

ENCORE

REENACTMENT IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

This exhibition brings together the work of seven photographers who employ reenactment as a tool to investigate the past. Some of them explore art historical narratives, while others reinterpret more personal stories. Beyond the realm of photography, reenactment is linked to long traditions of restaging historical events, bringing texts, oral accounts, and visual records to life as forms of popular entertainment and as tools for learning about history. Through sometimes obsessive efforts to remain faithful to original narratives—such as the annual dramatization of the Civil War battle of Gettysburg—reenactors can convey intimate and nuanced knowledge of a subject.

When contemporary photographers restage historical events for the camera—incorporating figures who are costumed, in makeup, and surrounded by props—their goal is often to critique conventional narratives and to highlight underrepresented stories. Indeed, artists typically employ reenactment as a strategy to give voice to those usually silenced. Beyond literal storytelling, these methodically constructed photographs convey a subtext of symbolic imagery, making available broader views of the past.



Non-flash photography and video for personal use are welcome in the exhibition.



Christina Fernandez

María's Great Expedition (1995–96) interweaves familial and national histories to create a suite of prints that are both personal and political. Christina Fernandez inserts herself into the title role, and through six photographs of staged scenes and a map reimagines the story of her great-grandmother, who as a single mother migrated from Mexico to Southern California. Drawn from interviews the artist conducted with family members as well as historical accounts of life in both the U.S. and Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century, these scenes reference stories about the formidable challenges of starting anew in an unfamiliar place. Through her choice of costumes and use of a variety of photographic techniques, the artist signals the passage of time. She also provides intimate narratives that offer insight into the circumstances of María's journey and undermine stereotypes about immigrants.

Fernandez has been an important voice in the development of Chicano art in Southern California. She earned a BA from UCLA in 1989 and an MFA in 1996 from the California Institute of the Arts. She is a faculty member at Cerritos College.



Gillian Wearing

Through staged photographs, videos, and performances, Gillian Wearing often calls attention to the differences between individual and collective identities. For her ongoing series *Album*, begun in 2003, she orchestrated a series of self-portraits using masks, wigs, and prosthetic elements to re-create photographs of her immediate family. Mining her family's photo albums for source material, the artist explores the notion of identity, both in terms of likeness attributable to shared genetic makeup and as shaped by broader social influences. Her use of highly detailed silicone masks, made with the help of experts from the wax museum Madame Tussauds in London, blurs the line between fiction and reality. The disguises are eerily lifelike, but closer examination reveals seams around the artist's eyes and nostrils. In these portraits, Wearing explores the ways that ordinary people fashion public and private identities, preserved in both spontaneous snapshots and formal portraits.

Following her graduation from Goldsmiths College, London, in 1990, Wearing rose to prominence as part of the Young British Artists, a loosely formed group who began to exhibit together in London in 1988 and became known for their use of unconventional materials and shock tactics.



Samuel Fosso

Samuel Fosso's *African Spirits* series (2008) presents self-portraits that celebrate prominent political and intellectual figures from countries within Africa as well as its large and diverse diaspora. These photographs pay homage to individuals who not only championed independence movements and resisted colonial narratives of subjugation but also raised their voices in the American struggle for civil rights. Through makeup, costuming, and meticulous mimicry of poses, the artist restages the physical characteristics of his subjects and re-creates iconic images that originally circulated in newspapers and popular magazines. His subjects include the political leader Patrice Lumumba, who was instrumental in establishing the Republic of the Congo, and Aimé Césaire, a French poet and politician from the Caribbean island of Martinique who advocated the celebration of racial identity by black writers. American subjects include civil rights pioneer Martin Luther King Jr., educator and activist Angela Davis, and boxer Muhammad Ali.

Fosso first opened a commercial portrait studio in 1976 in Bangui, in the Central African Republic, and currently divides his time between Bangui and Paris, France.



Qiu Zhijie

While known primarily for creating elaborate installations and videos, Qiu Zhijie has been making staged photographs since the early 1990s. For the series *Standard Pose* (1996), he costumed actors in business attire and directed them to mimic the poses of figures who appeared in propaganda posters after the Cultural Revolution. These advertising campaigns promoted operas that instructed people on how to be model citizens, featuring slogans such as “Learn from the workers” and “Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

During the 1980s in the People’s Republic of China, the figure of Mao Zedong attracted increasing popular attention, reflecting both nostalgia and a fascination with the persona of the founder of the communist state. In the next decade, the country gradually opened itself to what it saw as foreign ideologies, including capitalism, spurring investment by foreign businesses. The artist’s use of Mao-era propaganda as a source for photographs provides a subtle critique of the party’s growing acceptance of Western worldviews despite its allegiance to a political system rooted in communism.

Qui Zhijie divides his time between Beijing, where he is a dean at the School of Experimental Art, and Hangzhou, where he is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Yasumasa Morimura

Since the early 1980s, Yasumasa Morimura has been appropriating and restaging famous paintings, casting himself in the role of the figures depicted. By fabricating elaborate sets and costumes, he does not merely replicate his sources but also presents a pastiche of references that simultaneously pay homage to and satirize the original works. Often, he inserts anachronistic elements that deliberately deviate from the original, adding a narrative layer of his own making. In particular, his reinterpretations challenge assumptions that underlie narratives of celebrated historical episodes while also commenting on Japan's absorption of Western culture after World War II. In these self-portraits, Morimura often poses as female characters and intentionally creates visual dissonance by pointing out his otherness in the context of European masterpieces, an approach that allows him to explore contemporary values associated with questions of gender, race, and cultural identity. These constructions also reference the Japanese tradition of Kabuki, highly stylized theatrical performances in which actors wear white, masklike makeup.

Morimura graduated with a BA and an MA in design from Kyoto City University of Arts, and his work has been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world. He currently lives and works in Osaka.



Yinka Shonibare CBE

Yinka Shonibare CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) has long explored ideas of contemporary African identity and the legacies of European colonialism and global conquest. His work is characterized by the use of Dutch wax fabrics based on Indonesian patterns, which were produced in Europe for the West African market during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shonibare's incorporation of these fabrics has come to symbolize the complex web of economic and racial interactions—and interdependencies—between Europe, Asia, and Africa.

For his 2008 series *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, Shonibare reworked an iconic etching by the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya in five iterations, each representing a different continent. In each iteration the artist depicts a central, sleeping figure who appears entirely at odds with the continent he represents, reflecting the artist's interest in the complications of race, class, and the construction of cultural identity.

Shonibare studied in London at the Byam Shaw School of Art and Goldsmiths College. Known primarily for his elaborate sculptures and installations, he also works with painting, video, and photography. He currently lives and works in London.

Eileen Cowin

The depiction of personal relationships and the exploration of photography's narrative possibilities are two central themes in Eileen Cowin's work. In the mid-1980s the artist created a series in which she, her husband, and her father enact various scenarios inspired by European art history. Eschewing elaborate sets and period costumes, the artist relies on subtle expressions, gestures, and poses to allude to her sources. Cast against a black background, each figure wears contemporary clothing that seems to bring specific art historical moments into the present. The atmospheric darkness that envelops the actors mimics the visual languages of the stage and film noir, reinforcing the theatrical nature of the photographs. By inserting members of her family into well-known images, the artist blurs the line between representing works understood as masterpieces and commenting on the complexities of familial relationships.

Cowin obtained her undergraduate degree from the State University of New York, New Paltz, and her MFA from the Institute of Design in Chicago in 1970. She taught photography at California State University, Fullerton, from 1978 to 2010 and lives in Los Angeles.

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