

MASTERPIECE



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BY JIT FONG CHIN

Alex Gross' paintings reveal a hodgepodge of interests: comic books, old Japanese woodblock prints, vintage advertisements, and Renaissance paintings.

Take "Evolve (After Yoshitoshi)." A Japanese woman dressed in period Western dress cradles Doraemon, who's wearing a hat that looks like the top of Pikachu's head. The bottom of the painting is lined by little icons, including the Starbucks logo.

Gross' mash-up style intensified after his first visit to Japan in 1998, where he was blown away by Tokyo's vibrant mix of international restaurants and cultural icons.

"That was inspirational to the idea that I could mix things in my work, just like the way they mix everything cultural there in the city," Gross said.

Gross grew up in suburban New York reading comic books, from which he gained an enduring love of mixing illustrations with typography. His mother paints and his brother is a photographer, but Gross reckons he also got some of his technical meticulousness from his engineer father.

A standout in a retrospective of Gross' works now on view at Grand Central Art Center is "Ascent/Descent," a painting based on Rogier van der Weyden's famous 15th century painting, "Descent of Christ from the Cross." Gross kept the composition and copied one female figure.

The rest of the canvas is filled with the likeness of a contemporary Japanese pop star, two figures modeled on a former Korean-American student, a nude mannequin modeled with help from a computer program, and three women figures inspired by Japanese



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALEX GROSS

woodblock print master Toyohara Chikanobu.

Gross' paintings aren't always allegorical, but are tributes and improvisations of the pictures he loves.

"All my work is basically a product of being inspired by things I see, and using them as starting points to brainstorm and build on," Gross said.

"I really love that early Renaissance and Gothic period, the 1400s, particularly the artists from the Netherlands like van der Weyden and Van Eyck, Hans Memling. Back then, everybody painted the same Biblical crucial events. They all painted them, but they did it with their own twist. Now I'm doing my own Last Judgment."

Alex Gross' paintings reflect his diverse interests, from Renaissance art to old and new Japanese culture.

MASH-UPS

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Alex Gross Retrospective

Where: Grand Central Art Center, 125 N. Broadway, Santa Ana.

When: Through Aug. 19. Gallery open Friday-Saturday 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sunday 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Cost: Free

Extras: "The Art of Alex Gross," a full-color 159-page book, is available at the gallery for \$40.

Gallery info: 714-567-7233 or grandcentralartcenter.com