

# CULTURAL CROSSROADS

In Los Angeles, artist Ken Gun Min's eclectic works channel the city's undercurrents.

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**D**iverse communities have long converged—or even crashed together—in Los Angeles. It's fertile ground for Ken Gun Min, whose kaleidoscopic mixed-media art intersects different worlds. Through his eyes, Asian art history toys with the Western canon, pop iconography merges with folklore, and Asian queer masculinity mingles with melancholy.

Traversing different environments is familiar territory for the artist, a Seoul native who lived in Europe and San Francisco before moving to L.A. The space he resides and works in today is a microcosm of his hybridity, full of vintage furniture, figurines, flowers from his garden and colorful porcelain—from Nippon pieces to European chinoiserie that “mimics the Asian aesthetic through the Western gaze,” he notes.

Materials and their cultural significance are integral to his practice, which combines Korean pearl pigments with oils more common in Western art. He applies these on various linens, including one traditionally used in Korean burial rites, or raw canvas treated to resemble rice paper. He then embroiders Korean silk thread and found objects such as salvaged fabrics and crystal beads from his beloved grandmother, who taught him to sew. Having survived Japanese occupation and the Korean War, she imparted on him “how to be an artist, but even more so how to live as a human being among rapid changes,” Min reflects.

Upheavals underscored his recent show, “Silverlake Dog Park,” at the Shulamit Nazarian Gallery, for which he created a sublime world inspired by L.A. neighborhoods. Isolated during the pandemic and reeling from the loss of a relative, Min wanted to “construct an imaginary space to navigate these tangled feelings,” he shares. There is love and adoration in his sensual portraits of Asian men and male nudes enveloped in lush Californian flora. But there is also wistful grief in the dogs wandering through this “very emotional landscape,” the artist notes.

With a January group show at Craft Contemporary (plus exhibitions throughout L.A., another solo one at Shulamit Nazarian and an Expo Chicago booth in 2023), Min plans to explore more histories underlining his city, from its queer roots to its immigrant enclaves, all while situating his own gay, Asian identity. Because, Min says, in all his cross-cultural explorations, he is “always trying to find that connection with people and place.” ■



Artist Ken Gun Min's practice mixes a variety of media, including collage and paint on ceramics (left and below). In a notebook, the rich inspiration for his reflections on history, identity and culture coalesces into sketches (bottom).

