



YASUMASA MORIMURA

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Yasumasa Morimura was born in Osaka, Japan, in 1951. He studied at Kyoto City University of Arts before earning his master's degree at Columbia University in New York. Since the mid-1980s, he has emerged as a pioneering voice in contemporary art, blending performance, photography, and cultural critique into a singular, visually compelling practice.

Morimura's work centers on transformation and appropriation, as he inserts himself into iconic images from art history, cinema, and mass media. These meticulously staged self-portraits become a platform to question identity, authorship, and cultural memory. By reimagining Western icons through an East Asian lens, Morimura reframes established narratives and

reconfigures visual traditions on both sides of the cultural divide.

Born in postwar Japan—a time when Western values were rapidly embraced, often at the expense of native customs—he reflects on this cultural dislocation and hybridization. As he once observed, *"I will always be a part of the West because the West will always be a part of me."* This layered outlook lies at the heart of his work, offering a sustained meditation on history, representation, and the global circulation of images in the modern age.

"Art is the ability to turn one's gaze to the world of oblivion." — Yasumasa Morimura

Morimura first gained international attention with a series of self-portraits that both honored and subverted canonical Western artworks. Reimagining figures from Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Goya, Van Gogh, and Frida Kahlo, he inserted his own image into iconic compositions to question inherited art historical narratives. His reinterpretations of pop culture icons—Marilyn Monroe, Vivien Leigh, Liza Minnelli, Greta Garbo—transcend mimicry. These theatrical restagings shift the meaning of familiar images, encouraging viewers to reconsider their assumptions about beauty, fame, and cultural icons.

Central to his practice is a labor-intensive, theatrical process unfolding in multiple stages. Each work begins with a meticulously constructed set—often sculptural or painted—to recreate the texture and mood of the original. Morimura then undergoes a detailed process of physical transformation using elaborate costumes, makeup, and gesture to embody the subject. The final scene is captured photographically and refined digitally, resulting in a hybrid form that fuses elements of sculpture, painting, theater, and photography into a cohesive visual statement.

A featured series in this exhibition, Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo, presents Morimura inhabiting the persona of the iconic Mexican artist through elaborate costuming and performative staging. These works are not simple homages, but speculative portraits that blur the lines between admiration, projection, and reinvention—constructing a fictionalized Frida shaped by his imagination.

“As I am being inspired by you, Doña Frida, I drink in what I like to think of as your essence so as to create a Frida of my own, in my own mind’s eye... in that fantastic sphere, the various elements of Doña Frida and myself mix into a muddle, a chemical reaction occurs, creating this imaginary Frida of mine. I wanted to give form to what Doña Frida is to me. Via self-portraiture, that is.”

— Yasumasa Morimura

Yasumasa Morimura’s works are held in major museums and collections around the world, including The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), the Hammer Museum, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles; Museum Ludwig in Cologne; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid; as well as the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, and the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto.

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