

Gajin Fujita

Frieze Los Angeles / Paramount Pictures Studios
14 – 17 February 2019 / Stand D15



Ghost Rider, 2018, (detail) spray paint, paint markers, 12k white gold and 24k gold on wood panels, 60 x 108 in. / 152.4 x 274.3 cm

L.A. Louver is pleased to participate in the inaugural edition of Frieze Los Angeles, with a solo presentation of new paintings and drawings by Los Angeles artist **Gajin Fujita**.

Born in 1972, Gajin Fujita is the son of Japanese parents – a fine art painter father and art conservator mother – who raised him and his brothers in Boyle Heights, a historic immigrant neighborhood just east of Downtown Los Angeles and the L.A. River. As a teenager, Fujita became fascinated with graffiti, joining the tagging crews KGB (Kidz Gone Bad) and KIIS (Kill to Succeed). Through graffiti, Fujita followed his own path towards fine art and received his BA from

Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, and his MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he found mentorship under art critic Dave Hickey. Reverence for Japanese art history and pride for his identity as an L.A. native assert equal importance in Fujita’s work. Lauded by Christopher Knight of the *Los Angeles Times* as “the most important 21st century iteration of graffiti’s influence on art,” Fujita’s paintings incorporate graffiti language, traditional iconography drawn from Edo-period woodblock prints, and symbols of West Coast culture.

With a mastery of materials and methods, including spray paint (applied loosely and through intricately hand-cut stencils), paint markers, and gold leaf on wood panels, Fujita’s six new paintings, all made within the last year, are some of his most complex and ambitious to date. Ranging in size from 16 in. (40.6 cm) to 108 in. (274.3 cm) in width, each composition is brimming with dynamic energy and exquisite detail. In *Ghost Rider*, the largest work on display, Fujita describes an embattled, wraithlike samurai on horseback. Using a black and white monochrome palette, each article of clothing is embellished with a different pattern -- camouflage, tiger stripes and bombs. With the Raiders logo (altered to “Riders”) emblazoned on his chest, the otherworldly warrior charges across the plane, which is electrified with brightly colored tags and lightning bolts. *Phony Disillusion* captures a winsome geisha posing for a cell phone photo, only to have her true demonic identity revealed on screen. As an homage to L.A., *City of Fallen Angels* depicts a samurai towering over the downtown skyline. “There’s a hand-wrought intensity to paintings like this,” wrote Justin Paton (Head Curator of International Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney) in *Art and Australia*. “An unabashed desire to impress, and it flows, I think, from Fujita’s beginnings as an artist in spaces well outside the art world.”

Fujita’s painting process is one that requires a great deal of skill and patience. He prepares each wooden panel with gold leaf, a technical proficiency that he has perfected over time. The pristine gilded panels are then “violated” with graffiti lettering, facilitated by Fujita along with friends and members of his graffiti crews. Fujita constructs the imagery using layers of spray paint applied with paper stencils, which he then details with paint markers and a fine point brush. Some works can require hundreds of stencils. Once the painting is complete, Fujita pieces the stencils back to their

original drawing configuration. At Frieze Los Angeles, these reconstructed drawings are displayed in counterpart to his paintings. This pairing allows viewers insight into his painstaking process – evidenced through pencil sketches, hand-written notations, traces of spray paint along the stencil's edges and triangular voids left from small fishing weights used during the painting process. While his paintings are highly controlled, the drawings reflect the spray paint's unpredictability beyond those confined areas, resulting in imagery that is both alluring and enigmatic. With the encouragement of his mother Chitose Fujita, a conservator of Japanese antiquities, Fujita first conceived of his drawings as independent works in 2000. Mrs. Fujita worked with Gajin to develop a process for mounting the drawings, which is now accomplished with the assistance of the artist's brother Richard Kanshu Fujita.

L.A. Louver began its representation of Gajin Fujita in 2001, following his inclusion in the group show *Rogue Wave*, an ongoing curatorial program initiated by the gallery to celebrate emerging artists working in Los Angeles. Since then, L.A. Louver has mounted five solo exhibitions of his work. In 2016, Fujita curated a group show for L.A. Louver titled *Roll Call: 11 Artists from L.A.*, which featured a diverse selection of works by artists whose practices are rooted in graffiti traditions.

Fujita has been included in museum exhibitions worldwide including, *Conversations through Asian Collections*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (2015); *Gajin Fujita, Hunter Museum of America Art*, Chattanooga, TN (2015); *Gajin Fujita: Ukiyo-e in Contemporary Paintings*, USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA (2012); *Gold*, Museum of Belvedere, Vienna, Austria (2012); *Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Woodblock Prints*, The Minneapolis Art Institute, Minneapolis, MN (2011); *Prospect.1*, 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).

In 2018, he was a featured artist in *Beyond the Streets*, an exhibition curated by Roger Gastman that traces graffiti's historical significance and continued resonance in contemporary culture. Fujita's mural-scaled painting, *Invincible Kings of This Mad Mad World* (2018), will be exhibited in the New York leg of this touring exhibition, opening Spring 2019.

Fujita's 2008 major painting titled *The Saints*, which was commissioned by *Prospect.1 New Orleans*, will be on view in *Tsuruya Kōkei: Modern Kabuki Prints Revised & Revisited* at the USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena (8 February – 14 July 2019).

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About the gallery: Founded in 1976, L.A. Louver opened its doors to the public in the burgeoning arts neighborhood of Venice Beach, CA, with the objective of positioning artists from both Southern California and abroad, within an international context. As we enter our 42nd year, this founding principle is the fulcrum from which the gallery continues to operate – exemplified in this particular moment with concurrent presentations by three artists: David Hockney and Alison Saar at L.A. Louver, Venice, CA, and Gajin Fujita at Frieze Los Angeles, Paramount Studios.

For a comprehensive guide into our exhibition history, complete with images, reviews and gallery documentation, visit: lalouver.com/then