



Maya Fuji, Okaeri • Tadaima/お帰り • ただいま,
Acrylic & Rhinestone on Canvas, 54 x 84 x 1.5 inches, 2024

MAYA FUJI
IGOKOCHI • 居心地
961 CHUNG KING ROAD
JANUARY 25 – MARCH 1, 2025
OPENING RECEPTION | SATURDAY, JANUARY 25TH, 6-9PM

Charlie James Gallery is pleased to present *Igokochi*, an exhibition featuring paintings and installation by San Francisco based artist Maya Fuji. Fuji interweaves Japanese myth and folklore with contemporary iconography to explore ideas of identity and space, history and heritage. The title of the exhibition refers to the particular feeling of a certain place, and the works negotiate the constant push and pull of living between two continents and two cultures. Fuji populates remembered Japanese interiors with ancestors, playful deities and spirits, imagining them all coexisting in the modern day. The work celebrates traditional Japanese craftsmanship and spiritual tradition while simultaneously embracing a playful, modern sensibility.

The women in Fuji's paintings represent shinto gods called "Sorei" – gods formed by an aggregate of ancestral spirits. Every family has their own Sorei, who are protectors of the home and future generations. The artist imagines the figures in her paintings embodying all the women who have inhabited the home she grew up in, beginning with herself and reaching back through the generations. Formally, the figures embody two powerful aesthetic influences from the artist's childhood: Nihonga painting – a traditional style often found in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines – and manga illustration.

Plush bodies and elegant, expressive hands hail from Ukiyo-e painting of the Edo period, while the simplified faces and large, sparkling eyes have roots in manga. By embracing these two deeply Japanese styles, Fuji reclaims an aesthetic heritage that she felt carried negative stereotypes in the US.

Smaller, often half-glimpsed female figures also cavort across Fuji's compositions. These miniature women are colorless, with long black hair, and can be found rummaging in drawers, hanging off fan blades, peeking around corners, and tumbling across floors. These are manifestations of the artist's interest in *Tsukumogami*, household objects that obtain a spirit or soul over a century, as well as *Yaoyorozu No Kami*, which arise from the Shinto belief that gods reside in everything in this world. Both manifest as trickster deities who both help and harm, and here Fuji imagines that these spirits have emigrated with the family into the new world.

Borrowing a playful sense of perspective from Edo-period prints, these interiors press against the picture plane while also inviting the viewer to imagine the action just out of sight. The spaces feel lived in and comfortable, our access is intimate without any hint of voyeurism. The figures relax or go about daily tasks, and the spaces are infused with a fleeting nostalgia. *Saudade* • 母の味 simultaneously evokes memories of a mother's cooking and a fire that destroyed the family home. Insects appear in many forms across the paintings, adding a small element of unease to these colorful interiors. In ancient Japan, empty cicada shells, or *utsusemi*, signified transience, as the cicada only lives seven days above ground. Their appearance in *Treasure Hunt* • 夏の宝石 and elsewhere remind us of the fleeting nature of all things.

The painting *Double Belonging* stands apart from the rest, with its outdoor landscape setting and stylized wood grain figures. The title references belonging to more than one religious tradition – Japan is one of the few cultures where a majority of the population identifies as being of two religions, Shinto and Buddhism – but also to the artist's experience of being multiracial and multicultural, housing two identities in one body and continually finding balance. The painting takes the form of a wood carving from Fuji's grandmother's Buddhist altar, an antique touchstone of the family home, pieces of which now live with the artist in California. The original scene's group of monks have been replaced with Fuji's characteristic female figures. The central figure holds up a small Kaga Hachiman Okiagari doll, a Shinto symbol native to the family's hometown used for dispelling bad omens. This painting encapsulates Fuji's desire to salvage pieces of old Japan by inviting them into the present and creating a hybrid world of her own.

Maya Fuji (b. 1988 Kanazawa, Japan) is a self taught artist who shifted careers midway through her MBA program to pursue her passion in visual arts and painting. Fuji immigrated to Berkeley, CA at an early age, and spent her early years spending time back and forth between Kanazawa and Berkeley. She currently lives and works out of San Francisco.

Fuji has had solo exhibitions at SWIM Gallery, SF (2022) and YOD Gallery, Osaka (2023). Recent group exhibitions include New Image Art, LA (2022), Glass Rice, SF (2022, 2023), Hashimoto Contemporary, SF & LA (2023), Residency Art, LA (2023), Good Mother Gallery, Oakland & LA (2021-2023), The Hole, NY (2023), and Root Division, SF (2023). Fuji's work has been featured in publications such as New American Paintings, Friend Of The Artist, Artmaze Mag, Metal Magazine, It's Nice That, and Immigrantly Podcast. She was the winner of the Innovative Grant, was a finalist for the Foundwork Artist Prize, was nominated for the SF MOMA SECA Award in 2023. She was the recipient of the SFAC Artists Grant and was an artist in residence at the Wassaic Projects in 2024.