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TRIBECA

Ben Sakoguchi

Through Oct. 21. Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, Manhattan; 212-257-0033, ortuzarprojects.com.



Ben Sakoguchi's "The Unauthorized History of Baseball," 2005-2008, in his show "Belief & Wordplay" at Ortuzar Projects. via Ben Sakoguchi and Ortuzar Projects, New York; Photo by Dario Lasagni

Ben Sakoguchi spent three years as a boy interned in Arizona with his Japanese American family. His prolific series of "Orange Crate Label" paintings, begun in the 1970s, use the style of produce branding developed in California, where his family had a grocery store, to satirize the foibles, hypocrisies and grand injustices of life in the United States. The emotional range of the works is stunning. One relatively blithe 2005 painting picks on baseball sluggers "juicing" with steroids, while another from 1981 features David Duke, a onetime grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and his wife, Chloë Hardin, in their white robes, proudly holding glowing citrus fruits.

"Comparative Religions 101," 2014/2019, which features a sweeping bruise-hued

view of the Grand Canyon, no faith goes unscathed.) Recent paintings carry the orange crate format to a discomfiting level, like the black-on-black tribute to George Floyd that features the text "I CAN'T BREATHE," with a black wrapped orange near the bottom. Out of context, imagining the victims of racist violence as orange brands would seem insulting, or worse. Here, in the company of a police dog attacking a Black protester and white supremacists condemning Barack Obama with Nazi flags — or any number of awful, actual scenes from Sakoguchi's lifetime — the absurd orange motif feels like the artist insisting that, while racism and death vein the country, its enduring crime is commodifying life. TRAVIS DIEHL