



PHOTOS: IKKAN ART GALLERY

**Multi-faceted:** Morimura Yasumasa puts himself into his works, literally as can be seen in *Season of Passion/A Requiem: MISHIMA 2006*, an HDTV, 7-minute-plus presentation (above, left); and *A Requiem: Red Dream/MAO 2007*, Type C print, 150 x 120 cm (right), a print of himself styled as the late Mao Zedong

# Under the skin of great mien

By **NATALIE KOH**

IN **Ikkon Art** Gallery's latest exhibition, *Requiem for the XX Century*, what appear to be portraits of famous people, such as Einstein, Mao Zedong, Andy Warhol and Salvador Dali, hang on the walls. This, however, isn't an ordinary exhibition of portraits of famous people. They are, in fact, self-portraits of Japanese artist Morimura Yasumasa.

Known as an appropriation artist, Yasumasa re-enacts famous portraits and moments in history to create unconventional and, in some cases, rather shocking pieces.

Gallery owner **Ikkon Sanada** says: "In the past, Morimura often took the role of someone in art history. But in the past few years, he's shifted to people from the 20th century."

He gestures to the portrait of the artist posing as Einstein.

"In this, he is not just posing as someone else, he also retains himself. He doesn't hide himself entirely, he doesn't hide the hairline of the wig, and he doesn't do any digital manipulation of the photos. This is how he actually looked when the photo was taken. He treats every one of these art works as his self-portrait."

The works aren't restricted to just photographs. He also uses performance art, and videos as mediums. For instance, *A Requiem: Theater of Creativity/Andy Warhol* in motion, is made up of two synchronised videos on two different screens. In each video, the artist dresses as a different version of Warhol and interacts with himself.

"It's a complicated synchronisation video," says Mr Sanada. "He uses videos sometimes, instead of photographs, because there are more nuances, more actions and more reaction."

Inside the gallery, there are small rooms where videos created by Yasumasa are projected on huge screens. The most impactful of these projections would probably be *Seasons of Passion/A Requiem: Mishima*, where the artist recreates the scene of famed author Yukio Mishima in his final act.

Mishima stormed a Japanese army camp in 1970, tied the commandant to a chair, and made a passionate speech to soldiers, urging them to reinstate the powers of the emperor. He received jeers in response, and returned to the commandant's office to commit seppuku, a ritual suicide.

Yasumasa re-enacts the entire scene in his video, but instead of appealing the restoration of the Japanese emperor as head of state, he cries out to fellow Japanese artists to retain their Japanese roots in art and not to imitate Western styles.

The exhibition offers 20 works on sale, priced at \$5,000 for polaroid photographs, and \$42,000 to \$120,000 each for his other works.

Mr **Sanada**, who recently moved his gallery to Singapore from New York, says that he wanted to bring these works to Singapore because of the medium he uses.

"It's not just painting, or simple Photoshop, but the essence of video

art. Often, when people understand video art, they think of small screen videos or some sort of digitalised art work," he says. "But this is like a borderline between fine art and a real movie, and they are all Morimura self-portraits. That's why we call them self-portraits in motion."

Also, it is the only chance you get to see video art in such proportions, thanks to the high ceilings that his gallery offers. "This is probably the largest gallery showing in the world. Morimura had larger screen sizes in museums, but in galleries, even in New York, the screens were not as big as this."

A more compelling reason for him to introduce the artist to Singapore, however, is that Yasumasa is a well-known artist throughout the world, yet fairly unknown here.

"It's the kind of quality and artistic values that museum directors and curators throughout the world recognise as revolutionary and great talent as an artist. These are some things I want to introduce to the Singapore community, to give excitement to not just collectors but also to local artists, journalists, the general public and even to other curators," he says.

*Requiem For The XX Century* runs at Ikkon Art Gallery from Jan 11 to Feb 25. The gallery is open from 11am to 7pm from Tuesday to Saturday, and 12pm to 5pm on Sundays. Admission is free. It is located at ArtSpace@Helutrans, #01-05 Tanjong Pagar Distripark, 39 Keppel Road. Log on to [www.ikkon-art.com](http://www.ikkon-art.com)