



Yasumasa Morimura, *Self-Portrait (Actress) / After Liza Minnelli, 1996, Ilfochrome/Framed acrylic sheet, 47.25" x 37.25"* (photo courtesy of Vaknin Schwartz).

ATLANTA

Self Evident (Vaknin Schwartz, June 25–August 7) presented an international selection of recent work in which artists use themselves as subject matter. Arguably, the most sophisticated work in the show was Gavin Turk's deceptively simple, cleverly titled large-scale color photograph, *Portrait of Something That I'll Never Really See* (1997). The image, of the artist with his eyes closed, raises a host of questions about the nature of self-portraiture and what it might mean to "really see" something. Even though self-portraiture is often discussed as a genre through which the artist can reveal him or herself, isn't a self-portrait always a representation of a representation of the self? Perhaps indirect perception of the self is the most anyone can ever achieve.

Sean Landers' *Naked in Nature* (1992), a wall-mounted montage of 58 snapshot-like photographs of the nude, unassuming-looking artist striking casual poses in a natural setting also deflates a traditional genre, the nude in a landscape. This is no celebration of the fundamental connection between the human being and the natural world, nor does the work suggest a personal affinity for nature on Landers' part. The artist may be naked, but his nakedness entails no apparent revelation of self.

Like Landers' photo assemblage, Tracey Emin's monoprints from 1995 and 1997 are deliberately informal in style, partaking of a blotted, nervous line and sketchy renderings of a naked female figure. This style makes the work seem diaristic, as if the artist were keeping a sketchbook of solitary moments in her life, including such intensely private activities as masturbation. At one level, these works are the most traditional self-portraits in the show, since in both style and content they seem highly per-

sonal and revelatory. Yet, there is also a sense in which the sketchy female figures on these pages appear more as narrative surrogates for the artist and her life than as representations of the artist herself.

Amy Jenkins' small, trompe l'oeil video installations create much the same impression.

Please (1996) features two naked figures, male and female, projected onto the surface of a miniature bed. The woman beseeches the man for intimacy, but he turns away. In *Ebb* (1996), the video image of a woman in a bath is projected onto the surface of a small replica of a bathtub. The water turns pink, presumably with menstrual blood, which is then reabsorbed into the woman's body before she leaves the tub. Like Emin's work, Jenkins' creates the impression of looking in on very intimate moments of a woman's life. The small scale of these installations works against the feeling of intimacy, however, by making it seem that we are looking in on the lives of dolls in an immaculately rendered dollhouse rather than those of real people.

Yasumasa Morimura moves the question of the artist's self-perception into the cultural realm in a series of monumental color photographs of 1996, each titled *Self Portrait (Actress)* and referring to the image of a famous female performer (Brigitte Bardot, Liza Minnelli, Ayako Wakao). Each photograph recreates in meticulous detail a well-known film image; Morimura makes himself over into Liza Minnelli as Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*, for instance. There is an implicit critique of the dominance of Western popular culture in these works, especially in the way Morimura has to make over his Asian features to replicate the appearance of Western women. More compelling, however, is the way these works entail a dizzying interplay of gender codes that reveals the complexity and ambiguity of popular cultural representations of femininity and masculinity. When Morimura plays Liza Minnelli playing Sally Bowles, a female character created by a gay male author, where in this chain of performative representations does the "self" reside? Whose self is it—that of the artist, the actress, the character, the author, or all four?

Connie Walsh's *Push Pull*, a video installation of 1996, also touches on concerns with female appearance and masquerade, though from a very different perspective. The installation consists of three chairs with a video monitor attached to each at head height. Each of the monitors features a different sequence of a woman dressing elegantly in a black dress and elbow-length gloves. In the most disturbing sequence, she pushes pins into her stockinged thigh. The woman's face is left out of the frame, making her an anonymous mannequin engaged in rituals of female beautification—the focus is

squarely on the pains she is at to create a beautiful image, not on who she is, again raising the question of the degree to which our selves are the images we portray.

The overriding impression created by "Self-Evident," guest-curated for Vaknin Schwartz by Rebecca Dimling Cochran, is that contemporary self-portraiture does not take the self-understood as a directly accessible, essential aspect of personhood—as its subject.

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