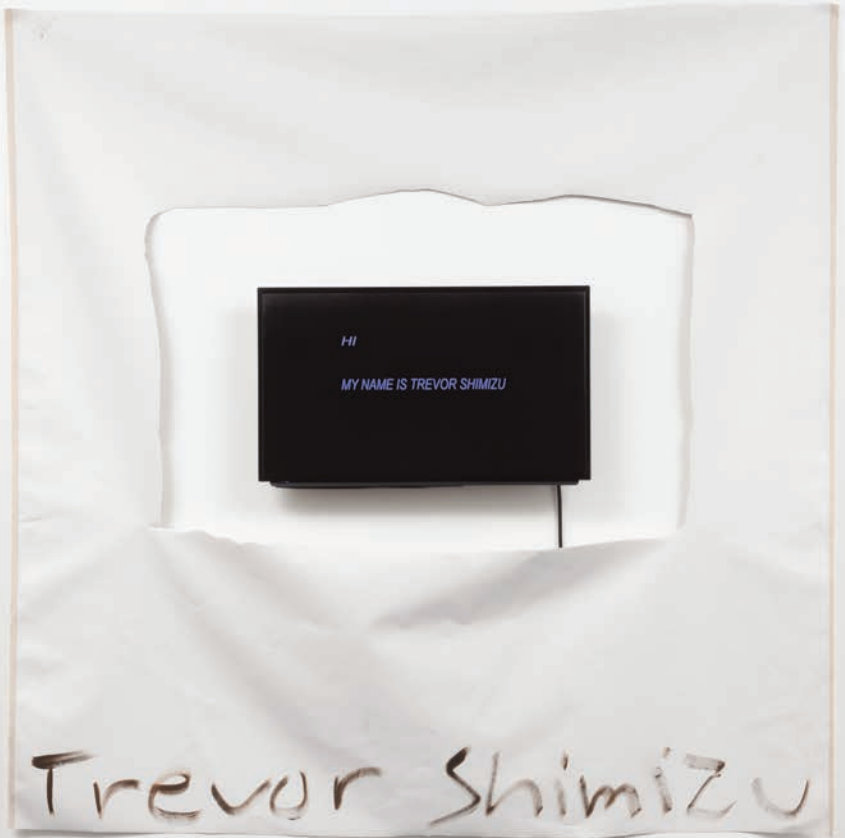


JAN 24–MAY 10, 2020

Trevor Shimizu:
Performance Artist



PROJECT SPACE
SECOND FLOOR

Trevor Shimizu (born 1978 Santa Rosa, CA; lives Long Island City, NY) has had solo shows at the Rowhouse Project, Baltimore; and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. His work has been exhibited at Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; the White Columns Annual, New York; the Whitney Biennial, New York; the Queens Museum of Art, New York; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta.

RELATED PROGRAMS

WED, FEB 5

6:30–8 PM Screening Program: *EAI Influences, 2005–2012*

This selection of films draws from the catalogue of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), where Shimizu worked as Technical Assistant and later Technical Director from 2005–2012. In citing the role that artists such as Dan Graham, Carolee Schneemann, Mike Kelley, and Paul McCarthy have had on his own trajectory as an artist, Shimizu opens up space to consider the nature of artistic influence.

Please visit icaphila.org/calendar for upcoming events.

Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist is organized by Alex Klein, Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE'60) Curator in collaboration with the Kunsthalle Lissabon as part of the Portuguese institution's tenth anniversary. The exchange grew out of the initiative *I is for Institute*, co-organized with ICA Spiegel-Wilks Curatorial Fellow Tausif Noor, which examines the perceptions and parameters of contemporary arts institutions as a way to create a space for dialogue about how we might reimagine them. The project unfolds through a series of exhibition collaborations and conversations with curators and directors reflecting on their work and its institutional and local contexts. The conversations are archived online at isforinstitute.icaphila.org. The exhibition will be accompanied by a forthcoming publication organized in collaboration with Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI).

Support for the research and development of *I is for Institute* has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. Additional support for *Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist* has been provided by 47 Canal, New York. The Kunsthalle Lissabon was founded by João Mourão and Luis Silva in Lisbon, Portugal.



COVER: Trevor Shimizu, *Memoir*, 2005–2017. Single-channel video, color, silent, 6:23 minutes, 32-inch monitor, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist is an exhibition staged across two venues, the ICA in Philadelphia and the Kunsthalle Lissabon in Lisbon, Portugal. Together they present an overview of the artist's videos, video paintings, and online interventions, offering a prescient and poignant commentary on affect and identity in our socially mediated moment. In this particular grouping, Shimizu revisits his artistic juvenilia to create a semi-fictionalized version of himself. For Shimizu, displaying his earliest artworks alongside his most recent creations is akin to the embarrassment of revisiting an old photo of himself or the music that he listened to in high school. It is both a snapshot of artistic development and a return of the repressed.

While Shimizu is recognized primarily for his paintings and drawings, the inclusion of the artist's media works help to reframe his broader practice as an expanded form of performance. Often produced using lo-fi and off-the-shelf digital technologies, his time-based works resonate with strategies employed by an earlier generation of video artists with whom he found himself in direct dialogue through his former job as technical director at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) in New York, one of the first nonprofit organizations in the United States dedicated to the advocacy of video as an art form. Just as those artists first produced work using Sony Portapaks and camcorders, Shimizu uses the technological tools at hand both to record actions for the camera and to employ the visual language of mass media for other means.

For Shimizu, video in its expanded sense has a provocative relationship to painting. From mid-twentieth-century films about Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock — where the process of the “heroic genius” male artist is documented by marks made directly on what appears to be the lens of the camera, to the touchscreens of our contemporary moment — the intersection of painting and the moving image has increasingly conflated the stroke of a paintbrush with the swipe of a hand on a screen. In his ongoing series of video paintings, Shimizu displays flat screens in the center of holes that have been cut into large unstretched canvases. These painterly frames for video are usually produced in one of two distinct genres: monochromes or gestural abstractions. While his videos and paintings are different in delivery, Shimizu sees both modes of working as coming “from the perspective of a character,” which in turn can be understood as a kind of performance of the role of the artist.¹

Within these works, his deadpan delivery sometimes makes it difficult to discern Trevor Shimizu the *individual* from the artist as *character*. The dry



Trevor Shimizu, *Suffering Thespian*, 2000, *YAWN*, 2005–2009, *The Lonely Loser Trilogy: Internet Concert*, 2018, installation view in *Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist, 2019–2020*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania at Kunsthal Lissabon. Photo: Bruno Lopes.

humor that permeates much of his work thus acts as a kind of mask for his critical investigation into identity and the presentation of the self. Although there is no singular character depicted in Shimizu’s work, he often gravitates to the figure of the lone “beta male.” Contrary to the negative associations often conjured by angry internet subcultures such as incels, edgelords, and brogrammers, Shimizu renders a more vulnerable depiction of mediated masculine subjectivity. His self-conscious and often self-effacing portrayals—from the passive fan and rejected romantic to his sentimental reflections on fatherhood and idealized fantasies of other possible selves—speak to shared insecurities and a collective need to belong.

—Alex Klein, Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE’60) Curator

1 “Confusing and Accurate and Deadpan: Trevor Shimizu Interviewed by C. Spencer Yeh,” *BOMB*, February 19, 2019, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/confusing-and-accurate-and-deadpan-trevor-shimizu-interviewed>.

"YIN-YANG"



Memoir, 2005–2017

Single-channel video, color, silent, 6:23 minutes, 32-inch monitor,
oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York

Memoir sets the stage for Shimizu's investigations of identity as a performance and site of mediation. Made using video-editing software for title slates, the text is a loosely embellished recounting of the artist's teenage years growing up in Northern California, with its countercultural residue. Shimizu originally conceived the video as a kind of shadow that could stand in for his physical self, imagining it as a way to introduce himself on first dates, while also harkening to the kind of semi-autobiographical testimonials found online. Around this time, Shimizu also began working at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI). Here he encountered artworks and artists that would prove to be influential. Among the artists with whom he collaborated and forged friendships was Dan Graham, whose video *Yin/Yang* (2006) critiques the premise of the loss of self to an artwork, underscoring Shimizu's wariness of the dark side of new age spiritualism. In this presentation he displays the video as a painting at the center of a blank canvas or white monochrome with an oversized signature, suggesting that this can also be read as a self-portrait.



Molly Ringwald (Self-Portrait), 1999

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

In the late 1990s Shimizu began performing in videos in which he frequently acted the role of the pathetic loser. While these narratives often mirrored his own romantic troubles, he found it embarrassing to see himself on camera. Painting soon became a means by which he could both abstract and idealize himself in an image. *Molly Ringwald (Self-Portrait)* is his first such foray into self-portraiture and connects to an ongoing series of paintings in which the artist portrays himself as different characters that are alternately idealized, comedic, or self-deprecating. In this work, created while he was still an art student, Shimizu depicts himself as the actor Anthony Michael Hall in the John Hughes film *The Breakfast Club* (1985). While Hughes's coming-of-age films of the 1980s often feature racist depictions of Asians, here Shimizu imagines himself as a romantic lead seated next to Molly Ringwald's character as she dines on sushi. The decision to cast himself counters the ways that Asian American masculinity has traditionally been portrayed by the mass media, while also contending with the identity politics of the 1990s. Shimizu wryly observes, "I didn't feel sexy until *Crazy Rich Asians*."²

2 Trevor Shimizu, in-person interview, September 18, 2019, referring to the popular 2018 film.



Garden, 2019

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York.

Photo: Joerg Lohse.



Still Life, 1996

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York.

Photo: Joerg Lohse.

These two artworks pair Shimizu's earliest landscape painting with one of his most recent. As a young art student, he made *Still Life* from a photograph of a friend's backyard as he sat on his dorm balcony. The small painting is emblematic of a kind of earnest sentimentality and romantic vision of the artist that Shimizu would later find cringe-worthy. While revisiting this period in his life, Shimizu was inspired to explore the genre of landscape anew. In *Garden* (alternately referred to as "Goldie's Garden" for his daughter), the artist re-creates from memory an impressionistic view of his parents' yard in Sebastopol, California. Although this return to landscape is approached from a mature perspective, it also links the artist's conflicted feelings about his older paintings and videos with his embarrassment at wanting to depict a nostalgic scene from his childhood.



Goldie's Drawing (3), 2019

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse.

Since the birth of his daughter, Shimizu has frequently made fatherhood a subject of his work. *Goldie's Drawing (3)* is a re-creation of one of her recent sketches blown up to monumental scale. If his previous video performances and paintings presented characterizations of romantic troubles, self-doubt, and sophomoric humor, these meditations on parenting act as a celebration and homage to a fleeting moment of childhood.



Inside Out Toys Unboxing (Compilation): Fear, Disgust, Joy, Bing Bong, Sadness, Anger, 2017–2019

6 single-channel videos, color, sound, 17:33 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)

Inside Out Toys Unboxing (Compilation) refers to the online genre of “unboxing” videos in which a consumer opens a new product and displays it in the round. Here, Shimizu imagines himself as a hand model carefully unwrapping his daughter’s toys. However, upon closer inspection one realizes that each toy represents a different feeling—fear, disgust, joy, sadness, and anger—suggesting that Shimizu is literally unboxing his emotions.



*What a Boring and
Disappointing Life*, 2002
Single-channel video, color, sound,
21:21 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)

In his early videos, Shimizu self-consciously places himself in front of the camera in performances that are at once earnest and sophomoric. Alternately playing the roles of frustrated actor and boyfriend, Shimizu draws on past experiences—from painful breakups to excruciating experimental theater performances—to enact various tropes of the melancholic. *What a Boring and Disappointing Life*, in particular, seems to set the stage for Shimizu's fascination with the archetype of the pathetic guy alone in his apartment.



Club, 2002–2012
Single-channel video, color, sound,
4:10 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)

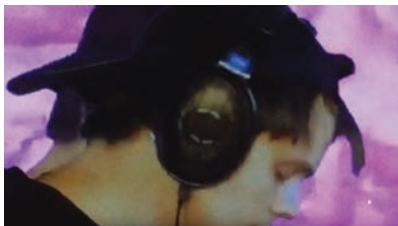
In the early 2000s, Shimizu held down various jobs photographing New York street fashion for magazines such as *Jane* and as a nightlife photographer for party promoters. Each evening he would head to the clubs and encourage people to pose for him with the hope that they would see their images on a website the following day. In anticipation of some of his later works, Shimizu used this opportunity to create a kind of performance, inserting himself into these scenarios with bleary-eyed model types, inebriated couples making out, a man making a pejorative slanted-eye gesture, and even a celebrity. His deadpan expression stands in contrast to the often unflattering and unpolished poses struck by the partygoers, whose desire to see themselves represented online speaks to a burgeoning moment before the heyday of social media.



Happy Friends Day, 2016–2019
Single-channel video, color, sound,
1 minute

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)

This video makes use of the personal photo compilations produced by Facebook as digital keepsakes and public affirmations. What previously would have been considered a deeply personal collection to be kept in a private album is now subject to a corporate algorithm that transforms random memories and friendships into a commodified highlight reel meant to remind you of your social network. Extracted from its original context, what at first appears saccharine takes on a more sinister tone.



The Lonely Loser Trilogy:
Internet Concert, 2018
Single-channel video, color, sound,
6:29 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)

The four videos that make up the *Lonely Loser Trilogy* are the culminating character study of a solitary male figure, atomized from collective society and living vicariously through a world of screens. In *Skate Videos*, exhibited previously at ICA, Shimizu donned a pair of unfashionable Google glasses and recorded himself watching skate videos on his iPad. The nimble athletes performing complex tricks to catchy soundtracks are a far cry from the dude sitting on a couch with his cat. In *Browsing Snowboards and Snowboard Gear* and *Mountain Bikes*, the artist used his iPhone to record himself scrolling through action sports equipment in real time, in effect putting a new spin on durational performance. Shimizu reflects, “I became the tech guy, lounging around the house, researching his hobbies on an iPad.”

In *Internet Concert*, screened here, we encounter a slightly updated account of this lonely figure. Averse to crowds, he attends an internet concert by the vaporwave musician George Clanton. While in previous works Shimizu retraced his footsteps and found concerts he attended in real life archived on YouTube, here he was struck by the absurdity of employing his iPhone to record a live concert streaming online from the comfort of his living room. Because Shimizu “attended” the online concert wearing headphones, the only sound audible to a viewer is the subtle rumbling of a dishwasher in the background of his apartment, underscoring that he is truly alone in what should be a shared experience.

#TREVORSHIMIZUPERFORMANCEARTIST
#IISFORINSTITUTE

ICA IS ALWAYS FREE. FOR ALL.

ICA is always Free. For All. Free admission is courtesy of Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman. ICA acknowledges the generous sponsorship of Barbara B. & Theodore R. Aronson for exhibition publications. Programming at ICA has been made possible in part by the Emily and Jerry Spiegel Fund to Support Contemporary Culture and Visual Arts and the Lise Spiegel Wilks and Jeffrey Wilks Family Foundation, and by Hilarie L. & Mitchell Morgan. Marketing is supported by Pamela Toub Berkman & David J. Berkman, Catherine O'Connor Carrafiell & John Carrafiell, and by Brett & Daniel Sundheim. Public Engagement is supported by the Bernstein Public Engagement Fund. Exhibitions at ICA are supported by Laura Tisch Broumand & Stafford Broumand, and by Stephanie & David Simon. Additional funding has been provided by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Overseers Board for the Institute of Contemporary Art, friends and members of ICA, and the University of Pennsylvania. General operating support is provided, in part, by the Philadelphia Cultural Fund. ICA receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Institute of Contemporary University Art of Pennsylvania