

VISUAL ARTS

Selfhood is elusive in series of portraits

By Jerry Cullum
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

What is evident in curator Rebecca Dimling Cochran's exhibition "Self Evident" is not really the self; it's the sheer elusiveness of anything that can be called "self."

That's a Buddhist conundrum, as well as a postmodern one, and it's most clearly seen in the photographic "Self Portraits" of Yasumasa Morimura, who has become famous by taking pictures of himself dressed up as other people. In this selection

from the "Actress" series, he imitates famous publicity photos of Brigitte Bardot, Liza Minnelli and Ayako Wakao. These are portraits of everyone except Morimura's

"self," and he chooses whom to imitate.

REVIEW

"Self Evident"

Through Aug. 7. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. Yvonne Schwartz, 1831 Peachtree Road N.E. 404-351-0035.

The verdict: A small, intriguingly selected international show about the search for self.



A detail from Amy Jenkins' "Ebb."

The British artist Gavin Turk might seem more straightforward. His large self-portrait color photograph, "Portrait of Something That I'll Never Really See," shows him with his eyes closed. But this tells us nothing about Turk's selfhood except for its physical limits. You never see yourself with your eyes closed, not even in a mirror.

Tracey Emin's monoprints reflect her preoccupation with her own life, a fact that has made this young British artist famous. It might seem like they bring us closer to some self-revelation, but they're almost as opaque as American artist Sean Landers' portraits of himself standing naked in Ireland. At most, we learn that these artists don't mind public nudity.

Neither does Amy Jenkins, but her video installations put her naked body to more universal uses. One, projected on a miniature tub sculpture, shows her absorbing the blood from bath water, leaving the water clear; another, projected on a miniature bed, shows her failed attempt to solicit intimacy from a male lover. Both are exquisitely acted little rituals that remove the scenes from the realm of autobiography. The bath sequence is, in fact, nearly a new myth for our times.

Connie Walsh's "Push Pull" uses video to explore the ways that the self gets shaped, and how that self resists the shaping. The screen first shows the artist in gown and gloves. She mimes the "proper" way to sit in polite society, then pushes pins into her skin to show the pain involved in such behavioral lessons. It suggests a genuine self-awareness, though it also may reflect a fashionable fascination with victimhood.

Jerry Cullum is an Atlanta freelance writer and senior editor of *Art Papers*, a magazine of contemporary art.