

MOT Collection 30th Anniversary Exhibit

Multiple Self-portraits

Special Feature NAKANISHI Natsuyuki IKEUCHI Akiko: Arc and Catenary

December 25, 2025 – April 2, 2026
Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Foreword

2025 marks 30 years of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. The MOT collection now consists of approximately 6000 works ranging from modern to contemporary, with an emphasis on postwar art. This exhibition is made up of two displays that shed light on the endeavors of artists in the collection, primarily focusing on recently added works.

On the 1st floor, “Multiple Self-Portraits” offers a multidimensional survey of images related to multiple selves, depicted via art masterpieces, history, and everyday life. Exhibits include a special display, incorporating loan items, featuring three artists: MORIMURA Yasumasa, plus YUASA Ebosi, who produces work under the guise of a fictitious painter; and MATSUI Erina, who views self-portraits, including some weird and wonderful faces, as a tool for communication. The new acquisitions from Yuasa and Matsui will have their first showing here, and the space will also present works from other artists such as MIYAGI Futoshi, YOKOYAMA Yuichi, KAIHATSU Yoshiaki, TOYOSHIMA Yasuko, KWAK Duck Jun, and Andy WARHOL.

On the 3rd floor is “Special Feature NAKANISHI Natsuyuki, IKEUCHI Akiko: Arc and Catenary,” an introduction to the artistic realms of the eponymous artists. Nakanishi, who was the first Japanese artist to stage a solo show at the museum, and Ikeuchi, known for her installations using silk thread, both make works that originate in their own bodies in the here and now, yet possess an expansiveness hinting at a realm beyond those physical limits. Ikeuchi will also create a new work on-site to mix with a display of new acquisitions from both artists, allowing visitors to experience the resonance between different works on display.

In closing, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of those who have honored us with their unstinting cooperation in realizing this exhibition.

Multiple Self-portraits

“Multiple Self-portraits” begins with a special presentation of *Ego Symposium*, a full-length film by MORIMURA Yasumasa (b. 1951), featuring Morimura playing a series of painters discussing the nature of the self. One of these is Andy WARHOL (1928-1987), whose *Set of 6 Self Portraits* is part of the MOT collection. *Ego Symposium* prompts viewers to ponder the nature of the myriad selves that materialize within the complex and varied relationships that form in today’s world, where encounters with this work and those of many other artists occur through the internet, social media, and AI.

I. MORIMURA Yasumasa

In the four decades since 1985, when he unveiled a photographic work featuring himself as a Van Gogh self-portrait, MORIMURA Yasumasa (b. 1951) has produced a steady stream of “self-portraits” in which he impersonates someone or other: a character from a canonical painting perhaps, or a film actress from yesteryear, or figure from the history books. For his art history series, he meticulously researches and undertakes his own interpretation of the artist and art, crafts the studio set and costuming, and dons the clothing and makeup to personally “become” the work.

In his first full-length film *Ego Symposium* (2016, collection of the artist) painters that Morimura has featured previously, from Leonardo da Vinci to Andy Warhol, are invited to an imaginary symposium, the artist blithely transcending era, nationality and gender to play them all as he races through 500 years of art history while discussing the nature of the self.

Using different character sets for the word *watashi* meaning I/me: kanji for the “I” that appears in self-portraits from art history, and hiragana for the “I” of Morimura as an individual, the artist has written of this work “It is about finding Morimura as an individual ‘I’ in the mirror of the ‘I’ of the historical self-portraits; and in turn, seeing the art-historical ‘I’ as something somehow different to the prevailing view, through its reflection in the ‘I’ that is Morimura. The desire to create this infinity mirror state was a major theme here.”* Emerging from this work, composed by switching between the museums in which Morimura’s works are displayed, the sets used for filming, and the time and space of the modern cities we call home, serving here as a stage for the historical painters to tread, is a splendid “self-portrait” as scene for encounters between multiple “I’s” of both varieties.

*MORIMURA Yasumasa, *Jigazo no kokuhaku: “Watashi” to “watashi” ga deau toki* [Self-portrait confessions: When ‘I’ and ‘I’ meet], (Chikuma Shobo, 2016), pp. 164-165.

2. MATSUI Erina

MATSUI Erina (b. 1984) is known for her outrageously distorted “silly-face” self-portraits, and has produced a series of these paintings all characterized by outstanding, highly detailed brushwork. Prominent examples are *I love shrimp chili* (2006, Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain collection), from her art prep-school days, also a gold medal winner at the GEISAI art fair, which shows the artist with eyes rolled back in a paroxysm of ecstasy at the aroma of her favorite dish, and *Nose-hana=flower* (2007, private collection). Her early works feature close-up self-portraits that brim and gush with emotion amid the artist’s carefully constructed inner cosmic utopia. From the very beginning Matsui has approached her production with the idea of painting as a tool for communication, grounded in a persistent urge to share everyday discoveries, humor and emotions with others, a philosophy that in recent years has seen her practice unfold in new directions.

Imitation Supper (2023) was inspired by the experience of recognizing Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in the quotidian family scene of pretend-play pieces scattered over the table. Here, this gaze embodying the artist's art-educated self unexpectedly manifesting in everyday life serves as a "self-portrait" of Matsui, the painter's "eye" subtly hovering over the white tablecloth. Meanwhile, in *Mme. Overrun* (2024, collection of the artist), adopting the perspective of a child photographing her on a smartphone, and layering a greater variety of brushstrokes and blank spaces than previously on the canvas, Matsui depicts herself in a sleepy late-night stupor. Assembled in this room are several such "self-portraits" from a diverse and ever-expanding portfolio characterized by the interplay of *hare* and *ke-ordinary* and *out-of-the-ordinary*—experienced by the artist, and different perspectives and images, that in turn invite us to recall our own experiences and memories.

3. MORIMURA Yasumasa , KWAK Duck Jun

This chapter presents self-portraits by MORIMURA Yasumasa (b.1951) and KWAK Duck Jun (1937–2025) that reveal a range of social standpoints and racial and other differences through the medium of the artists' own bodies.

Portrait (Shonen 1, 2, 3) (1988) is from Morimura's art history series. The idea for *Portrait* arose when Morimura happened to learn, while tackling Manet's *Olympia* (1863), that the model for *The Fifer* (1866), also by Manet, was the same woman seen in *Olympia*. Adding a twist to the existing gender-bending portrayal, the male Morimura took the part of this model. In *Portrait*, by inserting himself as an Asian into the binary oppositions of mistress/servant and white/black seen in Manet's *Olympia*, and systematically switching out, on the platform of his own body, the face of the boy playing the fife, the lower body, and the colors of the hand reaching toward the crotch, one could say he strives for a "disruption of values." Like his other works, this "self-portrait" arises from the very fact of Morimura adding his own interpretation, and "becoming" the work.

Kwak launched his "President and Kwak" series of photographic works in 1974. In the series the artist uses a mirror to combine his own face with that of successive US Presidents, figures only ever encountered in the media, where every four years they adorn the cover of *TIME* magazine, grinning (presumably) proudly as the eyes of the world look on. Kwak was born Japanese in Kyoto but lost his citizenship following signing of the San Francisco Treaty of 1952. As a "powerless artist without authority," by showing himself side-on at the fore of the frame, Kwak presents himself as a figure of solid reality.

4. YUASA Ebosi

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to live in a different era? Yuasa Ebosi (b. 1983), who became familiar with Surrealism through the writings of scholar of French literature SHIBUSAWA Tatsuhiko (1928–1987), found something especially relatable in the painters of wartime and postwar Japan, and came up with the idea of positioning himself in that period to pursue his practice, as the self-styled

"Taisho-born fictitious third-rate painter Yuasa Yebosi."

According to the artist, his fictitious alter ego Yebosi was born in 1924. At the age of 16 he joined the Fukuzawa Ichiro Art Institute,* where he learned of Surrealism. Failing his army medical, he instead spent the war years making collages from pictures cut out of boys' magazine *Shonen Club*. After the war he painted portraits of Occupation troops. Following a period working with Surrealist painter YAMASHITA Kikujirō (1919–1986) and other Japanese avant-garde luminaries, in the mid-1950s he spent time in the United States. On returning he eschewed involvement in artist groups to produce futuristic, surrealist, satirical paintings that also drew on comics and other products of American popular culture. In 1985 Yebosi's home and studio were lost in a fire, and in 1987 he died from complications arising from burns suffered in the conflagration.

The biography of the fictitious painter, liberally littered with the names of actual artists and art groups, continues to gain substance and silliness through the "discovery" of new works painted by Yuasa as the work of "Yuasa Yebosi," and deadpan commentaries courtesy of the artist in his capacity as a "Yuasa Yebosi scholar." Like the style, "obviously influenced by" FUKUZAWA Ichiro (1898–1992), the format mimicking accounts of ratings and rankings speaks to a criticality and risk-taking playfulness that cast a different light on the authority possessed by art history and art museums. Works that could have been around at the time, inserted in gaps in history, encourage the viewer to distance themselves from various artistic and historical norms as they look. The "discovery" of Yuasa Yebosi's works is ongoing, Yuasa interpreting his namesake as one of the many painters who never made it into art history. In a sense this may show a side of Yuasa himself, acquiring creative freedom by inventing another artist.

Here we present, alongside works by Yuasa, items from our collection by artists who were contemporaries of Yuasa Yebosi (whom he apparently mixed with from time to time), and works collected by Yuasa himself, and in the process explore the "self-portrait" that arises from the accumulation of these.

*Fukuzawa Ichiro was the painter who brought Surrealism to Japan in the 1930s. In 1924 he traveled to France, where he produced numerous paintings inspired by the works of Max Ernst. After returning to Japan, in 1936 he established the Fukuzawa Ichiro Art Institute in his home in the Tokyo neighborhood of Hongo-dozakacho. Yuasa Yebosi is deemed to have seen an advertisement for the Institute, and decided to join.

5. MIYAGI Futoshi

MIYAGI Futoshi (b.1981) produces works in multiple formats ranging from videos and photographs to novels exploring themes that include his own identity, his birthplace of Okinawa, and the American culture he admired as a teen. As well as presenting works that ask whether it would be possible for an Okinawan man and American man to fall in love on Okinawa, as the "American Boyfriend" project launched in 2012, Miyagi continues to curate exhibitions and

organize talk events that encompass expression peripheral to this theme, and resonant sensibilities.

The associated *A Romantic Composition* (2015) is a dual-channel video work telling a fictitious tale against the backdrop of Okinawa during the Vietnam War. One video tells the story of a Bach chaconne performed on the violin by an American soldier and heard by an Okinawan pianist in a bar at the Hilton Hotel that was in Okinawa at the time, and recollections of the pair's subsequent fleeting connection; on the other, the story narrated by the American soldier's son, told to him by his father since their reunion 20 years after the father left home when the son was very young. This tells of the father's memories of being posted to Okinawa while serving during the Vietnam War, the night he played the violin in the hotel, and the pain caused by concealing his sexuality.

Growing up in Okinawa as a member of a sexual minority, then spending time in New York, on returning home the artist conducted interviews in the United States and Okinawa designed to unpack individual experiences emerging from the relationship between Okinawa, Japan and the US during the Cold War, and used these interviews and his own experiences and memories as the basis for this work, in which a delicate interplay of present and past, fact and fiction, historical facts about the featured music, and anecdotes related to music and movies, unfold as a single narrative. The work ends with a Bach chaconne to which Schumann added piano accompaniment, the two instruments played as if in a dialog. This work, in which both stories are narrated by Miyagi himself, can itself also be viewed as a metaphorical musical variation on the self-portrait.

6. KAIHATSU Yoshiaki, TOYOSHIMA Yasuko, MINAMIKAWA Shimon, YOKOYAMA Yuichi

In this chapter we present works by four artists who, from various angles, expand our ideas around the question of self—What am I?—that Morimura posed of painters in his works at the start of the exhibition.

From around 2000, YOKOYAMA Yuichi (b.1967) expanded his practice to encompass manga, whose panel layout allows it to express time in a manner that a painting cannot. The result has been a stream of highly idiosyncratic expression that shows a clear grasp of the grammar of manga, yet no clear story or plot development; makes heavy use of onomatopoeia and mimesis; and portrays the passing of time through a series of movements by characters and objects that transcend sex, age, nationality and time. Dubbed “neo-manga” it has attracted attention well beyond the worlds of manga and art. *Beasts and Ourselves* (2005–07) is a series bringing together, in the manner of specimens, an array of fantastical creatures: expressionless, anonymous yet somehow charming, like the characters that appear in neo-manga. In this multitude of faces, vibrantly colored and simple in design, pattern and deviation are endlessly repeated.

Since about 1990, TOYOSHIMA Yasuko (b. 1967) has chosen the very understandings many seem to unconsciously share as material for her expression. In *Reprint Edition* (2003), she replicates an essay from elementary school that has been written within the school education system, presenting her

child self as another person, a stranger.

Since the late 1990s MINAMIKAWA Shimon (b. 1972) has been exploring different ways of being for the painting itself. *Impression 7*(2016), made while the artist was living in Germany, is one of a series that takes the painting as subject/agent, and attempts to document the painting's own specific impressions of experiencing the time and location of its creation, viewing his own production as a kind of intermediary.

Since 1990 KAIHATSU Yoshiaki (b.1966) has developed installations and performances featuring everyday objects, events and concerns as motifs. In the video work *Interview* (2001) the artist himself appears on screen as different individuals, talking about something or other just as these figures might, in a series of “bizarre interviews sans interviewer” in which it is impossible to grasp who exactly he is, no matter how hard one listens.

These works all contemplate the self and world around it: the different mechanisms in society, how we relate to other entities, and the gestures and guises that emerge as relationships are formed.

Special Feature NAKANISHI Natsuyuki IKEUCHI Akiko: Arc and Catenary

7.NAKANISHI Natsuyuki

In 1997 Nakanishi Natsuyuki (1935–2016) became the first Japanese artist to stage a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. From the late 1950s up to his final years, Nakanishi never stopped formulating and executing new ideas around painting.

Our 30th anniversary year at MOT coincides with the tenth anniversary of Nakanishi's passing, and to mark this we have assembled a selection of works from very early to late in his career, including recent acquisitions and items on loan. Taking our cue from the artist's own words, the aim is to offer a space to linger quietly in front of the art, and respond to it.

Nakanishi graduated from the Tokyo University of Arts painting department in 1958, with a major in oil painting. Though painting was never far from his thoughts, it is easy to imagine, in the 1960s, how an interest in spatial expansion and bodily expression encouraged by engaging in artistic endeavors with figures such as TAKAMATSU Jiro and AKASEGAWA Genpei, and collaborating with dancers like Hijikata Tatsumi, came to influence his painting production. The Nakanishi paintings here represent no obvious subject or theme, instead, occupying the picture plane are carefully-rendered dots, undulating lines, colors mixing on the canvas and the spaces between. These are what appeared when the painter standing before the canvas began with an interrogation of painting itself and took as launchpad his own body and sensations in the here and now. Behind this, touching it, lies an invisible, infinite imaginative realm.

PIECE/INSTRUCTION/PLAY

Many of Nakanishi's works consist of a series of connected canvases. According to the artist, for ideas he drew on the words "piece" and "instruction" used frequently by artists such as Yoko Ono and Nam Jun Paik in the early 1960s, and the structure and performance of music.* These serial works can be viewed as variations combining "pieces" in the form of individual works. "Instructions" may be found in Clothespins Assert Churning Action. At its unveiling in 1963, visitors were provoked into action by an instruction inviting them to "use the clothespins any way you like,"** and the pins duly strayed from the canvases and ended up dotted all around the gallery and beyond. This can be interpreted as viewers engaging in free "play" based on an instruction. In accordance with the artist's wishes the work is now displayed not as a participatory work but a painting, although the element of play remains. Retaining the framework as directed, the person installing the work for exhibition adds clothespins in parts, removing these when the work is packed away. The result is the emergence then disappearance of a new picture plane with each exhibiting.

*Conversation with the artist on September 28, 2010.

**Nakahara Yusuke, "Prospects for the 15th Yomiuri Independent Exhibition," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 12, 1963 evening edition.

ARC

In *Tangent Arc*, a bow is affixed to the canvas. Some works in the series have an arc painted on the canvas. These were apparently inspired by seeing threads dangled by spiders toward the ground forming U-shaped catenary curves and arcs.* Here Nakanishi thinks of the edge of the rectangular canvas not as a vertical plumb line dropping toward the ground, but part of a circle so vast it could be mistaken for a straight line, that is, an arc, and judges the canvas before us to have been guided here from someplace infinitely remote. The bow shape is an indicator of that imaginative realm touching the canvas, and the plane we see is accordingly transformed into something possessing a faraway spatial expanse. One surmises that the artist also set his own "here and now" as a fictitious place abutting that imaginative realm. He may well have compiled instructions to serve as a framework for production, by interrogating from the outset what it means to paint—the nature of that fictitious place, the position of the canvas and relationship between himself and the canvas, the selection of tools—and instructed himself. Even if this became habit or gesture, the vital energy and impulsivity of the body in that place and time serve as playful elements, and dwell even in the tiny, cautiously rendered dots.

*Nakanishi Natsuyuki, *Tangent Arc*, Tokyo Publishing House, 2015.

BODY

Nakanishi spoke of having the similarities in Rhyme to the letter T, clothespins, and painted brushstrokes pointed out to him. On that occasion the term "body" (*taishitsu*) emerged. According to Nakanishi, though he disliked the word, there being such* things as matter (*busshtsu*) and disposition

(*kishitsu*), it seemed reasonable enough to raise it in a critical context. In the *Softly Reductive* series, dissolving smoothly on a single brush mark is another layer, suffusing the canvas with a sheen glowing to the point of moistness. The artist has achieved this desired feel by using custom-made extender paint consisting of extender (body) pigment that alters qualities of the paint such as color and viscosity, added to the oils. The picture plane generated by a mix of body and matter seems to flow constantly, thanks to brush marks that speak powerfully of the artist's gestures, and appear fresh with every viewing. If one sees "reduction" as matter changing, then Nakanishi has "softly" changed the quality of painting. As the eye takes in the aura produced by the white, purple and yellow-green, sensation is heightened, and the line from Baudelaire's poetry often quoted by Nakanishi, "Luxe, calme, et volupté (richness, serenity, and pleasure)" comes to mind.

*September 28, 2010 conversation.

WATER AND CLOTH

In an essay, Nakanishi wrote that a painter does not walk beside a river in the direction of its flow, but gazes upon the face of the river from a bridge.* Thus he deemed painting the only format for looking at the flow of time directly, and bathing in it. When what Nakanishi thought and executed looking at the river's surface from the bridge manifested as a painting, one imagines it was like looking at the canvas as if watching the flow of a cascade: "Similar phenomena on the picture plane are repeated again and again within set rules. / Set, yet something is new, new again. / Just as a waterfall maintains a certain form but with new water constantly flowing."** Perhaps Nakanishi's paintings are like screens that display a phenomenon from nascence to disappearance, like water appearing from a height and falling into the basin of the waterfall. In its shimmering, dancing brushstrokes, and long white surface reminiscent of a waterfall, the epic Falls from his later years seems to project the flow of time.

*Nakanishi Natsuyuki, "On the Bridge," in *Brace: Devices That Forever Stand Still in Order to Gaze Lingeringly*, Chikumashobo, 1989 (first published 1981).

**Nakanishi Natsuyuki, "Notes for television 1980 XII–1981 I," ed. Goto Shinji, in Nakanishi Natsuyuki, exh. cat., Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, 1985.

8. IKEUCHI Akiko

The connection between IKEUCHI Akiko (b. 1967) and thread can be traced back to 1988 when as a student, the artist used it to stand a branch up on a floor. This rendering visible through a single thread the very space where there had been "nothing" was the start of a practice that subsequently took on a multilayered quality, gathering and tying together the light and shadow of the location, and its humidity; gravity, the movements and breath of those in attendance, and even the history and memories of the place.

As lines acquire dots in the form of knots made by the artist's hands, intersect, and expand into planes, the abstract nature of the line becomes evident. Yet these lines formed by silk thread, creation of living things, harbor a delicacy and wildness of a sort that capture every movement in that space ceaselessly, with a constant hum. Herein perhaps, with their

combination of intricacy and generosity, lies the uniqueness of Ikeuchi's works. In terms of structure, Ikeuchi suspends the work from two or four "cardinal points" based on bearings obtained from the earth's magnetic field, placing great importance on determining these "cardinal points" during installation. The work is shaped by the forces in that location, and supported by these points that suggest a domain extending beyond the building. This is an attempt, as frequently mentioned by Ikeuchi, to interrogate whether a work can "arise in a cave-like place without the boundaries of walls, floor or ceiling," and no less than a full exploration of the place from which the work emerges.*

Raising hands to chest height, her production technique of repeating the same single action that is simultaneously new each time, also resembles a kind of dance, and evokes images of the many tasks involving silk thread performed since antiquity. The action indicated in the title "Knotted Thread" could be said to give meaning to and bind the thread in a manner mediated by bodily rhythm. Perceiving spaces tactiley through her own body, exploring the depth and expanse of those spaces, Ikeuchi's practice quietly makes us realize that this place where we stand, is invariably connected to another.

*From discussion among IKEUCHI Akiko, IMANO Osuke, NAKANISHI Natsuyuki, and NAKAHARA Yusuke during Ikeuchi's solo exhibition in 2003.
"Ikeuchi Akiko interview," in Akiko Ikeuchi: Or Gathering the Energies of the Earth (Fuchu Art Museum, 2022), p73.

Texts by
MIZUTA Yuko (1-4,6-7)
CHINZEI Yoshimi (5, 9)
FUJII Aki (8)
Translated by Pamela Miki Associates

© Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo 2025