

GASWORKS

PRESS RELEASE

Ben Sakoguchi: *Critical Art Theory*

10 July – 7 September 2025

Opening 9 July, 6:30 – 8:30pm



Gasworks presents *Critical Art Theory*, the first institutional solo exhibition in Europe by Japanese American artist Ben Sakoguchi.

Ben's characteristic painting style mixes diverse elements of figuration, history painting and Pop art to critique Western cultural values and idealism. Mainly using acrylic on canvas, he reproduces and juxtaposes imagery from film posters, newspapers, comics and internet searches to reveal subtexts of discrimination, mass media exploitation and state-sanctioned violence. By turns funny, sentimental and brutal, his paintings often intertwine politics with his own biography as well as stories of famous people ranging from U.S. presidents to celebrities.

Ben was born in 1938 in San Bernadino, California. At age five, he and his family were interned at the Poston War Relocation Center in Arizona following U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. Signed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Executive Order 9066 authorised the forced removal of people deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centres further inland.

After World War II ended, the Sakoguchis returned to San Bernadino and reopened the grocery store they had run before their internment. Some of Ben's earliest artistic influences include the bold graphics and fanciful images found on the orange crates that were stacked behind his parents' shop.

Upon graduating from high school in the late 1950s, Ben moved to Los Angeles to study art at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Over 60 years later, his studies there provide the inspiration for his solo exhibition at Gasworks. *Critical Art Theory* tells a different story to the version of art history that Ben was introduced to at UCLA, one which lacked reflection on art's social contexts and primarily referenced white men. Notwithstanding anachronistic references to more recent political figures and histories, the 67 paintings on display at Gasworks present a roughly chronological timeline which spans cave paintings and rock art from over 50,000 years ago to the invention of photography in the early 19th Century. Never previously exhibited, the *Critical Art Theory* series explores, through Ben's acerbic lens, how religion, monarchy and capitalism have shaped the development of art over the centuries.

Many of the paintings engage directly and bluntly with the brutality of colonial history, racial subjugation and gender marginalisation. In doing so, they highlight how the Western history of art has repeatedly ignored certain artists and brushed moments of profound social, economic and political importance aside in order to better serve the interests of white society. Ben reproduces historical imagery, language and symbolism not to condone or absolve the past, but instead to make a powerful statement on how Western art history as we know it has been built upon the subjugation and diminishment of others.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

Gasworks' Exhibitions programme is supported by Catherine Petitgas, Gasworks Exhibitions Supporters and Arts Council England. Gasworks' 2025/26 programme is generously funded by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a Donor Advised Fund held at The Prism Charitable Trust. With thanks to Jacqueline Tarquinio.

PRESS CONTACT

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<https://www.gasworks.org.uk/about-us/press/>

IMAGE CREDIT

Ben Sakoguchi, *Critical Art Theory: Eurocentric Hegemony (one million B.C. - 21st century A.D.)* (#19) "RENAISSANCE ARTISAN BECOMES ROCK STAR", 2022, acrylic on board, maple frame. Courtesy the artist.

ABOUT BEN SAKOGUCHI

Ben Sakoguchi (b. 1938) lives and works in Pasadena, California. After retreating from the commercial art world in the 1970s, he has presented his work in solo and group exhibitions, university art galleries, museums and non-profit spaces throughout the United States. His work has been featured in institutional surveys and group exhibitions including *L.A. RAW: Abject*

Expressionism in Los Angeles, 1945–1980, Pasadena Museum of California Art (2012); *Sub-Pop*, Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2011); *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity*, 1900–2000, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2000); and *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, the New Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1990).

ABOUT GASWORKS

Gasworks is a leading non-profit arts organisation based in south London. Working at the intersection of UK and international contemporary art, we have supported more than 600 artists from over 80 countries since our founding in 1994.

We commission and produce exhibitions by emerging and underrepresented artists, and host residencies that enable artists from all over the world to research and develop new work. We also provide subsidised studios for London-based artists and co-design participation projects for local children, young people and families together with community partners.

Above all, Gasworks is a home for artists. We are committed to building long-term relationships with all the artists we work with. Thanks to our award-winning history, we have developed an unparalleled reputation for cultivating new artistic talent.

Gasworks is a registered charity, the London hub of Triangle Network, and part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio.

LISTINGS INFORMATION

Ben Sakoguchi: *Critical Art Theory*

10 July – 7 September 2025

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Gasworks, 155 Vauxhall Street, London SE11 5RH

Open: Weds – Sun 12–6pm. Free admission

www.gasworks.org.uk

@GasworksLondon: [Instagram](#) / [YouTube](#) / [Facebook](#)

URL: <https://gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/ben-sakoguchi/>