

## **JOHN YOYOGI FORTES**

### **BIO**

Born in a taxi on Yoyogi Street in Tokyo, Japan, John Yoyogi Fortes is a Filipino-American painter based in Sacramento. His paintings are often large scale explorations of self that lean towards a whimsical, dark and obscure world.

Fortes' artwork has been exhibited throughout the U.S., Hawaii, Venezuela, Japan, the Philippines and Norway. His paintings are held in numerous private collections as well as the Asian American Art Centre in New York, the Nevada Museum of Art, and the Triton Museum of Art and Crocker Art Museum in California. His work was also included in the International Arts & Artists traveling exhibition, "Infinite Mirror; Images of American Identity." The exhibition opened at Syracuse University in New York and traveled to museums and universities throughout the Eastern United States.

Fortes has received grants from the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission and a Visual Artist Fellowship from the California Arts Council. In 2004 John was awarded a prestigious Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. John was also nominated for the Alliance of Artists Communities, Vision from the New California Project in 2006 and 2007.

Recently John was a resident at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art's highly renowned Artist-in-Residence program in Omaha, Nebraska.

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### **STATEMENT**

Ever since I decided to pursue art as a career, I've always been curious about who I was as an artist and my connection to the work. It wasn't until I began painting about my father's struggle with Alzheimer's and then using my Filipino background as a source to inform my art that I realized I was on this mysterious journey of self discovery.

The underlying theme of my artwork is self-examination, attempting to bridge my internal and external experiences shaped through a bi-cultural lens. In the context of my work, I view culture as an organic form that changes through the acquisition of new ideas and new imagery, much like immigrants accumulating material possessions, symbolic of their cultural assimilation.

In my paintings, the idea of assimilation presents itself as a littering of images and text that over time gain meaning, though nothing remains an absolute for me. From monkey faces, a racial slur directed at Filipino immigrants in the 1920s and 30s, to deconstructed figures and forms, which suggest, "Trying to get ahead" or "not having a leg to stand on," these images all meet barriers. Brick walls, boulders and other forms impede any forward momentum, a nod to pressures placed on ourselves to succeed, or to fit into the homogeneous whole. It's a pictorial instant that's both volatile and playful, where all the parts are frozen to work things out in their own purgatory. Attempts by me to activate the paintings surface come from color placement, quality of line, how paint is laid down, or the juxtaposition of the paintings characters to other forms.

All this layering, both psychological and physical, manifest as an amalgamation of iconography borrowed from many sources: American pop culture, Filipino culture or even the collision of cultures. If my paintings beg to tell a story, it eventually surfaces through my art making process. It's a narrative that defines who I am as a Filipino-American and adds to my history as an artist.

Ultimately, I'm interested in seeing how these ideas about self and society play out on canvas and the transformative journey experienced through the art making process. Ironically, the barriers that I navigate are no different from those barriers a viewer experiences should they choose to have a relationship with my work.

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### **PROCESS**

Building or creating the surface that I work on whether canvas, paper, sheetrock or panel, is integral to my process and practice. The majority of my work is acrylic based, but I also use, pencil, ink, spray enamels, enamel pens and oilstick.

Rather than beginning with a preconceived idea, the beginning is intuitive and somewhat random while considering the paintings formal attributes and the building of it's surface. Drawing from a lexicon of characters and personal iconography, images creep into the work eventually forming a working narrative that guides me towards completion.

My process is additive as well as reductive. I'll use materials like paint, glitter, paper, canvas, stickers or anything that might activate the paintings surface while supporting the overall narrative. Reduction is carried out by sanding, scraping and using water to scrub paint from areas. I also selectively let paint run and drip as a natural part of the painting process.

To preserve layers, I'm constantly sealing areas with acrylic medium. This protects under layers from any future sanding or scraping. Through this process I'm also able to achieve a surface that appears highly worked and complex when viewed up close.

I tend to use brushes that are inexpensive and worn because of the line quality they create. I purposely paint in a way that produces an erratic line verses one that's fine and controlled. This all relates to the content of my work and a narrative based on navigation, perception and the need to have control and lack of it.