

The 15th shiseido art egg

仮想の嘘か|かそうのうそか

菅 実花

Imaginary Lie Mika Kan

“shiseido art egg” is an open-call program that offers up-and-coming artists the chance to exhibit at the Shiseido Gallery, now dedicated to the discovery and creation of new kinds of beauty for over a century. This 15th edition of the program received 243 applications from all over Japan, including, once again, a large number of extraordinarily creative proposals making optimal use of the Shiseido Gallery exhibition spaces. From these, the artists Umi Ishihara, Mika Kan, and Kayako Nakashima were chosen for their unconventional takes on today’s new values and aesthetics, with solo exhibitions by these artists being staged in turn at the Shiseido Gallery from September to December.

All three artists came up with proposals that subtly interrogate the dangers of these times of uncertainty and instability, look at potential sources of hope, and encourage us to rethink conventional notions of “the art experience.” Perhaps their efforts to share, by exhibiting, experiences that only art can offer, in turn offer valuable clues for the generation of new values at a time when the future is so hard to see.

This year’s second shiseido art egg exhibition is “Imaginary Lie” by Mika Kan. With procreation as her theme, previously Kan has taken photographs of dolls as a way of exploring the question of what constitutes human. Here she presents the latest in her “Won’t Let You Go” series of self-portraits launched in 2019, shot alongside dolls made using casts of her own head and depicting clones as “artificial twins,” based on the somatic cell cloning technology already in use today in settings such as the livestock industry. The gallery space is made up of photo, video and installation elements], the works on display inspired by the manmade humans of 19th and early 20th-century science fiction, and the optical equipment invented during the same period. A space designed to resemble a kaleidoscope reflects images in an exhibition that shakes up visual perceptions and offers a preview of changing values in the not-too-distant future, presenting the viewer with a totally new world.

From the end of the 18th century, “phantasmagoria” horror shows, in which images of ghosts were projected onto smoke screens and other surfaces using a magic lantern (slide projector using a lamp and lens), were staged in Britain and elsewhere as a form of entertainment. Once photographic technology had been invented, it was also employed to make the hitherto handpainted slides. In 1862, in a type of theater that became widely known as Dirksian Phantasmagoria, a different mechanism to that of the magic lantern dubbed “Pepper’s ghost” was employed for the first time. This setup showed an actual stage set overlaid with a virtual ghost projected on glass, and apparently, though spectators knew this was merely an artificial effect, its power to evoke images of genuine spooks still made it frightening. The development of a number of new optical devices during this period was mirrored in literature by motifs such as twins and alter egos, and the exploration of themes like the duality of the self, and conflicting egos. German Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffman wrote in his journal, “I am imagining myself trapped in a kaleidoscope – all figures that move around me are different forms of my ego.” In Hoffman’s short story The Sandman (1816) the protagonist mistakes an automaton spied through his telescope for a flesh-and-blood woman. Thus optical devices reflect and refract light, multiplying images and causing visual illusions. But by the early 20th century, the true nature of light had been revealed, and supernatural motifs gradually disappeared from literature, to be replaced by mechanical, human-like androids, and artificial humans cultivated from cells. This was also the era of camera-like copying devices duplicating human beings, and monstrous children created by artificial insemination. In that it caused a temporary suspension of disbelief in a virtual world, the genre of “doll photography” that appeared in the 1920s was similar to theater. Just as manmade ghosts played the part of ghosts, in doll photography, dolls, ie manmade people, play people. Despite the obvious lifelessness of dolls, we invariably sense something human in them. Doll photography is a form of expression that arose precisely because people believed that photos recreated traces of reality. These days though, when filters can be used to distort, and we can alter images digitally, there is no way to check what is real. At a moment in history when the line between genuine and fake has never been more blurred, what is it we are looking at?

Mika Kan

SHISEIDO GALLERY

Duration: October 19 (Tue)–November 14 (Sun) , 2021

Weekdays: 11:00–19:00

Sundays and holidays: 11:00–18:00

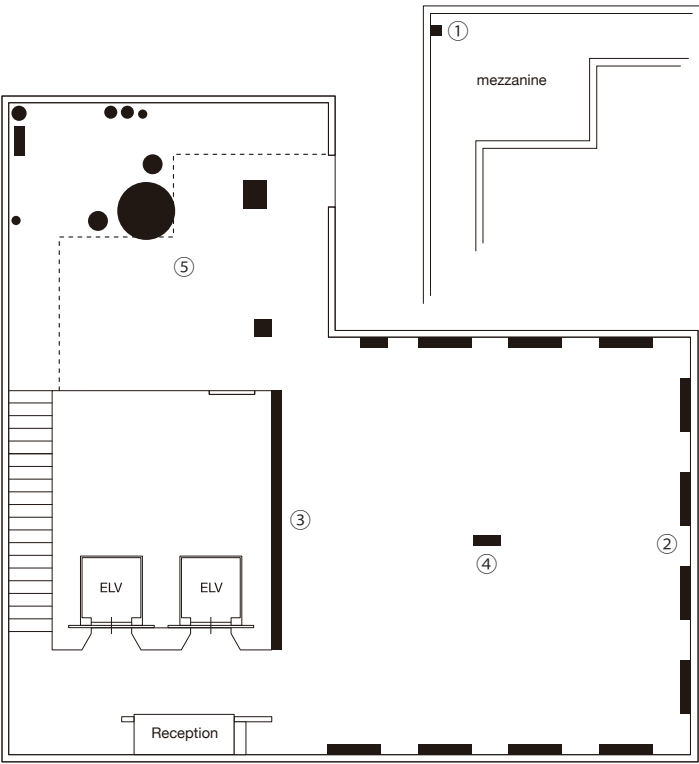
Closed Mondays (including national holidays falling on Monday)

Organized by Shiseido Company, Limited

*Content and schedule are subject to change depending on the status of Covid 19 infection.

On the exhibition title

The Japanese title of the exhibition, “Kasou no uso ka” is a palindrome, that is, reads the same from front or back, in this case like a reflecting mirror centered on the character no. The word kasou means “a hypothetical imagining” and also “virtual.” Are the works “lies” (uso) expressing an imagined “what if?” Or do they suggest the kind of “lie” in which the content of a photo has been digitally altered? The particle ka at the end indicates grammatically not only a question, but also the potential for an alternative meaning. The question would be “Kasou no uso ka?” (Is it an imaginary lie?) but I refrained from adding a question mark, to allow for a possible reading of “An imaginary lie or...(not).”



- ① *The Light in the Eye*, 2021
Glass, one-way mirrors, LED light unit, glass sand
With production assistance from Akihiro Okama (Glass artist)
- ② *Stay Paradise*, 2021
Inkjet print
With production assistance from Kashima Corporation
- ③ *Double Teleidoscope*, 2021
Video (1’47” looped)
- ④ *Watchful Machine 05*, 2021
Fresnel lens, steel
- ⑤ *Paradise Shift*, 2021
Wood, plexiglass, monitors, video (2’29” looped), prism, teleidoscope, iphone, turntable, table, chairs, stools, floor lights, air plants, fake plants, paintings, Inkjet print, mirror, frame, easel, cabinet, wallpaper,
With production assistance from And Greenworks Co., Ltd.
PLANTS and LIVING

On Paradise

I am currently using a room in the “Paradise AIR” artist-in-residence facility in Matsudo, Chiba as a studio. The building was originally a hotel, so the interior of my room remains basically as it was in its earlier incarnation, with the addition of my own furniture and equipment to make it easier to work in as a studio.

Stay Paradise

For me, the pandemic exhortation to “stay home” meant a “stay Paradise” of hunkering down in the studio alone and quietly getting on with making stuff. Having tried my utmost to avoid direct human contact, and spent all that time with a doll instead, three years after her casting I catch myself chatting to her now and then.

Paradise Shift

The ground floor of the building is occupied by a pachinko parlor called Rakuen, meaning “Paradise,” which is how the residence got its name. So once expelled from paradise, must we then shoulder all the suffering of life? If so, in order to remain here, I decided to alter myself. I needed to make the leap from the photographic works that had hitherto been my obsession, to the likes of installations, and videos using digital compositing, and effect a renewal of everything I had taken for granted. The black box in Paradise Shift is a monitor recreating the 19th-century visual trick “Pepper’s ghost.” Exploring what constitutes human, and modifying the very substance of myself, I found the “ghost” of Paradise to be something between human and doll.

Mika Kan

1988 Born in Yokohama

2021 Ph.D, Inter Media Art Course, Tokyo University of the Arts

Currently lives in Chiba

Main solo exhibition

2021 “BankART U35 Solo Exhibition Mika Kan,” BankART KAIKO, Yokohama

2019 “The Ghost in the Doll,” The Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels, Saitama

Main group exhibition

2020 “Listen to Her Song,” The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo

2020 “VOCA2020 The Vision of Contemporary Art,” The Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo

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Special Website

