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Morimura, Japan's Most Astonishing Art Chameleon, Is Coming to New York With a Major Debut Show

But you might not recognize him.

Sarah Cascone (<https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25>), June 1, 2018



Yasumasa Morimura, as Leonardo da Vinci. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Yasumasa Morimura (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/yasumasa-morimura/>) may not be an actor, but he knows his way around a costume. The Japanese artist has spent the last 30 years shooting self-portraits dressed as a wide range of historical figures, boldly appropriating Western culture to challenge viewer assumptions. Now, the Osaka-based artist is getting his first institutional New York solo show at the Japan Society.

Titled “Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura,” the exhibition will showcase these photographic portraits, elaborately staged scenes that draw from the annals of history and pop culture alike. Morimura even mines the traditions of European painting, creating images based on work by Old Masters such as Leonardo da Vinci (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/leonardo-da-vinci/>), Rembrandt

[van Rijn](http://www.artnet.com/artists/rembrandt-van-rijn/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/rembrandt-van-rijn/>), Albrecht Dürer, [Caravaggio](http://www.artnet.com/artists/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio/>), and Charles Le Brun.

Morimura tackles notions of “the self” by seamlessly absorbing any number of foreign identities—catch him, for instance, as Johannes Vermeer’s famed *Girl With a Pearl Earring* (https://www.flickr.com/photos/art_privee/8568286071/). By refusing to adhere to traditional gender roles or concepts of sexuality or nationality, he forces the viewer to confront all manner of power dynamics, including those between the East and West.

“Not only does his work offer a deeper understanding of Japanese identity within a Western context, it also inspires important dialogues between cultures in an age where self-reflection and identity are constantly examined,” Yukie Kamiya, the show’s curator and Japan Society director, said in a statement.

The exhibition will feature the premiere of Morimura’s first feature-length film, *Ego Symposium*, starring the artist as 12 famed self-portraitists, and a theatrical installation titled *Nippon Cha-cha-cha*, which will be performed during the exhibition’s opening week.



Yasumasa Morimura, as Marilyn Monroe. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Among the cast of characters Morimura has played over the years are Marilyn Monroe, famous Japanese author Yukio Mishima, and General Douglas MacArthur, the Allied commander during postwar occupation of Japan. The masterful shapeshifter has even starred in his own version of Edouard Manet’s controversial masterpiece *Olympia* and remade self-portraits of art stars such as [Andy Warhol](http://www.artnet.com/artists/andy-warhol/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/andy-warhol/>), [Vincent van Gogh](http://www.artnet.com/artists/vincent-van-gogh/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/vincent-van-gogh/>), and [Frida Kahlo](http://www.artnet.com/artists/frida-kahlo/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/frida-kahlo/>).

His work is both a critique and an homage aimed at Western culture. “In the end, what is history? And what is historical truth?” Morimura asks in the preface to *Ego Symposium*. “These are questions that do not have ready answers. Various truths are concealed in many paintings. On the other hand, a painting can be seen as a fake, something caked with falsehoods and misunderstandings. A painter’s testimony is at once a confession of a hidden truth and an attempt to overwrite their life with a false statement.”

See more works by the artist below.



Yasumasa Morimura as Albrecht Dürer. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Yasumasa Morimura, as Jan van Eyck. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Nippon Cha-cha-cha*, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Nippon Cha-cha-cha*, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Nippon Cha-cha-cha*, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Yasumasa Morimura, *Nippon Cha-cha-cha*, video still. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

“Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura” is on view at the [Japan Society](https://www.japansociety.org/) (<https://www.japansociety.org/>), 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues, New York, October 12, 2018, through January 13, 2019. General admission is \$12.

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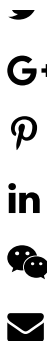
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