

## Press Release

October 12  
November 16, 2024Opening  
Saturday, October 12  
from 11am to 8pm

# October, Much Ado About Nothing Asami Shoji

At first sight, one might come to the conclusion that the figures haunting Asami Shoji's images are doubles. In truth, we are more likely to be witnessing astral projections, out-of-body experiences, figures being torn apart or tearing themselves apart. The double is never an alter ego, who might become an intermediary, but is the object of a process, of a transformation. They are never situated in front of the central characters, but rather behind, above or below them. These creatures that emerge change color, shrink, melt, burn...

There is no uncanny strangeness, but rather a raw tearing apart; no mirrored cloning in the form of a *W* à la William Wilson<sup>1</sup>, but a *Y* junction, leaving an open wound; these are not doubles, but beings in the process of splitting apart. The intensity in Asami Shoji's work lies in this ripping asunder. With audacity and inventiveness, she proposes decapitations and a multiplication of heads. Her creations bring to mind Saint Denis walking with his head in his hands. We might also be reminded of the changing identities in the cinema of Kiyoshi Kurosawa<sup>2</sup>: the film *Kairo* (2001), where disaffected youth become victims of "phantomization," a combination of taking on ghostly form and a process of atomization, finally disappearing as black ash projected onto walls, disintegrated, disarticulated, liquefied...

These ravaged figures and their out-of-body experiences entail a very specific handling of oil painting. In his recent new history of Japanese art<sup>3</sup>, the art critic Noi Sawaragi postulates that oil painting in Japan has never intended to portray realism, but to evoke the viscous, slimy quality of the mud from flooding and the tremors caused by the earthquakes that regularly fragilize the country's equilibrium. Asami Shoji's work is very much in line with this history of liquid painting, which trembles from the inside, seeking not so much to replicate reality as to introduce us to a world in flux. These shifts, these landslides are at work within Asami Shoji's images. The colors used by the painter are also reminiscent of this mud—shades of brown, beige, chalky white, the color of congealed blood, murky greens, dirty yellow and washed out black. The oily liquid with its red and gold borders seems to ebb and flow from layer to layer like watery backwash.

However, the physical, artistic dimension that lends her work its materiality, emanating from the swamps of our nights, should not distract our attention from the dramatic tension at work in each of these representations. The cohabitation between the doubles is shot through with tensions and contradictions, inner conflicts, gender metamorphoses, forced intimacy and desperate embraces, all of which speak of a crowded solitude, a stifled cry.

The editing and cutting effects are reminiscent of cinematic art, of the intentional continuity errors that amplify plays on scale, the use of recto-verso effects and high and low angled shots. Except that in Asami Shoji's work, everything happens in the same fixed, painted rectangle, not spread out over time but compressed into a limited space, as if on a palimpsest, juxtaposing different strands of potential existence. Here and elsewhere, the present, past and the future coexist in impossible images that contradict the logic of time.

This coexistence might also found on the theatre stage. Everything—wrong-doing and atonement, treachery and forgiveness, seduction and innocence—is concentrated in the same image, where nudity is another means of expressing a

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1. *William Wilson* is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe that was first published in 1839 in *The Gift: A Christmas and New Year's Present*. Poe explores the theme of the double or doppelgänger through its main character William Wilson.
2. Diane Arnaud, *Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Mémoire de la Disparition* (Paris, Rouge Profond Editions, 2007).
3. Sawaragi Noi, *Shin Bijutsuron* (Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha Co., Ltd, 2017).
4. Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (1965) translated as *On Racine* by Richard Howard (Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York, 1983).
5. *Ibid.*

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form of universality. The nudity of Asami Shoji's own characters leads to an abstraction of affects. A return to the nudity of the original couple, a return to forever, a return to bare bone—the bones of a skeleton, those of teeth, which from one canvas to another grin in the background. Teeth without faces, bones without flesh: it's said that the devil laughs, and we might ask ourselves if it isn't a pervasive presence of the devil that Asami Shoji conjures up in her canvases?

These naked devils, from a time before the fall, reveal another kind of theatre, no longer a type of social theatre but a psychic stage where the self is multiplied and where immemorial conflicts play out, those of desire, power and alienation. And amongst all the runs, spatters and liquid slicks of paint and oil, sex conserves its tragic privilege as the primary source of original conflict. As Roland Barthes states in his *On Racine*<sup>4</sup> "The image is repeated, never transcended." This is undoubtedly the meaning of these images of the double and duplication, the endless repetition of the same trauma. Images of the original opposites are reiterated: those of masculine and feminine, black and white, the diabolical and the angelic, dramatic intensity and casual indifference. The same reversal of one thing into its opposite can equally be seen in the use of complimentary colors: red and green, yellow and purple, which also express the shift from one side to its inverse. The multiplication of heads and arms also embodies this reversal, this turnaround of appearances. In Asami Shoji's world, "to be, is not only to be divided, but to be reversed."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, even if Asami Shoji points us towards this initial trauma, this two-faced self, there is never any question of demonization. She focuses on that precarious, suspended instant when in a moment of metaphysical indecision, appearances endlessly turn and turn again. This catastrophic time, the tipping point at 180 degrees. The impossible moment where front and back coexist—simultaneously.

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