

MICHAEL HYUN GU KANG BIO

Michael Hyun Gu Kang is a Korean American artist based in San Francisco, California. He has shown work internationally and locally. This has included showings at Arc Gallery, Land and Sea, Paolo Meija Fine arts, and the Salesforce Tower. Born and raised in Southern California to immigrant parents, his work is informed by resourcefulness and the processing of day to day events. He uses mixed media to create sculptural, textured paintings.

RUMINATIONS

Asian American art is defining itself as we speak. It is full of the nuance and multiplicity of life experiences that come from the Asian American existence. I can't define it for others, but I can tell you its more than Boba and rice and how your mom got mad at you for getting B's in school. Although we've shared things like this, I believe we are slowly looking past the surface and finding a clearer voice. We are looking for something, but haven't found the places to reference. I know at least I haven't found many. I see Asian American groups sprouting up left and right and can see a world starting to define itself. Asian American art is more important now than ever. It is our role as artists to help create visual neologisms for things that are just too nuanced and personal. We do it by existing and presenting our world as we see it. This is Asian American art to me.

Q & A

Are you responding or adapting to the political landscape, social landscape? Directly or subconsciously?

I am easily influenced. I've learned to adapt at a young age and fit in in order to survive. I always attempt to address the current political climate directly but find that the expression exists in an in between space. The subject matter or narrative of my painting can be direct but the composition, movement, or color choices present themselves in moments of sublimity.

Do you have thoughts on rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans?

Hate crimes against our community have been on the rise for some time now. Simultaneously, we're starting to speak out about them. I feel like we are more vocal now about the atrocities we are facing instead of accepting them as part of the cost to live in America as an Asian person. We are past surviving in this country and are now trying to fight for our equality. I think some don't like this and seek to put us in "our place".

Do ideas about the model minority myth perpetuate and influence your life and/or artwork?

I often work in opposition to this. I grew up feeling like a "bad asian". Not studious, industrious, or particularly pragmatic, I felt as if the person I was wasn't acceptable. I'm often chasing an expression that feels completely innate to who I am in the moment and a kind of immediacy that I feel isn't planned. I find myself battling against academia and being a generally defiant person

when it comes to authority. I think the model minority myth has imparted a stubbornness in me. An unwillingness to do things until I find my own reason to. The model minority exists in my mind the same way ideas of what it means to be Korean or American do. I've realized I'm still unraveling habits I formed trying to conform and then later trying to oppose these ideas. It took me a long time to realize that simply, "I am who I am". I'm constantly searching for confidence in my own skin.