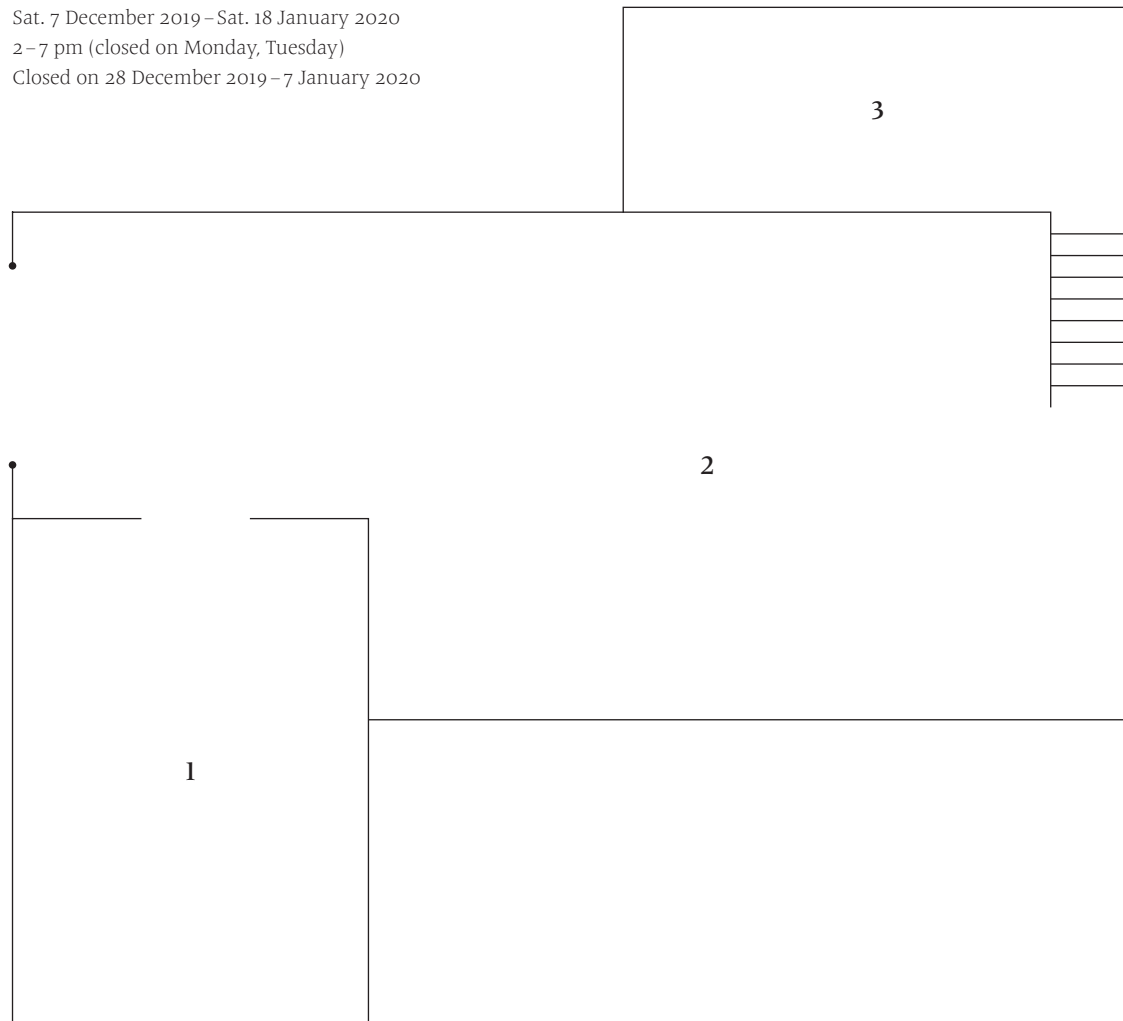


I.C.A.N.S.E.E.Y.O.U AYA MOMOSE

Sat. 7 December 2019 – Sat. 18 January 2020
2–7 pm (closed on Monday, Tuesday)
Closed on 28 December 2019 – 7 January 2020



1 I.C.A.N.S.E.E.Y.O.U
• 2019
Single channel video
6 min 40 sec

2 Jokanaan
• 2019
2 channel video installation
12 min 26 sec

3 Social Dance
• 2019
Single channel video
10 min 33 sec

Aya Momose has questioned anew the act of watching moving images, via moving images themselves. Her work exposes the moment in which subjectivity can waver, exposing the uncertainty of relationships with others. For the exhibition *I.C.A.N. S.E.E.Y.O.U.*, she focuses on the aspect of video as an emotional apparatus. It presents video works that employ visual languages and gestures, such as a movement of the eyes, or sign language, to explore the relations that are constructed through gaze and the desires within oneself.

The artist blinks towards the camera in an eponymous video *I.C.A.N.S.E.E.Y.O.U.* She opens and closes her eyes weakly in an unnatural rhythm, occasionally closing her eyelids for what seems to be a long time. As her blinking and facial expressions reiterate, variable patterns emerge. As the video continues her at first undemonstrative face becomes increasingly full of woe, with eyes wide open, catching back a sob, and giving a grimace. This seemingly vulnerable person is in a plain white room. Her blinks no longer seem to be a physiological phenomenon, but rather something willed; she closes her eyes again and again, using all the muscles of her face: eyes, cheeks, and mouth. In this work, the artist translates the message “I can see you” into Morse code, and transmits it through her blinks towards the camera. The bizarre idea refers to a video that the artist watched on the Internet: footage from a war which shows a captive who secretly conveyed a message by blinking in Morse code while he was interrogated. While the artist partially re-enacts this action, the cause of her behaviour is ambiguous. There is no clue for the audience to know what is happening to this person standing on the screen. Is she emotional, or is she suffering from a physical symptom of continuous blinks? The work is a self-portrait, nevertheless. The artist, who is a cameraperson, exposes her body in front of the camera, surveyed in that moment by multiple anonymous gazes. The audience does not doubt the fact that they see a woman intermittently closing her eyes. However, without translation, most of them cannot understand the actual intention of her blinking acts, as her message is conveyed in a language that is not commonly used as a communication tool. When her affirmative confession, with its suggestive title, is unveiled via a mediator, a weird situation occurs. In a kind of *mise en abyme*, the bodies of the audience, which are observing the subject of the video, are seen by the very same subject who is shot, who, moreover, is the one who is filming herself in the first place.

In her past works, Momose has dealt with the issue that the coherency of the body is a collective assumption which is uncritically taken for truth, as well as questions of subjective agency. Another of her works in the exhibition, *Jokanaan*, develops this theme further, focusing on the intersection between gaze and

desire, via motion capture techniques. The work stages the dramatic climax of Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*. In the opera, it is a moment in which the titular character's perverse and overwhelming sexual desire is enacted through a madly ecstatic song, with Salome singing her demands for kissing the head of the prophet Jokanaan, who refused her advances. The two channel video installation shows one screen on which a live-action image of a man wearing a motion-capture suit, dances to music in the role of Salome. On the other screen a female figure also representing Salome, generated via computer graphics, is brought to life via the processing of data of the first dancer's movements. The artist uses computer graphics, a popular medium of visual representation, to create a virtual situation in which the gazes of two figures intersect, despite their unsuccessful love in the original story. While the male dancer dances and sings passionately in reality, Salome appears in a virtual space as his representational image, whose hands are red with blood. The two bodies dance in sync, as a dramatic melody echoes. On the one hand the male dancer gradually starts to express his discomfort and writhe in agony, as if he were obsessed with Salome, who becomes on the other hand frantic, being absorbed with sensual pleasure. She stands up and sings “but wherefore didst thou not look at me” her movements increasingly diverging from the male dancer's. She begins to move autonomously, as if she were gaining subjectivity all on her own. In such a moment, we see the uncanny situation that one is looked back at by the subject that one desires: the body of the dancer reflects Jokanaan's desired body, and at the same time is captured by Salome's original desiring gaze. An obsession with being seen — “I want you to see me” — that is present in the crazed self-obsession of Salome's desire is now juxtaposed with the narcissistic aesthetics that are associated with the reflexive medium of video. In order to cause the audience to question who they perceive to be the agent of an action, the artist has used witty tricks within her previous work, which are coupled with a fictional depiction of figures such as an anime character. Here, having noted the embedded stereotypes that audiences carry with regard to sensory input and the interpretation of moving images, she develops her interest in a CGI character, specifically generated through a motion-capture technique. The artist points out that, despite the fact that it is a human dancer who gives life to this CGI character through their movements, as soon as we see that character moving, we forget the actor's existence. With this backdrop, Momose creates a situation where an actor and character face each other, in a hypothetical realm. In doing so, she deals with the uncertainty of subjectivity, questioning a monocular point of view, and its attendant preconceptions. Throughout history the phallogocentric

gaze and male desire have produced a distorted representation of the feminine body. Referring to a classic motif of the *femme fatale* with criticality, the work succeeds in the multi-layered subversions of the positions of sight and agency, to call for the emancipation of oppressed sexualities. The artist, who sees patriarchy an illness that women internalize, deconstructs the original drama that the body experiencing life, sexuality and death. In so doing, she suggests active, desiring agents instead of the body as an object of desire and gaze.

While the two works reveal the politics of gaze, a third piece, *Social Dance* — a documentary that re-enacts a woman's conversation with her ex-partner — depicts the discrepancies present in the visual mode of communication that is sign language. Using an interview that she conducted with a deaf female dancer, the artist wrote a narrative based on the interviewee's personal experience, which became the basis of the work. In the video, a woman lies in bed talking through sign language to her ex-partner. She is expressing her upsets and frustration at his past words and deeds, including her bottled-up feeling of being rejected. At times her hand movements convey a sense of her own hesitation, the gestures modulated and restricted. The conversation is raw and emotional, her partner reaching out in what would normally be understood to be a caring gesture, to touch her hands in comfort. Ironically, however, this is also a muting touch, that prevents her from continuing to speak. One senses that our hands, which function both as a language and an emotional apparatus, reflect our inner states closely. At the same time hands are an intimate contact zone, which help us to feel assured and "in touch" with our relationships, providing intimacy, trust and acceptance. Her words — "I was certainly feeling like my body became invisible" — and her gestures disappear into thin air, while her body exists in inexplicable but absolute distance in relation to, and disconnection from him. This seemingly solid, but still vulnerable relation, which could fall apart in mere seconds, could be interpreted as the ambiguities that unavoidably arise in acts of caring and understanding one another.

Momose's work captures the disquieting, imbalanced nature of the relationship. Something remains suspended in the air, that disrupts the way that things should really be. The audience may feel slightly uncomfortable beneath the gaze of her works, which sharply question the judgement and ethics of the audience themselves. Poetically woven narratives, precisely constructed theatricality, and her forceful shifting of boundaries: all these aspects together create a tension that disturbs and disrupts the viewer's feelings, urging them, one might say psychoanalytically, to question the structure and system of bodily representation. Her practice expresses the ambiguity

and vulnerability of the body, often examining the inter-connectivity of the affect and corporeality. She sees her body as being connected to the unheard, invisible bodies, as well as being moulded and shaped by the inter-generational collective memories that exist beyond time and place. Her acts of disconnecting movement and voice from the body, stripping them of their labels, and doubting one's own body are an exercise in facing preconceptions and existing systems, and deviating from them. The artist is aware of the grammar of video making, which can manufacture empathy, sympathy, and the sensational, as well as the political aspects of shooting and editing film, a medium whose intrinsic potential to exercise violent power is often overlooked. She turns these potentially oppressive tools against themselves, using video to explore the position of the body and its uncertain relation to the other. The artist stands somewhere else and blinks as if she is releasing the shutter of the camera. When her gaze, and that of the standing-here-audience intersect beyond space, there may exist a phase where both the one who is seeing and the one being seen stand on the same horizon.

Text by Miwa Negoro

Aya MOMOSE

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Born in 1988, currently lives and works in Tokyo. Momose completed an MFA in Oil Painting, at Musahino Art University in 2013. Momose's early work involved capturing video of performing arts acts, uses video to reveal the relationship between the cameraperson and the subject. Her recent solo exhibitions include: "Borrowing the Other Eye" (ESPACE DIAPHANES, Berlin, 2018), "Voice Sample" (Yokohama Museum of art, 2014). She has participated in group exhibitions "Happiness is Born in the Guts" (Municipal Gallery Arsenal, Poznan, 2019), "Roppongi Crossing 2016: My Body, Your Voice" (Mori Art Museum, 2016), "Artist File 2015 Next Doors: Contemporary Art in Japan and Korea" (The National Art Center, Tokyo and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2015–2016), and "SENSOU-GA STUDIES" (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 2015). In 2017 she stayed in New York (Triangle Residency) for six months as a recipient of a grant from the Asian Cultural Council and in Seoul (SEMA Residency). The film Exchange Diary in collaboration with Im Heung-soon was nominated for the 20th Jeonju International Film Festival in 2019. She exhibits her works internationally.

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