

## Who We Are: Examining the Work of Gajin Fujita



Ulrich Museum of Art

### Objects:

Gajin Fujita, *KIIS Crew*, 2002. Spray paint, acrylic paint, and gold leaf on wood, 60 x 96 inches, Ulrich Museum of Art, Museum purchase

John Lawrence Doyle, *Samurai (Japan)*, 1978. Color lithograph on paper, 11 ½ x 16 inches, Ulrich Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Jerry Cohlma

Hasui Kawase, *Shingawa Machi in Rain*, 1931. Woodcut on Japanese paper, Ulrich Museum of Art, Gift of Phyllis A. and Richard H. King Jr.

### Description:

Students will learn about the multicultural heritage of the artist Gajin Fujita and the influences he draws from in his work. They will learn what a museum extended label is and write their own label for Fujita's artwork using what they have learned.

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Subject:** Studio Art, English

**Length of lesson:** Independent worksheet, 60-90 minutes

### Standards:

VA: Re7.2.6 Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotion, an actions.

VA:Re8.1.6 Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re8.1.7 Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:Re7.1.8 Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others

VA:Re8.1.8 Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

### Materials:

Worksheet  
Pencil

Where are you from? What about your mom and dad? Your grandparents? Many people have family backgrounds from different cultures or countries. The culture your family comes from and the culture you live in now blend together to make your unique personal heritage.

For example, an artist by the name of **Gajin Fujita** was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, but his parents are from Japan. Despite growing up in American culture, Fujita was around a lot of Japanese culture as well. This is something that he explores in his art. Fujita blends graffiti art and American culture symbols with Japanese imagery like samurais and ukiyo-e woodblock prints.

A samurai was a Japanese warrior that wielded two swords. They were well paid and respected. Samurais were abolished in the 1870s, yet are still popular imagery in Japanese art and culture.

Here is an image of a samurai:



John Lawrence Doyle, *Samurai (Japan)*, 1978. Color lithograph on paper, 11 ½ x 16 inches, Ulrich Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. Jerry Cohlma

**What is ukiyo-e?** Ukiyo-e is a style of woodblock printing that became common in the Edo Period (1603-1868) in Japan. Printmakers developed this woodblock technique to be faster and easier than previous techniques. This made ukiyo-e prints more affordable and accessible to those in the middle class.

Here is an example of a Japanese woodblock print:



Hasui Kawase, *Shingawa Machi in Rain*, 1931. Woodcut on Japanese paper, Ulrich Museum of Art, Gift of Phyllis A. and Richard H. King Jr.

**What is woodblock printing?** Woodblock printing is a method of carving a block of wood, covering it with ink, and then pressing that to paper. The printer will carve away the sections from the wood that they do not want to be inked. Once the woodblock is carved, it can be inked and stamped on as many papers as the printer wants. If the artwork is going to have different colors, a new woodblock for each color is made.

Now that you have become more familiar with the Japanese imagery that inspired some of Gajin Fujita's work, take a look at his artwork called *KIIS Crew*. KIIS refers to a graffiti group in Los Angeles, California, Fujita has been a part of since he was a teenager, it stands for "Kill to Succeed."



Gajin Fujita, *KIIS Crew*, 2002. Spray paint, acrylic paint, and gold leaf on wood, 60 x 96 inches, Ulrich Museum of Art. Museum purchase

What American imagery and Japanese imagery do you notice in this work?

Why do you think it is called *KIIS Crew*?

What do you think is going on in this image?

How does the artist's cultural background influence how you responded to this painting?  
Having interpretive information, as found on extended labels, for the works of art you view in a museum is not necessary, but sometimes this information can enrich a person's experience with an artwork. That is why museums often have **extended labels** next to artworks on display.

An object label always accompanies an artwork in a museum. An object label contains important information like:

- The artist's name and birthplace
- The artwork's title
- The date the artwork was made
- The materials the artwork was made with
- How the artwork came to the museum

Many museum labels also include an **extended label**, text that gives the viewer additional information on that particular work of art. These labels are usually written by the museum curators or educators. They are meant to be a brief introduction to the artwork, narrowing the often vast amount of background information down to a few key points that are **interesting, easy to understand, and relevant**. When writing an extended label, the curator or educator must keep in mind that their audience might not have a background in art or history. Ideally, labels should be easy to read and understandable to everyone. The goal of an extended label is to increase accessibility to museum-goers, so everyone can learn from and enjoy the artworks on display. Becoming familiar with extended label writing can be helpful if you are an artist as well. Try writing extended labels for some of your works that will be on display. You may want to consider why this work of art is important; why the museum collected it, why someone made it; how they made it; and significant cultural or historical references when writing your extended label.

