YASUMASA MORIMURA:
APPROPRIATOR OF IMAGES, CULTURES, AND IDENTITIES

Caitlin Gorman

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Committee:
Dr. Andrew Hershberger, Advisor
Dr. Stephanie Langin-Hooper
ABSTRACT

Dr. Andrew Hershberger, Advisor

Japanese contemporary photographer Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951) appropriates Western imagery from art history, film, and media, recreating the scenes by inserting his own male Asian body into them. The scholarship regarding Morimura often acknowledges one feature of the works, emphasizing the artist’s use of appropriation and the feminist quality of the work or its post-colonial nature. Such an approach does not address the multi-faceted quality of his works or offer a holistic look at the dialogues that the images create. This paper addresses those issues by combining the critical approaches to his work through the study of photographs from his Daughter of Art History series. Employing post-colonial, feminist, and queer theories, three case studies focusing on Morimura’s photographs and the commentary created by them are included. The first case study analyzes Morimura’s Portrait (Futago), in which the artist reimagines Édouard Manet’s famed Olympia, commenting upon many post-colonial and feminist issues. The second case study examines Morimura’s Doublenage (Marcel), a photograph recreating Man Ray’s photograph Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Selavy, focuses on issues such as gender theory and queer theory. The third case study investigates Morimura’s interest in the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, exploring the realm of self-portraiture, gender theory, and the identity crisis that both faced. Through this approach to the artist’s work, it is seen that all of these theories are deeply connected to Morimura’s work due to his identity as an Asian male artist living in a post-colonial era.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Copying, reinterpreting, quoting, and translating are all terms that have been utilized as alternative descriptions for the phenomenon known as “appropriation,” the action of taking or making use of something without authority or legal right.\(^1\) This practice often involves borrowing, mimicking, or even stealing, and it is highly contested and criticized in the contemporary art world. From Andy Warhol to Jeff Koons to Sherrie Levine, the number of contemporary artists that have used appropriation in their art covers a broad spectrum of styles. The same can be said for the widely divergent critical reception of such works produced through this artistic methodology. Appropriation art can cause reactions ranging from shock and disbelief to praise and acceptance, depending upon the receiving audience and the execution by the artist.

The Japanese artist and photographer Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951) has created works that literally embody the diverse range of images that can be found in Western art history, twentieth-century media, and film. His unusual photographs have received an array of reactions, from shock and disgust to delight and fascination. Morimura’s work deals with photographic self-portraits created utilizing appropriation and photography. Morimura appropriates images from art, history, and media, and then inserts himself into the role(s) portrayed in the various scenes. In his photographs, he alternates between playing female characters such as da Vinci’s Mona Lisa and Brigitte Bardot, to assuming the masculine roles of artists like Andy Warhol and historical figures such as Mao Zedong and Vladimir Lenin. The ambiguity of Morimura’s gender in these works, together with the engaging style of his appropriations, makes him an influential postmodern artist in the opinion of many critics.

Much of Morimura’s work and artistic skill gets employed behind the scenes. After selecting an image to appropriate, he starts the process by creating the set, which involves

\(^1\) Merriam-Webster Dictionary
everything from painting the set pieces to sculpting the props.\textsuperscript{2} Once he completes the setting, Morimura creates the costume and applies the make-up that he will wear in order to portray his chosen subject(s).\textsuperscript{3} Then, finally, he takes the photograph. This is why, “preferring to be called ‘artist’ rather than ‘sculptor’, ‘painter’, or ‘photographer’, Morimura considers his real work an experimental, highly artificial performance in which he assumes at different times all the roles…for the objective lens of the camera.”\textsuperscript{4} When examining Morimura’s appropriations, it is important to realize that his “works” of art are two-fold. First, he reinterprets the setting of the image and creates from scratch the stage upon which he will document his performance. Then, he dons the make-up and costumes required in order to embody his subjects, performing both his identity and theirs for the camera and viewer. We create identity through our performance of it and so too does Morimura in his enactment of these alternative “parts” that he plays.\textsuperscript{5}

Morimura’s work consists of three main “series”, and he constantly updates and contributes new material to each one. While the main focus of my analysis will be on his first series, \textit{Daughter of Art History}, also known as \textit{Self-Portrait as Art History}, his other two groups of work, the \textit{Actor/Actresses} series and his \textit{Requiem} series, deserve mention as well. In the \textit{Daughter of Art History} series, Morimura has selected a wide variety of famous artworks in art history to re-imagine, from Édouard Manet’s \textit{Olympia} (Fig. 9 & 10) to Rembrandt van Rijn’s \textit{The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp} (Fig. 1 and 2), which he titles \textit{Portrait (Futago)} and \textit{Nine Faces} respectively. In his \textit{Actor/Actresses} series, Morimura appropriates film stills from movies starring famous Hollywood actresses such as Audrey Hepburn (Fig. 3) and Marilyn

\begin{footnotes}
\item[3] Ibid.
\item[4] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Monroe (Fig. 4). Not only does Morimura “become” these actresses, he thoroughly embodies the character that they themselves have portrayed as actresses. His more recent Requiem works involve more than recreating a scene from a photograph or film still; Morimura has pushed himself into other art forms such as performance art with these appropriations of important historical figures from the twentieth century, such as Albert Einstein (Fig. 5) and Adolf Hitler (Fig. 6). In this series, Morimura recreates famous speeches given by these important figures, often performing them for audiences, and then he captures it all in film and in film stills.

Throughout Morimura’s work, a focus on Western imagery can be seen, a detail that is crucial to the analysis of his work.

All of Morimura’s series can be considered forms of appropriation; however, his most vivid and highly debated series, Daughter of Art History, will provide the clearest avenue for my discussion and analysis of Morimura’s work. This is due to the original artworks he chooses to reinterpret and the discourses to which they contribute. All of Morimura’s work deals with the systematic assumption of important roles in Western culture and history, from artists such as Vincent van Gogh to actresses such as Audrey Hepburn and politicians like Adolf Hitler, all as a means of a self-exploration of identity. Morimura’s Daughter of Art History series deals most specifically with the established, and academically codified, canon of Western Art. As a result of violating this quasi-sacred canon of Art with his appropriations, Morimura has been criticized by many. This criticism has perhaps been even more intense than what his appropriations of pop culture images have received due to their more consumable and less “sacred” quality. This makes Morimura’s Daughter of Art History series an ideal corpus through which to investigate

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appropriation and, in particular, the way that appropriation can be a potent form of political and cultural commentary. In the case of Morimura, the commentary is a post-colonial one.

Morimura’s work also can be seen as a commentary upon an East-versus-West dichotomy that is still prevalent in our society today, perhaps resulting from the age of Western colonialism in the East that (mostly) ended before Morimura's birth in 1951. He has created a broad range of appropriations since he first began his career in 1985; however, the body of work that has received the majority of criticism is his Daughter of Art History/Self-Portrait as Art History series. In fact, as pointed out by the curators of the exhibition Appearance, Danilo Eccher and Achille Bonito Oliva, “despite the fact that he [Morimura] is invited to participate in different exhibitions, not only in Japan, his work is still considered by many as a form of desecration.”

While many do view Morimura’s appropriations as a type of sacrilege against the pillars of art history, I see them as a tool employed by an artist to not only revive art that has perhaps lost its impact due to innumerable reproductions worldwide, but also as a way to capitalize upon the meanings already embedded in these images and then to add his own as well.

This additive process creates new dialogues in eye-catching ways, particularly for art historians. Through his selection of iconic works from art history, Morimura cultivates an informed, educated audience within the body of art historians and art critics who would be familiar with the originals that he re-interprets. Morimura himself focuses on these works in terms of the discussions that they create, saying: “Borrowing the masterpieces is just a beginning, not a conclusion. I think of it as the start of a long conversation with the audience.”

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7 The “East” is a loaded term due to the Orientalist construction of it by Western Europeans that came to represent the geographical Eastern nations as exotic, mysterious, and highly feminized areas of the world.
is precisely this utilization of appropriation as a conversation-maker that interests me in Morimura’s work.

This paper will investigate Morimura’s work in relation to his manner of appropriation and what, exactly, it achieves. Is it simply a conversation that is created? Or, is something even larger and more powerful taking place? Historically, appropriation has also been used as a way of subverting power by one dominating culture over another, whether by taking ownership of goods, land, or even the artistic styles of the "weaker" culture.\(^\text{10}\) Knowing this other side to appropriation, it could be argued that if Morimura is aware of this fact, as he most likely is, he could be utilizing appropriation as a means of regaining that power as a Japanese man, and more importantly, as an Eastern artist, for a culture whose history has been impacted by the dominance of the West. In utilizing a favored tool of the dominating political power, especially during the era of Western colonization, Morimura draws attention to the cultural and political practice of appropriation and its effects, while at the same time negotiating his own identity. By looking at Morimura’s refashioning of identities in his appropriations of notable Western artworks through post-colonial, gender, and queer theories, it can be hypothesized that Morimura utilizes this format in order to take back the agency that had been appropriated by dominant colonialist nations centuries before. Additionally, through his works, Morimura provides multiple avenues for critical discussion of gender and identity, and the ways that they play out in art works.

My thesis attempts to combine the previous methods of looking at Morimura’s work, like its cross-cultural implications, into one cohesive approach. I will first provide a selection of important scholarship regarding both Morimura and appropriation, as the combination of the two will provide the main focus of my exploration. While I focus on scholarship specifically

regarding Morimura’s *Daughter of Art History* series, I incorporate alternative publications that comments on Morimura as an artist and on how his work has been received. Then, after discussing my approach to his work through post-colonial, gender and queer theories, I will provide analyses of three key works from Morimura’s *Self-Portrait as Art History* series: *Portrait (Futago)*, 1988; *Doublenage (Marcel)*, 1988; and *An Inner Dialogue with Frieda Kahlo (Hand-Shaped Earring)*, 2001. Within these analyses, an understanding of Morimura’s appropriations can be developed as works that need to be seen as performances of identity and explorations of gender created by an artist from an area of the world still negotiating its identity in a post-colonial society.
II. PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

An integral element to the examination of Morimura’s work is his utilization of appropriation as a tool to provide commentary on issues that are deeply personal to the artist. By examining the definitions and views of this tool, a clear understanding will be achieved of how appropriation will be addressed in this thesis. Appropriation, a word often used but define, can be better understood by examining a range of writings on the subject, and thereby a definition will be reached that reflects my own views of the concept. After defining the term, I will then examine the contemporary scholarship regarding Morimura, which ranges from exhibition catalogues to critics’ responses, to art historical analyses. This literature review is critical in my interpretation of his work, as it provides grounding for the importance of Morimura and his appropriations.

Appropriation

Johnson Okpaluba, a copyright lawyer, has examined appropriation in his essay contributing to the book Dear Images: Art, Copyright, and Culture. There he begins with a quotation from Hillel Schwartz: “The history of art is the history of copy rites, of transformations that take place during acts of copying.”11 This quote sets the tone for the rest of his essay on “ Appropriation Art: Fair Use or Foul?” in which he looks at appropriation throughout the history of art, but also in contemporary art, and in relation to the various issues of copying, copyright, and the connotations usually associated with appropriation.12 Okpaluba elaborates by saying that the “reuse of pre-existing material in new contexts is a feature typical of modern arts practice, and is considered to be an essential component of postmodern artistic expression.”13 Okpaluba

12 Okpaluba. “ Appropriation Art: Fair Use or Foul?”, 197
13 Ibid.
also addresses how the term is received in different contexts. For example, “outside of artistic
circles, the term ‘appropriation’ bears strong negative connotations, signifying essentially theft
or piracy.”14 These negative connotations occur not just outside artistic circles, but also inside
them. That is to say, those inside artistic circles like the critics, the artists themselves, their
dealers, and the art historians who deal with art on a daily basis, also can have negative
perceptions of appropriation in art.

Okpaluba explains appropriation art quite thoroughly. He not only looks at it in terms of
why contemporary artists choose to create this type of art, suggesting that “artists have employed
the practice of appropriation both as a means of creation and for articulating social criticism,”15
but he also looks at appropriation as an historical phenomenon. He points out that it not only has
been used as an aid for teaching drawing, but also that “there is a long tradition of artists who
have appropriated elements of other artist’s work and recycled them into their own works…”16
Both of these claims are accurate; however, there exists additional meanings and reasons for
appropriation that Okpaluba has not discussed, some that are introduced by Theodore Gracyk,
who focuses in his own book specifically on cultural appropriation.

Gracyk, a philosopher who has applied classical questions of aesthetics to contemporary
issues, has authored The Philosophy of Art: An Introduction.17 In his chapter entitled “Four
Kinds of Appropriation,” Gracyk notes only two modes of copying in art: forgery and cultural
appropriation.18 He further focuses in-depth upon cultural appropriation and the four kinds that
occur in art: object, content, design, and voice appropriation.19 While Gracyk explains each

14 Okpaluba. “Appropriation Art: Fair Use or Foul?”, 197.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid, 198-199.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 87-88.
category persuasively, I find problematic his determination that cultural appropriation represents the only possible form of appropriation that occurs in art. Contemporary artists have shown us that appropriation does not have to be culturally loaded, or about a power struggle, as demonstrated by Pop artist Andy Warhol and his appropriation of the Campbell’s soup logo. Warhol was an American artist appropriating an American symbol in order to create a commentary regarding consumerism and commodities in American culture.

In fact, Morimura turns Gracyk’s definition of cultural appropriation on its head and perhaps even creates a new category, one that I would term reverse-cultural appropriation. By this I am indicating a process in which the artist chooses imagery that was initially created out of the appropriation of Eastern imagery or identities by Western artists or subjects. He then re-interprets it in order to reverse the effects of the original appropriation. Morimura does this in order to take back some of the agency that had been stolen from the colonized Asian cultures of the East In that way he reverse-appropriates iconic imagery from Western art, similar to how the West once incorporated Asian imagery and design into their artworks and design elements. Examples of such Western uses of the appropriation of Japanese art can be found in artworks by artists like Manet and Van Gogh.

After looking at these views of appropriation, a general definition as it applies to art can be outlined as follows. Appropriation is a tool or style utilized by artists wherein an existing and often well-known image is recreated in order to communicate a new critique or new meaning for the original image when combined with the implications and/or imagery infused by the appropriating artist. The rest of this thesis focuses more narrowly upon Morimura and his appropriations, providing an in-depth analysis of his series *Daughter of Art History/Self-Portrait as Art History.*
Yasumasa Morimura

*Culture and Commentary: An Eighties Perspective.* This catalog title summarizes perfectly what Morimura focuses on in his work: commentary on and through culture. In the exhibition catalogue for the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1990, curator Kathy Halbriech questioned the motivations behind not just Morimura’s work, but also behind that of many other contemporary artists in the 1980’s such as Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, and Jeff Koons. She grouped Morimura with a number of other Japanese artists who were and are examining cross-cultural appropriations, as well as the implications of cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism appears when “a powerful country uses cultural means to achieve or support the political and economic ends of imperialism that were historically attained through military force and occupation. In this view, the tools of culture can smooth the way for domination by exposing people to lifestyles to aspire to, products to desire, and even new sources of allegiance.” Halbriech claimed that “artists move forward by building on the lessons of history, often not acknowledging the source of their imagery and technique.” It is in Halbriech’s commentary on these artists’ use of other artist’s works that we start to see a dialogue regarding appropriation in art; in this case, this dialogue specifically refers to the work of Morimura.

Halbriech further added context to Morimura’s appropriations by citing Japanese culture as a major source of his inspiration, “Morimura circles back to the French history of art he came to know through rumor and reproduction,” she writes. “It is a history of painted masterpieces that, while revered in Japan, is essentially foreign to a culture whose artists, often referred to as

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‘national treasures,’ still produce such functional objects as ceramics, textiles, and swords.”

Halbriech points to the dichotomy between Eastern and Western artists and to the fact that, while the West’s history of art dominates over the East’s, it is still something learned only through reproductions and not completely understood. It is this type of contextual analysis that fills in Morimura’s background and informs the viewer about the artist's Japanese culture. This becomes a source of information that demonstrates how Western-centric the art world can be, especially in Western nations, and provides the informed viewer with one avenue of understanding why Morimura chose to create his deliberate appropriations.

In her exhibition Halbreich addresses appropriation more specifically in relation to Morimura and the work of other contemporary artists. She discusses appropriation in general by saying that “when one tradition influences another, the word adulterate often is used to describe that culture that has absorbed new practices by subordinating old ones.” An example of this would be Édouard Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe (Luncheon on the Grass)* (Fig. 7). Here Manet, a French painter, derived the imagery of the grouping of people from an engraving made by Marcantonio Raimondi entitled *The Judgment of Paris* (Fig. 8). Raimondi based his engraving in turn upon a drawing by Raphael, and both were Italian Renaissance artists.

A direct connection can be made between the main grouping in Manet’s work and a group of figures at the bottom right of the engraving. Thus, one Western artist appropriated work from another that was completed much earlier. It is important to recognize that, while some artists

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
and cultures utilize appropriation as a means to assert power or call attention to such power relationships, it can also be observed that does not have to be the case for all appropriation art.

In a 1994 exhibition entitled Quotation, Re-Presenting History, Morimura’s work is discussed again along with numerous other artists, especially in terms of their work’s appropriative qualities, or—as the curators of the show call it—its character as quotation. This exhibition specifically examined artists utilizing photography as their chosen medium. The selected artists were “inspired, intrigued, and influenced by the history of painting and of sculpture and by the traditions of making art.” Shirley Madill, the show’s curator, discussed appropriation as quotation more in-depth, adding the particulars of how each artist involved fit within the theme.

The association of appropriation with quotation is significant in that, quotation can be seen as a valid way for writers to reference influential passages critical to their own work, which Morimura does in his own photographs. Madill explored Morimura’s work mainly through a contextual lens, summarizing his imagery in this statement: “Morimura works with an image of real cultural significance debased by familiarity and reproduction. Through his own presence he confirms its new status as an appropriated artifact commenting on its diminution…. Morimura’s self-incarnations are impudent critiques of and adulatory bows to Western masters.” This reaction of both fascination and aversion that many have to Morimura’s work results from his appropriations of the Old Masters and requires further attention. Critical to the discussion of Morimura’s work that will appear later in this thesis is this quote from Madill:

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28 The idea of appropriation as quotation has intrigued me for a while now and it will be something that I focus upon in this paper, especially during my analysis of the term appropriation and how it will be utilized in the critique of Morimura’s work.
If white imperialism is predicated on narratives of origin and mastery, Morimura undoes its cultural masters by corrupting the purity of their ‘originals’. Similarly, Western civilization has asserted its superiority over different cultures by fixing the identity of the other. The challenged imposition of singular identity is challenged more by using photography to occupy a diversity of fictionalized selves.31

Here emerge the beginnings of the discussion about Morimura and his employment of appropriation in order to create comment on identity, especially his personal identity as an Asian, Japanese man. Arguably Morimura inherited an identity created for him at a point in history by the dominating Western culture, and he self-consciously intends to explore and critique it.

In the exhibition catalogue from the 2000 show entitled Appearance from the Galleria d’Arte Moderna in Bologna, authors Danilo Eccher and Achille Bonito Oliva highlighted a particular characteristic aspect of Morimura’s work. Namely, they argued that his “almost maniacal attention to detail—an attempt to totally identify with the subject—continues to be a distinctive characteristic of his art.”32 It is exactly this obsessive attention to detail in Morimura’s work that draws art historians because it shows that these works deliver more than just copies; they are interpretations created as a result of Morimura and his personal experiences. The curators also point out one contradictory element about the reception of Morimura’s work: “despite the fact that he is invited to participate in different exhibitions, not only in Japan, his work is still considered by many as a form of desecration.”33 Morimura’s work as "desecration" provides a theme that can be seen throughout much of the scholarship on his works; however, it is not a view that I share. I argue that these reinterpretations breathe new life into the original artwork, which his art further develops the various discussions that revolve around each piece and each appropriated artist.

33 Ibid, 59.
Though Morimura’s other two series remain equally appealing to analyze, I believe that his first series provides the most important works because of his reimagining of iconic images from art history that call especially to those interested in the discipline. His series *Self-Portrait as Art History* started in 1985 at the cusp of the digital photography revolution, and Morimura constantly revisits it. In his foreword, “Art’s Identity Crisis: Yasumasa Morimura’s Photographs,” which accompanies the 2003 book published by Morimura and Aperture entitled *Daughter of Art History*, Donald Kuspit, a renowned art historian, argued that in “substituting his [Morimura’s] face for theirs… depending on how you want to look at it, makes their masterpieces his own or mars them.”\(^{34}\) For some, Morimura has defaced the cornerstones of Western art history, and that is crucial to the reverse-appropriation and potentially post-colonial power of his works. At the same time as he vandalizes these pillars of Western art, I argue that he transforms them in a unique way, causing shock and surprise within the viewer in order to allow for a fresh perspective to be applied to the older works.

Through his reinterpretations, Morimura has added new meanings and integrated crucial dialogues into the contemporary art world, dialogues regarding the effects of colonialism on Asian identity in particular, along with the examination of identity and the performance of it in general. Kuspit added that Morimura’s photographs provide “commentaries on the identity crisis that painting—and more generally art—has experienced in the postmodern age of mechanical reproduction. Photography precipitated the crisis, and photography is taking over art, but in Morimura’s photographs it does so in a way that make the very idea of imaginative art—art in which subjective reality becomes manifest through objectivity, as Baudelaire theorized—suspect.”\(^{35}\) This statement by Kuspit is intriguing to unpack and consider. It addresses the still-

\(^{34}\) Kuspit, *Daughter of Art History*, 7.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
present conflict between photography and painting,\textsuperscript{36} and also brings to the fore the idea of an identity crisis that Morimura explores on a more personal level in his work. Morimura brings back into focus this conflict between painting and photography through his creative process, and specifically in the way in which he varnishes and frames his works that deal with art history, much in the same way the paintings he appropriates have been framed and varnished. In his book, \textit{Daughter of Art History}, we receive direct commentaries from the artist regarding many of the themes that are easily identified in his pieces such as Western art history, self-portraiture, and gender roles.\textsuperscript{37} Receiving this glimpse into the artist’s psyche is helpful, in that Morimura answers many of the questions that surround his work, which will be frequently utilized in the analyses of it that follow.\textsuperscript{38}

This review of scholarship could include a plethora of additional articles, exhibition catalogues, and reviews – this expansive number of writings dealing with Morimura’s work exist, at least in part, because of the seemingly provocative nature of his art. However, at this point I have covered the most important sources for my own analysis. I will still continue to employ these sources throughout my own investigation of his work to supplement my conclusions regarding his \textit{Daughter of Art History} series. While Morimura’s photographs allow for multiple modes of analyses, I will be utilizing a small number of methodologies in order to investigate his appropriations. The methods include post-colonialist theory, feminist theory and gender theory. In the next section of this thesis, the methodologies that will be applied to Morimura’s works will be elaborated, with a focus upon explaining why they apply to this specific artist and his works.


\textsuperscript{37} Kuspit, \textit{Daughter of Art History}, 7.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
III. METHODOLOGY

After looking at Morimura’s background and the scholarship written about him, methodologies need to be identified to move forward with an in-depth analysis of his photographs. Selecting certain approaches will be beneficial for the discussion of appropriation and Morimura’s version of self-exploration via the various roles he takes on and embodies. Because of the nature of his work, one mode of analysis will be a comparison between the appropriations and the original works of art. This will offer a solid grounding and detailed examination of the pieces to build the rest of my analysis on. Also important is returning to the definition of appropriation created through my earlier analysis of previous scholarship, scholarship, which highlights recreated images in order to “communicate a new critique that uses the meanings of the original image combined with the new implications and/or imagery.” Other methods of analysis that will be employed in this discussion include more contextual approaches such as post-colonialist theory and gender and queer theories. Through this combination of methodologies, my analyses of Morimura’s appropriations will offer a comprehensive look into these complex works that have been instilled with a multitude of meanings.

Post-colonialist theory is a particularly useful approach because of the East versus West interplay that can be found in Morimura’s works. Traditional Orientalist analyses focus on the depiction of the East in Western art forms and, in general, emphasize cultural, social, and economic contexts.39 In her book on art history and critical theory, Anne D’Alleva states that the term postcolonial “refers not only to the shaping of new identities, and political and cultural practices in former colonies, but also to a body of theory that supports the study of distinctive

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cultural, social, and political dynamics of both colonial and post-colonial societies." Edward Said, author of *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, is a groundbreaking cultural critic whose work focuses on postcolonial theory. In his famous book he employs Foucault’s ideas about discourse and power, asserting that the West, through Orientalism, represented the East as exotic, mysterious, distant, [and] unknowable, as a way of exerting control over it. By perpetuating certain stereotypes and images of the East in Western art and culture, the interactions between the East and West would always be skewed, in favor of the dominant West. In his book, Said develops a starting point for post-colonial theory.

By first defining Orientalism and the Orient, then highlighting what is problematic with it, Said identifies the racism that concerns post-colonial theory and that it attempts to address and/or ameliorate. It is integral to realize that this power struggle, which took place during the colonialist period in Asian history, is still being felt and that it has a great impact upon the art produced in East Asia (as well as other parts of “the East”, such as India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East) today. Morimura’s art can be read through this postcolonial theory as his way of reclaiming control and asserting his own identity rather than accepting one created for him Westerners to represent the whole of “the East”.

Another key scholar in postcolonial studies is Homi Bhabha. In his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha “explores mimicry and hybridity as ways of negotiating the power relationships between colonizer and colonized. In mimicry, the colonizers compel the colonized to imitate them—to use their language, customs, religion, schooling, government, etc.” In his

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41 Ibid.
44 Ibid, 30-90.
45 D’Alleva, *Look Again!* 77.
book, Bhabha explores what this means not only to the colonizer, but also to the colonized.\(^4\) It is through this lens that I believe a reading of the multi-dimensional works created by Morimura can be achieved, which will bring to light his emphasis on identity and dialogue rather than simply copying another artist’s work.

While the post-colonialist approach provides a method for the examination of Morimura’s images, a reading of his work through a feminist and gendered lens offers a further avenue for debate about these images as self-portraits and as explorations of identity. Both gender theory and feminist theory are grounded on the premise that gender is an essential element in understanding the creation, content, and evaluation of art.\(^4\) Both post-colonial and feminist theories complement each other in my analysis due to their connected nature. Each theory focuses upon the marginalization of an “other,” whether that other be an ethnic group dominated through colonialism or the feminine gender that has been subjugated by men throughout history.

An important notion central to gender theory is the concept of gender performativity. Judith Butler argued that “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various act proceed, rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time— an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.”\(^4\) In her analysis of gender performativity, Anne D’Alleva states that, “from a performative gender perspective, not only do artists themselves sometimes perform or undermine mainstream gender identities and sexualities in their own lives, but they also sometimes create images that can perpetuate or challenge mainstream gender identities and

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\(^{4}\) D’Alleva, *Look Again!*, 77.

\(^{4}\) Ibid, 72-73.

sexualities.” In his work Morimura inserts himself into feminine roles, producing images that directly challenge the Western notion of the East as feminine. He assumes on the role that has been assigned to him by the West, and at the same time he causes the viewer to become uncomfortable with seeing a distinctly male body in the place of a woman.

I believe that Morimura can be considered a feminist artist whose work deals mainly with gender performativity and it is for this reason that his photographs can be shocking or grotesque to some, an example being his version of Manet’s *Olympia* (Fig. 9) entitled *Portrait (Futago)* (Fig. 10). Where the viewer expects to see a woman's body, they find a man's body in her place. It is precisely this challenging of "mainstream gender identities and sexualities" that Morimura presents to us in his work, whether he intends to or not. Further, feminist art historians object to a simple formalist reading of art because “works of art, as well as artists, reflect their cultural context.” The context of Morimura’s work is incredibly important to an analysis of it. With Morimura’s tendency toward appropriating works involving females in the main roles and inserting himself into those roles, ultimately or visually he “becomes” a "woman" in the image.

A key figure in the development of feminist theory is Linda Nochlin. In her famed essay “Why Are There No Famous Women Artists?” published in 1971, Nochlin provides a response to her title not by focusing on the “hidden” women artists in history, but rather by posing an investigation of the social structures in which art is created. Much in the very same way that Nochlin called for an investigation of the system in which art is created, thereby identifying possible solutions as to why there have been no “great” women artists, post-colonial theory requires an investigation of the social structures and systems created by colonialism. Nochlin

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states: “What is important is that women face up to the reality of their history and of their present situation, without making excuses of puffing mediocrity… women can reveal institutional and intellectual weakness in general….”\textsuperscript{52} While Nochlin focused on women and primarily challenged the systems of inequality, I will apply a similar mindset to the work of Morimura, for his work broaches topics that feminist theorists are also focus upon such as gender, the performative nature of it, along with how gender is also a facet in the creation of identity.

Though Morimura stresses that his work deals more with identity than specifically feminist issues, the works he chooses to appropriate, in which he often inserts his own body as the female character in the original, provides perfect examples to use for a feminist critique. A third facet to these previously mentioned approaches is queer theory. Once again Morimura shies away from the association of his work with queer theory.\textsuperscript{53} However, queer theory’s premise that “sexuality and gender are in part social constructs that impact the reception of art, which is inseparable from the identity of the artist,”\textsuperscript{54} is hard to ignore here because the identity of this artist makes these works important to unpack. The combination of both of these theories, applied to select pieces of Morimura’s body of work, allow for the next dimension to be added in my critique of Morimura’s photographs. In the next chapter, the analysis of Morimura’s works continues with his piece entitled \textit{Portrait (Futago)}, completed in 1988.

\textsuperscript{52} Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” , 23-39.
\textsuperscript{53} Adams, \textit{The Methodologies of Art}, 85-87.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
IV. CASE STUDY 1: PORTRAIT (FUTAGO), 1988

To begin this critique of Morimura’s work, it only seems suitable to start with one of his first pieces of appropriation art, Portrait (Futago) (1988) (Fig. 10). This work recreates Édouard Manet’s painting Olympia, 1863-1865 (Fig. 9). Manet, a French painter and printmaker classified as a Realist, is most famously known as the “Father of Impressionism” and/or of Modernism.55 While these two pieces of art were created nearly one hundred and twenty-five years apart, they both speak to a tradition of appropriation as a tool utilized by artists to further their own creativity and to incorporate the meanings attached to the original with the new pieces. Manet’s work, in fact, appropriates an older work of art by Titian called Venus of Urbino (Fig. 11). In both of these paintings, the focal point is a female nude reclined on a bed; in Titian’s painting it is Venus that is on display, while in Manet’s image it is a French prostitute. Of these two paintings Manet’s was the more controversial image due to his incorporation of a contemporary female in the image rather than that of an allegorical or mythological figure, along with his seemingly unfinished style of painting.

Regarding these three pieces (Figs. 9-11), for this particular analysis it is Manet’s Olympia that will be considered the "original," but in reality perhaps Morimura’s piece consists of an appropriation of an appropriation. Manet first appropriated the theme/composition from Titian’s painting and then Morimura created his image 125 years later. Because of the specific works of art that Morimura chooses to appropriate, along with his gender and ethnic background, the results of his artistic creativity generate multi-dimensional pieces that invite discussions regarding a number of issues. His Portrait (Futago) is no exception, to the point that only a select few issues will be broached here.

A formal analysis of the two images will be helpful; mainly to identify what Morimura has changed in his photograph, but also to establish a sense of comparison that will accompany the rest of this dialogue. Manet’s *Olympia* is an exploration in contrast and color, both literally and figuratively. The bright blinding whites and creams dominate the image while the darker hues of black, browns, rusts, and greens create a sense of space, while at the same time enhancing the flatness of the canvas. The painting can be divided easily into three proportional sections, with the heads of the two women depicted landing on the dividing lines. This calls attention to the obvious differences between these two women: light versus dark, European descent versus African descent, prostitute versus servant.

In Morimura’s *Portrait*, the contrast in color has been reduced, the bright whites and creams have been replaced by Morimura’s darker skin tone and a golden kimono draped across the bed. Morimura inserts himself into the composition as both Olympia and her African maidservant, taking their places and assuming their identities’. The darker tones of Morimura’s skin and the bed-coverings, along with the maidservant’s pink dress and the deepened tones of the patterning on the walls produce an overall dimmer image. The black cat in the right bottom corner of the painting, sitting on the bed, transforms into the Maneki-neko, which literally means, “beckoning cat” in Japanese.\(^{56}\) This item, a Japanese lucky charm usually displayed in Japanese businesses, is believed to bring good luck to the owner.\(^{57}\) Another significant detail that has been altered in Morimura’s re-enactment of *Olympia* is the size of the work. The original painting has dimensions of 130.5 cm x 190 cm,\(^{58}\) while Morimura’s photograph looms nearly

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\(^{58}\) Artstor, Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863-65, oil on canvas, 130.5 x190 cm.
life-size, measuring 210 cm x 300 cm.\textsuperscript{59} The most obvious other difference would be the mediums of painting versus that of photography that have been utilized by the artists respectively.

Another important detail to recognize is that Morimura tries his best to create depth to instill a sense of reverence that accompanies paintings by varnishing the surface of his photographs, along with incorporating both painterly and sculptural elements in the sets he creates in order to make the photographs. Gregory Williams describes his own experience with \textit{Portrait (Futago)} as such: “When standing before \textit{Portrait (Futago)}, his rendition of Manet’s \textit{Olympia}, for example, one experiences a double jolt of recognition…. [O]n one hand an old friend materializes … in an unexpected place… on the other, the artist becomes a familiar face as he usurps the position of the nude Olympia.”\textsuperscript{60} This is an experience that is common with much of Morimura’s work and it is not until one looks at the fine details that they come to discover the truth of the “fake.” Morimura’s unexpected presence in the image jars the viewer out of their preconceived notions about the image before them.

In analyzing Morimura’s \textit{Portrait (Futago)} through both post-colonialist theory and more gender-focused lenses, two different angles can be revealed in the analysis: 1) examining at the image-type (the odalisque), its history, and its ties to the East; and, 2) viewing Morimura’s image as a post-colonialist attempt to return power and agency to the East, power which had been taken during the colonialist eras. Both of these approaches will be expanded upon as they offer excellent examples of how important context can be in the understanding of contemporary art and how two very different approaches can be utilized to aid in the discussion of the appropriation of one image.

\textsuperscript{59} Artstor, Yasumasa Morimura, \textit{Portrait (Futago)}, 1988, chromogenic print with acrylic paint and gel medium, 82 3/4 in. x 118 in. (210.19 cm x 299.72 cm).
Both Manet's *Olympia*, and subsequently Morimura’s *Portrait (Futago)* have been categorized by the term “Odalisque.” The history of the Odalisque is one that can be traced back through time, Morimura’s *Portrait (Futago)*, created in 1988, which is directly linked to Manet’s *Olympia*, dated 1863-1865, which in turn can be linked back to the Venetian artist Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus, 1510* (Fig. 12), etc. Furthermore, Titian himself found inspiration in Giorgione’s *Sleeping Venus*, and Titian himself probably completed the painting for Giorgione. While the last two works are technically separate from the odalisque tradition—since the official incorporation of the odalisque into Western art did not occur until the Orientalist period in the nineteenth century—they still can be incorporated into the discussion of traditional Western art imagery and its depiction of the female nude.

Connected with the genre of the nude, the theme of the odalisque first appeared in French painting styles during the nineteenth century as a translation of the Turkish term *odalik*, “referring to a female slave in an oriental harem.” The composition made famous by Ingres with his 1814 *Grande Odalisque* (Fig. 13), typically includes a nude or semi-nude female reclining in a provocative manner. Such figures, often read as being a mistress or prostitute by Western audiences, incorporate elements into their scenes that imply the setting to be some “exotic” place in the East or Orient. Manet, having developed out of the French painting tradition of Ingres, would have been familiar with the *Grande Odalisque*, yet it seems his ultimate source of inspiration came from Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, as illustrated by the similar composition. While Maneat kept the animal on the bed with the nude woman, changing it into a black cat, along with the other figure of the chambermaid, Manet brings her to the front of the

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62 Ibid.
composition, situates her visually behind the reclining form of Olympia, and changes her into an African servant.

Morimura further complicates the reading of this imagery in his reinterpretation of it by incorporating his own Asian body into the scene. In Morimura’s image, “…the viewer is placed at a certain disadvantage, being momentarily captured by a familiar image, only later to have their notions about that image debunked and directly challenged. It is from this advantageous and empowering position that the artists can use a deconstructive apparatus based on either irony or abstraction.” It is precisely this empowered position that Morimura occupies, and in the identification and understanding that the odalisque is essentially a Western image portraying a Western stereotype of the Eastern/Oriental harem woman, we achieve a greater understanding of the imagery, specifically Morimura’s use of it, as a reverse-cultural appropriation.

In Portrait (Futago), Morimura reinterprets Manet’s Olympia, an iconic painting that has become synonymous with modernist nineteenth-century French painting. Morimura plays off of the illustrious nature of the Olympia with his appropriation, calling attention to both his blatant reproduction of the image and his insertion of a foreign body, his own, into it. Sri-Kartini Leet discusses this work in her book on photography:

This double crossing of gender and race – the double displacement of his own body – highlights the ambiguous relationship between Olympia and her (re)incarnation as the African maidservant. Freely translating Olympia from paint to print, from West to East, and from female to male, Morimura irrevocably transforms Manet’s original canvas and ‘outs’ both Olympia and her African maidservant in the process.

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64 I am referring back to the term reverse-cultural appropriation that I explored earlier in my previous scholarship section
It is his translation, through the "double displacement of his own body," that allows for a post-colonialist-based conversation regarding this work. Shirley Madill in her essay “Constru(ct)ing the Origins of Art” writes, “If white imperialism is predicated on narratives of origin and mastery, Morimura undoes its cultural masters by corrupting the purity of their ‘originals’. Similarly, Western Civilization has asserted its superiority over different cultures by fixing the identity of the other.” Madill draws attention to the impact of Morimura’s appropriations of Western “cultural masters,” which can be assumed to be the masters of Western art history, by comparing his appropriations to the way the West has asserted itself over the East. Basically, Morimura takes on the role of the West by placing himself in the position of power, and by his exercise over Western images through the insertion of his body into those images.

As a result of the colonialist history of the East and the dominance of Western art in the art history Morimura learned even in Japan, Morimura grew up in a culture that glorified foreign, Western artists over his own native Japanese art history. In his book Daughter of Art History Morimura states: “Art education in school was almost exclusively a Western curriculum—starting from the image of Venus de Milo, up through classicism’s re-appropriation in the Renaissance with Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, then on via the curves of the Baroque, toward the Impressionists—and that was ‘art history’” Because of this education that he received while growing up in Japan, and his reaction to it, in combination with the postmodernist age that Morimura operates within, he chose to appropriate Western images in order to regain a sense of power and importance that had been previously denied to Eastern artists in art history.

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66 Leet, Reading Photography, 161.
68 Kuspit, Daughter of Art History, 113.
69 Ibid.
Morimura himself comments upon his experience of having been primarily taught about Western Masters as “art history”, saying that “I do not, however, believe that the sensibilities I’ve developed under such conditions are by any means healthy or well-balanced. If anything, the resulting mental state is distorted, disturbing, and strange.”70 Thus, in a still Western-dominated art world, Morimura explores this imbalanced mental state through the imagery that is most familiar to him, and at the same time provided the source of his identity crisis. To push this idea further, Morimura’s appropriations would then serve not only as a means of creating conversation, but as a deeply personal conversation, as these images can be interpreted as self-portraits of the artist’s struggles with identity. In addition, as Kuspit states, “they are commentaries on the identity crisis that painting—and more generally art—has experienced in the postmodern age of mechanical reproduction.”71 However, they also serve as commentaries on the identity crisis that Morimura, and potentially many other Eastern contemporary artists, face resulting from the lasting effects of colonialism and a Western-dominated art history.

In his postmodernist appropriations like Portrait (Futago), Morimura explores many facets of identity, not just ethnicity, but also gender. As an extension of his interest in ambiguity, Morimura claims: “I’ve always been interested in ambiguous realms… my fascination lies in this ever-shifting, utterly undefined grey area.”72 This fascination, while concentrated in his writings on gender roles, also applies to the dichotomy between East and West, resulting from the colonialist history that they share. He elaborates: “My purpose is not merely to perform the act of playing a woman. Nor do I make photographic self-portraits simply to fulfill my wish to become a woman. As with my fascination of the neither-land-nor-sea water’s edge, it was my aim to explore the ‘neither-male-nor-female waterline,’ to realize it using cross-dressing as my chosen

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70 Kuspit, *Daughter of Art History*, 113.
71 Ibid, 8.
72 Ibid, 118.
method of investigation.” I would like to argue that he is not just exploring the realm of “not-quite-male-and-not-quite-female” with his appropriations, but also the grey area between Eastern and Western artists in the postmodern age that we live in today. In his work, Morimura purposely chooses Western art to appropriate because of the multiple avenues and identities available for exploration that he can take.

From this analysis of Portrait (Futago), the variety of ways in which Morimura has used appropriation in his art to provide commentary upon certain dialogues in art history becomes evident. Appropriation, in the case of this artist, is utilized to explore personal issues that Morimura faces as an Eastern, male artist, working in a postmodern era. From here my attention will turn to another example of Morimura’s appropriations, this time of a French artist that was born in 1887, just five years after Manet died: Marcel Duchamp.

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73 Kuspit, Daughter of Art History, 119.
V. CASE STUDY 2: *DOUBLENAGE (MARCEL)*, 1988

Another one of Morimura’s appropriated creations from the same year as the *Portrait (Futago)* is his reinterpretation of Man Ray’s 1920 black and white photograph, *Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Selavy* as color photograph titled *Doublenage (Marcel)* (Fig. 14 and 15). Rrose Selavy (“Eros, c’est la vie” or “Eros, that’s life”) was Duchamp’s female alter ego, which he adopted in order to explore ideas of sexual identity. Although Man Ray is the photographer credited with the work’s creation, it is Duchamp who brought Rrose Selavy into being. So, is then the work of art the photograph that remains or Duchamp’s performance of his alternate identity? Then again, in regards to Morimura’s re-creation of it, I feel that it should not be viewed necessarily as an appropriation of Man Ray’s image; rather it is a performance of Marcel Duchamp’s alternative identity, Rrose Selavy. Examining this image through the combined approaches of gender and queer theory can provide not just investigative information, but also some crucial discussions of gender and sexuality, and how each can be viewed as a performance in our society. Through the completion of the analysis of this work of art, once again it is realized that appropriation is an important tool available to artists that incites conversation and critique.

As with the previous analysis of Morimura’s *Portrait (Futago)*, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the appropriated image/artist before a complete discussion of the appropriation can commence. Duchamp was a Modern (or early Post-Modern) artist who was not limited to just one style, from Cubism to Dada to Surrealism; he was an artistic jack-of-all-trades. Duchamp cultivated and spread the notion of the importance of concept over form,

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75 Adcock and Jones. "Duchamp, Marcel." *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*.
which now dominates the Contemporary Fine Art sphere, with the introduction of his readymades.\textsuperscript{77} Born in 1887, Duchamp was a French painter, sculptor and writer, whose work and ideas dramatically altered the conception of art; indeed, he advocated for a conceptual approach to art.\textsuperscript{78} Most well-known for his ready-made sculptures, Duchamp’s “primary achievement involved undermining our basic ideas about what it means to do a ‘work’ of art.”\textsuperscript{79} I believe this to be integral to our interpretation of Morimura’s works too because without Duchamp coming first, artists like Morimura would have had a more challenging time gaining acceptance in the fine art world.

In 1920 or 1921, Duchamp’s alter ego was born when he dressed himself in women’s clothing and posed for fellow Dada-ist Man Ray. Their collaboration resulted in a number of photographs.\textsuperscript{80} Amelia Jones in her essay “En-Gendering of the Artistic Subject” writes: “Rrose can be seen in retrospect as an early interrogation of the complex structures by which the artistic subject is en-gendered (constituted within sexual difference) in Western culture.”\textsuperscript{81} Morimura’s contemporary photographs revisit this exploration present in Duchamp’s image. This is made especially evident in the selected works of the \textit{Daughter of Art History} series examined in this paper because of the gendered nature of each work selected.

Updated by using later twentieth-century photographic technologies, Morimura transforms Man Ray’s black-and-white photograph of Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Selavy into a color print. The end result is an image that looks garish and startles the viewer due to the incorporation of bold color and stark contrast in skin tones, whereas Duchamp’s is mysteriously

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Naumann, “Duchamp, Marcel”, pp. 1. Readymade is a term used to signify a style of art that utilizes found objects to create works of art, examples of which are Marcel Duchamp’s 1913 \textit{Bicycle Wheel} and \textit{Fountain} (1917), the latter is a piece of art created using a urinal turned upside down to create the ‘fountain’.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Adcock and Jones. "Duchamp, Marcel." \textit{Encyclopedia of Aesthetics}.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
seductive with its soft, hazy ambiance. Perhaps this work’s inability to convince the viewer whether or not it’s the original can be attributed more to the original artwork’s medium than Morimura’s lack of success. In his appropriation, he transforms a black-and-white photograph into a color one, where normally he converts a painting already in color into a color photograph. With his Portrait (Futago), Morimura translated a painting into a photograph, which already has imbued in it an air of human error, while with Doublenage (Marcel) he makes a photographic recreation of a photograph, the medium that, some say, tells no lies. Whether it is the nature of the original in this appropriation or the change in color, either way, in the newly created image by Morimura, elements not previously seen in the original are added which emphasize the themes of identity and gender in Morimura’s commentary.

Man Ray’s original image, a roughly 8 ½ x 7 in. gelatin silver print, shows Duchamp as his alternate personality wearing a modernistic hat, clutching what seems to be the fur collar of a coat close to his/her face with hands that have been adorned with jewelry. Whether it was Man Ray who signed the corner of the image or Duchamp himself, it is unknown. However, the inscription reads, “lovingly Rrose Selavy alias Marcel Duchamp”, as if Rrose herself had autographed the image. The lighting can be characterized as very soft and, in general, this image feels very feminine; however, the harsh lines of Duchamp’s face, heavy eyebrows, and masculine hands give him away.

In contrast, looking at Morimura’s appropriation Doublenage (Marcel), “Morimura is cross-dressing as a cross-dresser, which perhaps explains why Rrose has been given two sets of hats and two sets of arms.” In his large 60 x 48 in. color photograph, Morimura poses against a green background, wearing two hats that seem to be exact replicas of Duchamp’s original, and

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82 Artstor, “Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp as Rose Selavy”
84 Artstor, Yasumasa Morimura, Doublenage (Marcel), 1988, mixed media color photograph, 60x48 inches.
holds what appear to be two mannequin arms in his hands that are posed much like Duchamp’s own, clutching at the black fur collar that surrounds Morimura’s neck. In this new image, three skin tones appear, the near-stark white of Morimura’s face, the deeper olive tones of what appear to be his hands, and the mid-range peach of the mannequin arms, which serves as one signifier that this is not the original. Obviously, it seems, a deeper notion has been referenced here than simply the original cross-dressing of Duchamp.

One definition of appropriation claims that it “refers to a tendency in contemporary art in which artists adopt imagery, ideas, or materials, from pre-existing works of art or culture. The act of appropriation is usually an acknowledged component within the works, and it is typically deployed to call attention either to the source material or to the act of borrowing itself.” This definition of the term becomes critical, I believe, in the comprehension of Morimura’s works, especially his Doublenage. In his photographs, Morimura clearly emphasizes the origins of his imagery, whether that be obvious or in the titles he gives, as seen with Doublenage. The source material remains important in the analysis of Morimura’s work, in that it becomes essential to fully understand the context of the originals in order to completely comprehend the commentary Morimura’s works create.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Duchamp presented the art world with new and foreign ways of thinking about and creating art. This is information Morimura would have known when he chose this image of Duchamp’s to re-imagine. Kerstain Brandes comments on this, saying:

By playing upon an image that itself occupies a somewhat striking position in art history, Morimura invites the critic to ask what kind of effect this might have on our reading both of his work and of Duchamp’s; even more so, as Morimura inevitably finds himself situated within contemporary discourses that celebrate

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multiculturalism, but differ in acknowledging multicultural artistic practices in terms of ‘minority art’ on the one hand, and as a challenge to the dominant politics of representation on the other.86

I find it important to note that Brandes speculates upon not just the reading of Morimura’s work, but also on how his choice of image might affect our reading of the original work. This interplay between the two works becomes critical, because through Morimura’s appropriation the original work is given a breath of new life and an even greater sense of interest. With Duchamp’s original piece, the relationship between the “seen” and “the seeing” is explored. This remains true in Morimura’s piece; however, he goes further to emphasize the importance of self-portraiture for this investigation.

For both Morimura and Duchamp, self-portraiture provided an important avenue for not just the exploration of identity, but also as a way to step into the role of the “seen”, an unusual one since artists are nearly always the ones doing “the seeing”.87 This concept of being “seen” versus doing “the seeing” also appears in feminist critiques in regards to gaze theory, where it is often the female, nude or not, being viewed or seen by the male gaze or the male doing the seeing. In addition, by inserting himself into a variety of female roles, Morimura explores not just the reversal from doing the seeing to being seen (as a male), but he goes further and subjects himself to the much harsher gendered gaze.

The imagery of the two artworks focuses on the doubling or perhaps dividing of identity, for both Morimura and Duchamp. This can be observed in Duchamp’s original, as the artist is a male performing an alternate identity that is feminine. The same can be said for Morimura, in that many of his performances and explorations revolve around a female identity: however in this specific image an additional layer is incorporated, in Morimura’s Asian body taking on the role

87 Kuspit, Daughter of Art History, 117.
of a European one. This particular doubling conveys the post-colonial nature of this work as well as its feminist side. Morimura highlights this former aspect of the image with his inclusion of mannequin arms of a “white” skin tone held in his Asian arms. At the same time he has painted his face stark white, which could be referencing the white make-up worn by both Japanese Geisha and kabuki theater performers alike, adding to the contrast of skin tones the viewer sees. Morimura’s decision to create a different atmosphere than that found in the original, and to nevertheless convince the viewer that he is Rrose Selavy, produces a commentary regarding power. Morimura’s photograph could be interpreted as saying that while historically Western men have cast Asian men in a feminized role, comparing them to white women, it is actually White, Western men who are more convincing at impersonating white women. With Doublenage (Marcel) Morimura comments upon both colonial power issues and then adds to the critique regarding the creation and performance of gender that Duchamp started.

After looking at Morimura’s Doublenage (Marcel), it can be observed that these photographs do not simply depict two men playing dress up. They both critique the way gender is constructed, performed, and “seen” in society and in art. Morimura takes this investigation a step further, adding to the discussion an exploration of how identity is also constructed or impacted by gender. In his image, Morimura doubles, arguably triples, aspects of the composition to call attention to not just his performance of male and female as part of one identity, but also the additional layer of an Eastern man in the role of a Western man in the role of a Western woman. To bring this analysis of Morimura’s work and the way that through his appropriation he is able to engender new, fresh dialogues within art to a culminating point, I will

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next discuss a piece that focuses on gender, revolving around Frida Kahlo in Morimura’s *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo* mini-series.
VI. CASE STUDY 3:
AN INNER DIALOGUE WITH FRIDA KAHLO (HAND-SHAPED EARRING), 2001

In the final example of Morimura’s appropriations, we jump nearly fifteen years later in his career to discover that he continues to explore gender and identity in his work; however, this time it is through the self-portraiture of a well-known Mexican artist. The subject matter that Morimura explored deeply, and that has produced perhaps his most striking pieces, is Frida Kahlo and her variety of self-portraits. I consider his work with her images to be a mini-series, entitled An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo, within his larger Daughter of Art History series. Nancy Princenthal writes in her review of Morimura’s work, “In his most extravagant exercise of borrowed identity to date, Yasumasa Morimura created a series of hybrid self-portraits modeled on works by Frida Kahlo.” Morimura’s series is extravagant for its breadth and is significant because of its depth.

In these works, Morimura fully investigates the work of Kahlo, whose deeply personal oeuvre focuses often on the pain she endured throughout her short life, both physical and mental. Shirley Madill remarks: “Morimura goes beyond impersonation to become the subject. This is representation of Morimura’s existence between two worlds and the quotation is used to awaken the self.” Morimura employs appropriation to such a level in his transformations of Kahlo’s work and brings the ambiguity of sex to the forefront in his photographic translations and it is often hard to tell that it is a man performing the role of Kahlo. Madill continues in her discussion of Morimura’s dialogue by saying, “Kahlo’s beauty and self-possession, her faint mustache and distinctive linked eyebrows, her regal posture, challenging stare and insistent vulnerability are all captured with uncanny skill. Distinctions between what is recreated, retouched and inverted

In this series of works, the opportunity to discuss Morimura in terms of gender performativity is apparent; moreover, another discussion that becomes unavoidable is his photographs as self-portraits that explore identity.

First, some background on Kahlo will be helpful by informing my analysis regarding Kahlo’s history, adding context to Morimura’s work and perhaps enlightening the viewer as to why he chose Kahlo’s self-portraits to focus on so deeply. Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), a Mexican painter who began her career during her recovery from a debilitating bus accident, spent the entirety of her life recovering, both emotionally and physically.92 Because of this accident, she would never be able to bear children.93 Her artwork focuses on herself; categorized as self-portraits, they became “a kind of exorcism by which she projected her anguish on to another Frida, in order to separate herself from pain and at the same time confirm her hold on reality.”94 The focus of self-portraits is one's own identity and, for Kahlo, her identity was forever changed by her accident. Parts of her identity were taken away, such as her hope to one day be a mother, while there were new factors added to her identity like the pain and numerous surgeries that she would have to go through. While during her lifetime she at times was associated with Surrealism, she disagreed with such comparisons claiming, “…she painted not dreams but her own reality.”95

By discussing Morimura’s Frida series as self-portraits, it can also be assumed that much of Morimura’s other photographic appropriations are also avenues for him to investigate identity and what determines it. Morimura has said: “My transformation [is] more ‘real’ to me than the

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93 Herrera. “Kahlo, Frida”.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
fact that I’m a 50-year old man in Osaka.”96 For a man whose own artistic education relegated him to the realm of outsider, causing him to question aspects of his own identity, it seems surprisingly easy for him to take on these various roles. The transformation of both gender and ethnicity is an aspect seen in all of Morimura’s work: however, with the Kahlo series he takes on the identity of someone who is of ethnicity different from (and “other” to) the Caucasian origins of the Western personas he typically explores. Perhaps it is due to the status as “ethnic” artists that Morimura and Kahlo share that has made Morimura’s assumption of Kahlo’s identity a smoother transition - both can be considered outsiders in the world of Fine Art. Kahlo, a woman attempting to break in to the male-dominated world of Fine Art and a Latina in a predominately European/white art world, seems an appropriate choice for Morimura to become. “Morimura slips and slides between gender and history, perpetuating a double artifice as he impersonates the characters and constructs of art history. This is not mere masquerade but a ploy which highlights the consequences of cultural otherness.”97 It is the image of Kahlo that Morimura slips into and out of most easily, performing her character so well that often the only recognizable differences are very subtle relating to differences in the shape of his nose, and eyes, etc.

The most noticeable differences between Morimura’s appropriations and Kahlo’s originals appear as changes in color; where the color remains more subdued in Kahlo’s works, it grows more vibrant in Morimura’s, bringing attention to the translation of the image from painting to photograph. For the comparison of Morimura and Kahlo, I have chosen to focus on Morimura’s An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Hand-Shaped Earring), 2001 (Fig. 17), and its inspirational companion piece, which was originally painted by Kahlo, entitled Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser, finished in 1940 (Fig. 16). Kahlo’s original painting features a three-

quarter view of herself, cropped so that the focus remains on her head, neck, and shoulders. She uses a subdued palate, opting for murky greens, greys, and browns for the foliage, shawl, and sky respectively, while utilizing equally faded yellows and pinks for the flowers on top of her head. The color that seems to be the most vibrant and subsequently captures the viewer’s attention is her ruby red lips in the center of the painting. Overall, the mood of this painting is dismal and somewhat morbid, with the white hand-shaped earring hanging from her ear and a necklace of thorns that encircles her neck, drawing droplets of blood from her skin.

In contrast to the darkness of Kahlo’s painting, Morimura’s photograph exudes brightness. Morimura incorporates bright vivid colors into the depiction of his own body and symbols of his own contemporary culture. While the original painting measures roughly 24 x 15 inches, Morimura’s photograph dwarfs it at 59 x 47 ¼ inches, a typical, nearly life-size image for the artist. Where before foggy greys and murky greens appeared, now the foliage brightens with lively yellows and hints of orange, and a background that seems like an unnatural melding of color. A shimmery, luxurious gold Louis Vuitton scarf replaces the natural earthen tones of Kahlo’s shawl. Similarly, where dahlias, daisies and roses once appeared, now Asian-inspired fake flower assortments characterized by bright hues of red, soft pink and aqua fill the scene. The white hand has been replaced by a golden one, and with what seems to be a red coral hanging off of it. Finally, Latina skin that used to be marred by the pricks of thorns transforms into flawless Asian skin highlighted by the thorn necklace with jewels hanging from more of the same coral, with vein-like material that hangs from the earring. In his image, Morimura attempts to evoke

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98 Artstor, Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait, 1940. Oil on Masonite.
more feminine air, utilizing the fiery red lipstick, blue-pink eye shadow, and blush to produce that effect.

Created at a time when her tumultuous marriage was on the cusp of destruction, Kahlo infuses her painting with her emotions and the struggle of constantly attempting to find her identity through the physical and emotional pain she experienced. While his life has not been marked by the physical struggles that haunted Kahlo as a result of her bus accident, Morimura attempts in not only this, but in all of his images, to work through his chaotic mental state which he describes as being “distorted, disturbing, and strange,” a side-effect he identifies with his primarily Western-focused art history curriculum. Morimura utilizes his photographic appropriations not only to explore these alternative identities, such as Frida’s, but as a way to explore his own psyche, the result of the after effects of colonialism and strict gender roles that he was born into in Japan.

Throughout his appropriations, Morimura claims that he is seeking to explore the “grey area[s]” of the in-between, neither this nor that. In his Inner Dialogue series he is exploring the nuances of gender. “Inspired by Frida’s self-portraits,” Morimura claims, "I added my original inventions, again in order to attempt to express a sexual ‘grey area’." This expression of sexual ambiguity is something that Morimura successfully achieves with his Frida Kahlo series, to the point that it becomes hard to recognize the image as one of a man. The way Morimura reimagines himself as a woman, seemingly with incredible ease, brings questions to the fore regarding the ways that we construct gender in our society.

101 Kuspit, Daughter of Art History, 113.
102 Ibid, 119.
103 Ibid, 120.
Morimura asserts that these grey areas remain not just between genders, but also in a range of spheres for “… everyone surely possesses elements in mind and body that far overstep the bounds of name, function, and position granted by society. That is what I mean by grey areas. And that which gives shape to these ambiguous realms that do not usually surface in everyday life is art. At least that is my belief as I continue creating artworks.”

In the pieces of Morimura’s work that have been analyzed within this paper, we have seen that in each case he transforms the characters into figures that are perhaps neither woman nor man, neither Eastern nor Western, and the images themselves become something that is neither a contemporary photograph nor a historic painting. The transformation from something easily categorized into an image that becomes complex and indefinable is what makes Morimura’s work so intriguing to examine, especially for art historians. Through the appropriation of artworks by famous artists such as Frida Kahlo, and by not simply copying Kahlo’s self-portraits—but truly translating them from paintings into photographs—and by becoming "Kahlo" to the point that difficulties arise in attempting to discern whether or not Morimura is in fact a female too, Morimura transfers some of her fame to himself.

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104 Kuspit, Daughter of Art History, 120-121.
105 Ibid, 120.
VII. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the analysis of contemporary Japanese photographer Yasumasa Morimura has illustrated the variety of ways that his appropriations can be interpreted. Through the in-depth examinations of his photographs presented in the three case studies, which utilize post-colonial and feminist theories, it has been argued that these works accomplish more than simply creating dialogues regarding important conversations within art history. Whether Morimura meant to or not, these photographs act as an avenue for the artist to regain power that had been usurped from the East by the West during the age of colonialism. Morimura directly challenges the Western notion of the East as feminine by inserting his own male body into a space where one expects to see a female form. The sense of unease experienced by the viewer with his images allows Morimura to reclaim power previously taken by the West in proving that not everything about the East is feminine, just as not everything about the West is masculine.

In my analysis of Morimura’s photographs I have focused my critique on his works from his *Daughter of Art History* series, a corpus of work that art historians often analyze because of the transgressive nature of the appropriations. In all three images, Morimura inserts himself into feminine roles of varying ethnicities, whether they are actual females or a male performing his female alter ego. In *Portrait (Futago)* the artist takes on the role of a French prostitute and her African maidservant, from Manet’s famous painting *Olympia*. With *Doublenage (Marcel)*, Morimura reinterprets Marcel Duchamp’s performance of his alternate female identity Rrose Selavy as captured in film by Man Ray. In the final work of art that was examined above, *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Hand Shaped Earring)*, Morimura performs the identity of an artist that is similar to his own, who was both ‘other’ in terms of ethnicity and gender, in the Fine Art world.
A critical element in understanding Morimura’s work is the way appropriation is utilized repeatedly by the artist. Often, when it comes to appropriation art, the responses have been polarized, either positive or negative. I would like to suggest a new way of looking at appropriation art, where the focus rests upon the commentary and the dialogue that it creates. I offer my analyses of Morimura’s work as one such example, where the emphasis falls upon the results of the appropriation rather than merely upon the fact of the appropriation itself. By examining each of these images through post-colonial and feminist lenses, while focusing on how Morimura explores and creates his identity within the works of art, it can be seen that these theories remain deeply interconnected, just as Morimura’s exploration of identity remains deeply connected to the colonized past of the East. To leave out any of these aspects in a reading of his work would be to do the works a great disservice, as these works embody an exploration in gender and identity that arises out of the colonial era experienced by the East.
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