

# Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura faces off with Old Masters in New York

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*Une moderne Olympia, 2018, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura*

## INFORMATION

'Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura' is on view until 13 January 2019. For more information, visit the Japan Society [website](#)

## ADDRESS

Japan Society  
333 East 47th Street  
New York

In Yasumasa Morimura's versions of Manet's glorious canonical nude *Olympia*, the artist gazes stoically back at the camera, a carefully placed-hand demurely concealing his modesty, kicking off a pair of pink backless mules – much in the manner of Victorine Meurent, who modelled *Olympia* for Manet in the 19th century, and provoked outrage for being depicted as a prostitute with apparently no shame about it.

In a new series on show at New York's Japan Society Gallery until January 2019, Morimura comes at Manet from a different angle: in art history, the naked male body, when it has been explored, has been western – the Grecian idyll of form. What makes a masterpiece, according to the history of art, has been defined by European men, for European men. Bodies like Morimura's have not been represented in western art.

'In the end, what is history?' The Japanese artist decries. 'And what is historical truth?' These are the questions that play out as we take a Morimura tour through the Masters of painting and the beginnings of western modernism: from a restaged Durer and Van Gogh to Frida Kahlo, Marilyn Monroe, and Marcel Duchamp, with Morimura playing the protagonist – questioning his own position as an artist, and his relationship to these works, as an Asian man.



*Still from Égo Obscura, 2018, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist. © Yasumasa Morimura*

In these self-portraits as other people – the exhibition is titled ‘Ego Obscura’, presumably a wry nod to the Latin-oriented notion of history – Morimura makes you laugh, but it’s hardly comfortable viewing. In two new video works, Morimura flings this cultural skewer in the viewer’s face even more directly.

His feature-length film, *Egó Sympósiion*, showing for the first time in the US at the gallery, is an interpretation of 12 Master artists known for their self-portraits, while *Nippon Cha Cha Cha!*, performed live for the first week of the show’s run, is a theatrical installation in which Morimura cavorts as key figures of 20th-century history and pop culture, invoking into the present a bank of imagery from the past, but for a gender-queer, multi-ethnic present.



Are they as good as the originals? Of course not. But their treacly humour and costuming (Morimura is from Osaka, home to Japan's oldest alternative theatre traditions) questions the very value system to which we uphold works of art in the west, and the way iconic images in art and pop culture, have shaped the collective memory into something homogeneous, heterosexual, and white. §



Watch an exclusive excerpt of film *Egó Sympósiōn*, which features Yasumasa Morimura as 12 artists known for their self-portraits including Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol and Frida Kahlo. *Courtesy of the artist.* © Yasumasa Morimura



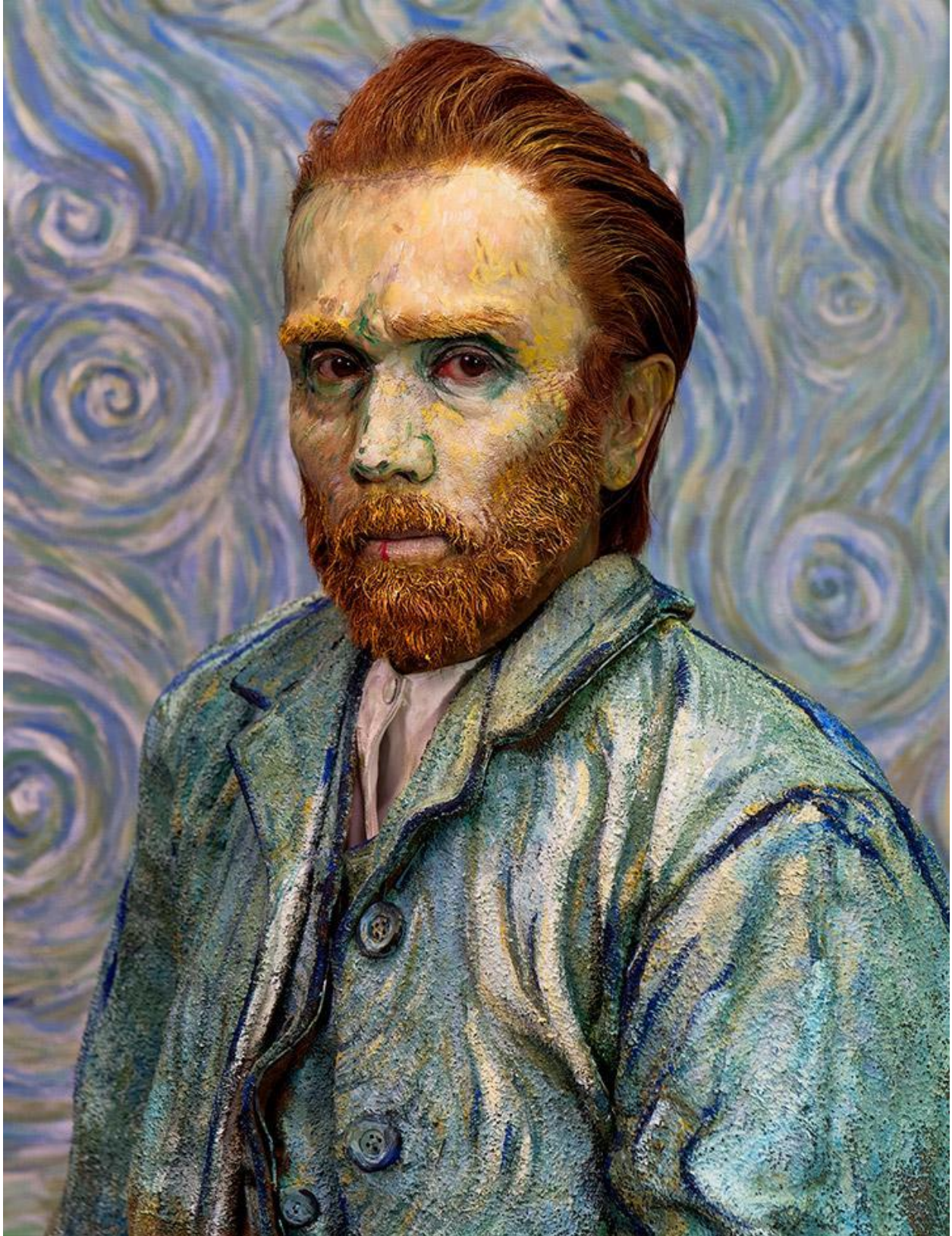
*Doublonnage (Marcel)*, 1988, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura





*Self-Portraits through Art History (Le Brun on the Witness Stand)*, 2016, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura





*Self-Portraits through Art History (Van Gogh / Blue), 2016, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura*



*Self-Portrait (Actress) / Marilyn at Tokyo University, Komaba, 1995–2008, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura*





*Self-Portraits through Art History (What Leonardo's Face Says)*, 2016, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura



*Self-Portraits through Art History (Van Eyck in a Red Turban)*, 2016, by Yasumasa Morimura. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura



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