

Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

2020/01/08

Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura, Tokyo 2020

January 25 (Saturday) – April 12 (Sunday), 2020



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No matter how deeply I searched within myself, I could never find anything resembling a center, much less any kind of truth. From the time I was a child, the only thing I knew for sure was that there was a vast emptiness there. If anything, things like truth, values and ideas, existed outside my body, and like clothes, I was free to change them whenever I liked. This concept made a lot more sense to me than anything else.

from Ego Obscura

The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art is proud to present *Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura, Tokyo 2020*. In his acclaimed photographic self-portraits, Morimura re-enacts famous paintings, movies and moments in history, injecting himself as the protagonist. By reincarnating himself through the skillful use of makeup and costume, he transcends the time, race and gender of the subject while imbuing it with a meta-commentary uniquely his own. Making a splash in 1985 with his debut work *Portrait (Van Gogh)*, Morimura has persistently explored the theme of the "self" through his photographic works, and more recently through self-produced, -scripted and -acted video works and live performances.

This exhibition comes on the heels of Morimura's highly successful *Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura* held last year at the Japan Society in New York. For this Tokyo version, he has rearranged his video work entitled *Ego Obscura*, which, along with a lecture performance, comprises the centerpiece of the show. In the video, Morimura appears as Emperor Hirohito, General Douglas MacArthur, Marilyn Monroe and Yukio Mishima – iconic figures that are deeply etched into the collective memory of the Japanese people. Born in Osaka in 1951 during the post-war occupation by the Allied Forces, Morimura was educated at a time when the country's pre-war teachings had been rejected and the resulting "void" infiltrated by Western values. This experience led him to see truth, values and ideas as things that "reside outside the body," which like clothes could be "freely changed" at will (quoted from *Ego Obscura*).

For over 30 years, Morimura has injected himself into the history of Western art. What ideas did he embrace as he went beyond notions of race and gender? Those ideas, which form the background from which his works were born, are given voice in the exhibition's titular video work *Ego Obscura*, which engendered a strong response in New York. They are encompassed in the title "Ego Obscura," an unfamiliar word that Morimura uses to refer to what he describes as "an ambiguous ego wrapped in darkness." In 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympics fifty-five years after the first Olympics which symbolized the country's postwar revival, in self-portraits imbued with complex feelings towards a motherland that go beyond mere affection, Morimura directs the question "what is the "self"?" not only to us, but to the nation of Japan itself as well.

Highlights of the Exhibition

1. *Ego Obscura*, Tokyo 2020 Lecture Performance

Morimura will give a lecture performance of his work *Ego Obscura*, Tokyo 2020.

Dates: January 25 (Sat.), 26 (Sun.), February 22 (Sat.), 23 (Sun.), March 20 (Friday/national holiday), 21 (Sat.), April 12 (Sun.)

Time: 16:00 – 17:00

*Performance will be held in Japanese only.

*Reservations required. Free with museum admission. Details will be posted on the museum website.

2. Yasumasa Morimura and the Hara Museum

Morimura's previous exhibitions at the Hara Museum include *Rembrandt's Room* (1994), which delves deeply into the "self" using as his theme the great 17th century painter from the Netherlands and the light and dark aspects of his life, and *Morimura Self-Portraits: An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo* (2001), which presents the life, loves and death of the great 20th-century Mexican artist Frida Kahlo through festively rendered images. Another work, *Rondo*, is a unique permanent installation that Morimura made using one of the building's toilets in 1994. While undergoing occasional changes in clothing, *Rondo* stands as one of the museum's defining trademarks.

3. Morimura to Juxtapose His Famous Early Work *Portrait (Futago)* born of Manet's *Olympia* with His New Work *Une moderne Olympia* 2018

Morimura's famous *Portrait (Futago)* (1988) which he created early in his career, takes as its subject Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1865), a work that changed the course of modern painting. In it, Morimura, a person of the so-called "yellow race" and of the male gender, assumes the roles of both the white prostitute and black servant painted by Manet. Now, thirty years later, Morimura has unveiled his most recent work, *Une moderne Olympia* 2018, in which the figure whose nakedness is exposed to the public gaze looks back with a gaze even more intense. Here, the young prostitute has been changed into a geisha reminiscent of Madame Butterfly and the black servant into a Western male reminiscent of Pinkerton. The exhibition features a new work by Morimura based on Manet's other masterpiece made late in his career, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. We invite you to view Morimura's presentation of these various protagonists and the complex interaction that arises between them.

Yasumasa Morimura

Born 1951 in Osaka, where he continues to live and work.

Completed undergraduate and graduate degrees at Kyoto City University of Arts.

He made his debut in 1985 with self-portrait works based on his personal interpretation of Vincent Van Gogh.

He has since produced a number of self-portraits in elaborated staged photographic and video works, with himself incarnated as art-historical images, famous film actresses and iconic figures from the 20th century.

In 1988, Morimura was invited to take part in the Aperto section of the 43rd Venice Biennale. In the years since, he has participated in countless important exhibitions both in Japan and abroad. He draws his main themes from famous paintings by such iconic artists as Van Gogh, Velázquez, Goya, Vermeer and Frida Kahlo, as well as images from movies and other forms of pop culture and mass media, as seen in his *Requiem* series. Not only does he grapple with the issues of identity and gender in these images, Morimura uses them as meta-commentaries that posit questions to himself and to his audience, about the role of painting and photography as forms of media.

His solo exhibitions include *The Sickness unto Beauty: Self-portrait as Actress* (Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, 1996), *Self-Portrait as Art History* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo and two other venues, 1998), *Morimura Self-Portraits: An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo* (Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 2001), *A Requiem: Art on Top of the Battlefield* (Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo and other venues, 2010), *Yasumasa Morimura: Theater of the Self* (The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, 2013), *The Self-Portraits of YASUMASA MORIMURA: My Art, My Story, My Art History* (National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2016), *Yasumasa Morimura. The history of the self-portrait* (The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 2017) and *Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura* (Japan Society, New York, 2018).

In 2014, he was the artistic director of Yokohama Triennale.

In 2018, Morimura performed *Yasumasa Morimura: Nippon Cha Cha Cha!* at the Pompidou Metz (Metz, France), Minato City Gender Equality Center's Libra Hall (Tokyo) and the Japan Society (New York).

In 2018, the Morimura @ Museum was opened in Kitakagaya, Osaka.

His publications include *Self-Portrait as Actress: Yasumasa Morimura*, Nigensha Co., Ltd, 2010; *Manebu Art History* (imitating art history), Akaaka Art Publishing Inc., 2010; *Taidan Nanimonokabeno Requiem/ 20 Seiki wo Shikosuru* (conversations about requiem/considering the 20th century), Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 2011; *Bijutsu, Otoseyo* (art, respond!), Chikumashobo Ltd., 2014 and *Jigazō no Yukue* (the whereabouts of self-portrait), Kobunsha Co., Ltd., 2019.

He has received a number of awards for his achievements, including the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize of Fine Arts (2007), 52th Mainichi Art Prize (2011), Photographic Society of Japan Award (2011) and also one of the most prestigious awards in the field of art and science, the Order of Purple Ribbon (2011).

Exhibition Details

Title: *Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura, Tokyo 2020*

Dates: January 25 (Saturday) – April 12 (Sunday), 2020

Organized by: Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

Supported by: regist ART

Cooperation provided by: Yoshiko Isshiki Office, Chishima Real Estate Co., Ltd., Japan Society, New York

Venue: 4-7-25 Kitashinagawa, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo 140-0001 Tel: 03-3445-0651

E-mail: info@haramuseum.or.jp Website: <https://www.haramuseum.or.jp>

Hours: 11:00 am – 5:00 pm, Wednesdays until 8:00 pm (last entry 30 minutes before closing)

Closed: Mondays (except February 24) and February 25, 2020

Admission: General 1,100 yen; Students 700 yen (high school and university) or 500 yen (elementary and junior high); 550 yen for those over 70; Free for Hara Museum members and for students through high school every

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Saturday during the school term; 100 yen discount per person for groups of 20 or more

Directions to the museum: 5 minutes by taxi or 15 minutes on foot from JR Shinagawa Station (Takanawa exit); or from the same station take the No.96 bus, get off at the first stop (Gotenyama), and walk 3 minutes

Number of works: approx. 20

*Free Japanese-language tours are given by a museum curator every Sunday and national holiday, starting at 2:30 pm and lasting about 30 minutes. No reservation is required. Free mini-tours in English are also available upon request.

**Ego Obscura* will be screened daily. See website for details.

Images for Publication

*Please include the credit along with the respective caption.

*Please do not trim or alter the images. Putting text over the images is prohibited.



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[1] Still image from *Ego Obscura*, 2020 Photo: Kazuo Fukunaga ©Yasumasa Morimura

[2] Still image from *Ego Obscura*, 2020 Photo: Masahiro Hasunuma ©Yasumasa Morimura

[3] *Une moderne Olympia* 2018, 2018 ©Yasumasa Morimura

[4] *Self-Portrait (Actress)/Marilyn at Tokyo University, Komaba*, 1995 - 2008 ©Yasumasa Morimura

[5] *A Requiem: Mishima, 1970.11.25 - 2006.4.6*, 2006 ©Yasumasa Morimura

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