

NEWS RELEASE

2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90049-6833

TEL: (310) 440-4500
FAX: (310) 440-4595

E-MAIL: communications@skirball.org
WEBSITE: www.skirball.org



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Media Contacts:

Emma Jacobson-Sive, (323) 842-2064, emma@ejs-media.com
Mia Cariño, (310) 440-4544, communications@skirball.org

Press Preview: Wednesday, April 6, 10:00–11:30 a.m.

Reservations required: (310) 440-4582 or communications@skirball.org

Skirball Cultural Center to present

THE UNAUTHORIZED HISTORY OF BASEBALL IN 100-ODD PAINTINGS
The Art of Ben Sakoguchi
April 7–September 4, 2016

**Compelling series by the Southern California artist illustrates with candor and humor
the true stories of overlooked baseball players, communities, and history**

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center announces *The Unauthorized History of Baseball in 100-Odd Paintings: The Art of Ben Sakoguchi*, an exhibition of canvases by Southern California–based artist Ben Sakoguchi (b. 1938). Known for his singular blend of art, activism, and humor, Sakoguchi has been creating this body of work for more than a decade. In the colorful, captivating, and often provocative paintings, he explores how baseball, long referred to as America’s national pastime, reflects both the highs and lows of American culture. Drawing from his background as the son of a grocer and avid baseball fan, the artist juxtaposes the iconic imagery of vintage orange crate labels with whimsical, eccentric, and at times scathing portrayals of one of America’s most beloved sports.

Featuring more than 150 paintings, *The Unauthorized History of Baseball in 100-Odd Paintings* will be on view during baseball season, from April 7 through September 4, 2016. It is presented at the Skirball to complement the major exhibition *Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American*, which considers baseball as an intersection of sport, identity, race, and ethnicity.

“Ben Sakoguchi’s dynamic and thoughtful series serves as a kind of ‘people’s history’ of baseball,” says Robert Kirschner, Skirball Museum Director. “By shedding light on figures and communities who have been overlooked, forgotten, or misrepresented—including women athletes, immigrant and Native American players, and fallen sports heroes—Sakoguchi’s unique paintings counter the idealized notion of the game and highlight the contributions of marginalized populations to American culture.”

Fascinated by the graphic design of orange crate labels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sakoguchi has used their detailed, small format as a creative template. The labels’ romanticized vision of the California landscape has provided a playful visual language with which he can address serious themes. The orange crate label format is also a nod to his father, a Japanese

immigrant who owned a grocery store. Though he and his family were incarcerated along with more than 100,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, the artist's father was a great believer in the "American Dream"—and a dedicated fan of baseball.

At the Skirball, the canvases will be grouped into themes ranging from "High Jinks" and "Steroids" to "Segregated Baseball" and "Global Baseball." Throughout the series, Sakoguchi illuminates the many challenges minority groups have faced, both on and off the field, while also satirizing some of the more absurd episodes in baseball history, from Pete Rose posing in underwear ads to players' flamboyant hairstyles and mustaches.

Filled with complex imagery, the paintings are rich with enigmatic references and double meaning. *Miss Call Brand*, for example, depicts the groundbreaking Pam Postema, the first woman umpire to officiate a Major League Baseball (MLB) spring training game, under the words "Miss Call." The pun refers, of course, to umpires' "missed calls" during games, but more importantly to Postema's gender and to the short-lived promise of her MLB career. Another painting, *Minors Brand*, depicts American Little League Baseball pitcher Mo'ne Davis, the first little league player to grace the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Demonstrating Sakoguchi's fluid yet pointed approach to history, the painting portrays Davis wearing the jersey of legendary American Negro League pitcher Satchel Paige, quite possibly the best pitcher ever to play the game. The exhibition will also introduce new works, including several portraying a Jewish "Dream Team" and a personal series devoted to Sakoguchi's father.

About the Artist

Ben Sakoguchi was born in 1938, in San Bernardino, California. During World War II, he spent his early childhood in a Japanese American incarceration camp at Poston, Arizona. After the war, his family returned to San Bernardino and, with considerable difficulty, reopened their small grocery business. There, Sakoguchi attended public schools, including San Bernardino Valley College.

Eventually moving to Los Angeles, Sakoguchi attended UCLA, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree, his teaching credential, and in 1964 a master's degree. He then started teaching at Pasadena City College, where he served on the faculty of the art department until he retired in 1997.

In five decades as a professional artist, Sakoguchi has been a part of many exhibitions throughout the United States, at venues such as the Japanese American National Museum, the Pasadena Museum of California Art, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. He has been awarded numerous grants, including two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships.

THE UNAUTHORIZED HISTORY OF BASEBALL IN 100-ODD PAINTINGS: THE ART OF BEN SAKOGUCHI IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH SUPPORT FROM THE FOLLOWING DONOR:

Pasadena Art Alliance

About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is dedicated to exploring the connections between 4,000 years of Jewish heritage and the vitality of American democratic ideals. It welcomes and seeks to inspire people of every ethnic and cultural identity. Guided by our respective memories and experiences, together we aspire to build a society in which all of us can feel at home. The Skirball Cultural Center achieves its mission through educational programs that explore visual, performing, and literary arts from around the world; through the display and interpretation of

its permanent collections and changing exhibitions; through an interactive family destination inspired by the Noah's Ark story; and through outreach to the community.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to exhibitions beginning March 1, 2016: \$12 General; \$9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are FREE to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.