

TACOMA ART MUSEUM

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pop Art that Packs A Punch: Artist Roger Shimomura Sheds Light on Stereotypes

Tacoma, WA – [Tacoma Art Museum](#) presents the work of Seattle native [Roger Shimomura](#) in [An American Knockoff](#), featuring 53 paintings and prints on view June 20 – September 13, 2015.

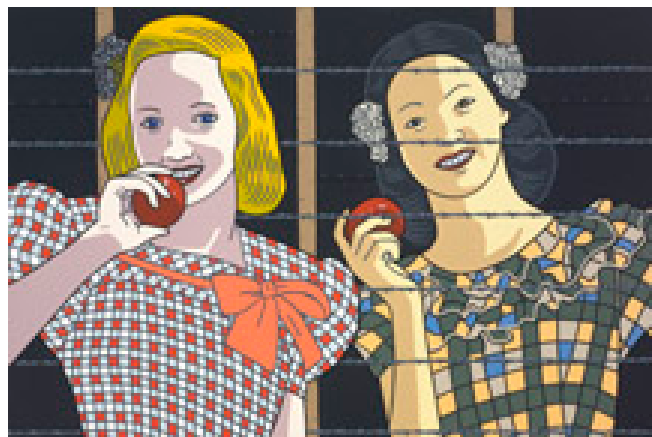
Shimomura's style combines his childhood love of comic books and interest in American pop art with the traditions of Japanese woodblock prints, resulting in a contemporary American presentation that references his Japanese ancestry. His vibrant art conveys messages about politics, society,

racism, and stereotypes, sparking conversation about Asian American identities.

An American Knockoff reflects Shimomura's experience of commonly being presumed a foreigner in his own country and culture. "Knockoff" refers to something cheaply made to resemble a more valuable original; with a knife-sharp wit, Shimomura's work explores the perception of his identity as "less than" American. In the exhibition catalogue he explains, "Far too many American-born citizens of Asian descent continue to be thought of as only American knockoffs. This latest series of paintings is an attempt to ameliorate the outrage of these misconceptions by depicting myself battling those stereotypes, or in tongue-in-cheek fashion, becoming those very same stereotypes." (*Roger Shimomura, An American Knockoff*, Copyright © 2014 Museum of Art/Washington State University.) He assumes the identities of real and imagined iconic American heroes – Superman, George Washington, Mickey Mouse – raising questions about what and who we consider to be American. He inserts himself as an impostor within or aggressor against stereotypes (for



example, *American vs. Chinese*, addressing the stereotype that all Asians have an instinctual understanding of martial arts).



Two major life events strongly influenced Shimomura's work: his family's incarceration at [Minidoka Relocation Center](#) in Hunt, Idaho during World War II when he was a young child, and his move as an adult from the culturally diverse hub of New York to the more homogeneous Midwest, where he has faced frequent race-related questions and presumptions. "The need to address my identity was genuinely born out of the need to mediate and reconcile my yellow presence in the Midwest," he says.

"Roger Shimomura is a major Northwest artist. His work is visually dynamic and offers highly relevant, thought-provoking content, especially for the Tacoma and Seattle region, as we are home to one of the largest Asian American populations in the United States," says Stephanie Stebich, executive director at the museum. "This is an exciting opportunity to see his powerful and memorable work."

A multi-faceted artist, Shimomura is also known for film, performance art, and music. A Seattle native, he graduated from University of Washington in 1961 with a BA in commercial design. He served in the US military in Korea and upon his return, attended Syracuse University, New York, earning a MFA in painting. From 1969 to 2004, Shimomura taught at the [School of Fine Arts at University of Kansas](#). He is represented by [Greg Kucera Gallery](#) in Seattle.

The exhibition is organized by the [Museum of Art at Washington State University](#) and debuted there last fall before touring to the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University in Salem, OR.

See this provocative work on view at TAM this summer, and hear him speak on Sunday, July 19 at 3 pm at the museum's American Matusuri free community festival.

Roger Shimomura: An American Knockoff is organized by the Museum of Art, Washington State University, Pullman.

Image Credits:

Roger Shimomura, *American in Disguise*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 34 x 34 inches. Collection of the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund, 2014.031.

Roger Shimomura, *American vs. Chinese*, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 54 x 54 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Roger Shimomura, *Classmates #1*, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Collection of Tilman Smith, Seattle, WA.

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About Tacoma Art Museum

Founded by volunteers in 1935, Tacoma Art Museum has become an anchor in the city's downtown and a gathering

space for connecting people through art. TAM's collection contains more than 4,500 works, with an emphasis on the art and artists of the Northwest and broader American west. The collection includes the world's largest retrospective museum collection of glass art by Tacoma native Dale Chihuly on continued view; the world's largest collection of jewelry by Northwest artists; key holdings in 19th century European and 20th century American art; and one of the finest collections of Japanese woodblock prints on the West Coast. TAM recently welcomed a promised gift of 295 works of Western American art in the Haub Family Collection, one of the premier collections in the nation and the first major western American art museum collection in the Northwest.

HOURS – Tuesdays–Sundays 10 am–5 pm

ADMISSION – Adult \$14; Student age 6-17, Military, Senior (65+) \$12; Family \$35 (2 adults and up to 4 children under 18). Children 5 and under free. **Third Thursdays free from 5–8 pm.** Members always free.

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