vargas Lugo*, curated by Ilona Katzew, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2005); *Floating World Redux: Gajin Fujita and Yasumasa Morimura*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC (2002); and *Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitan*, curated by Dave Hickey, Site Santa Fe’s 4th International Biennial, Santa Fe, NM (2001).