

#TREVORSHIMIZUPERFORMANCEARTIST
#ICAATKUNSTHALLELISSABON
#IISFORINSTITUTE

Institute of
Contemporary
University Art
of Pennsylvania

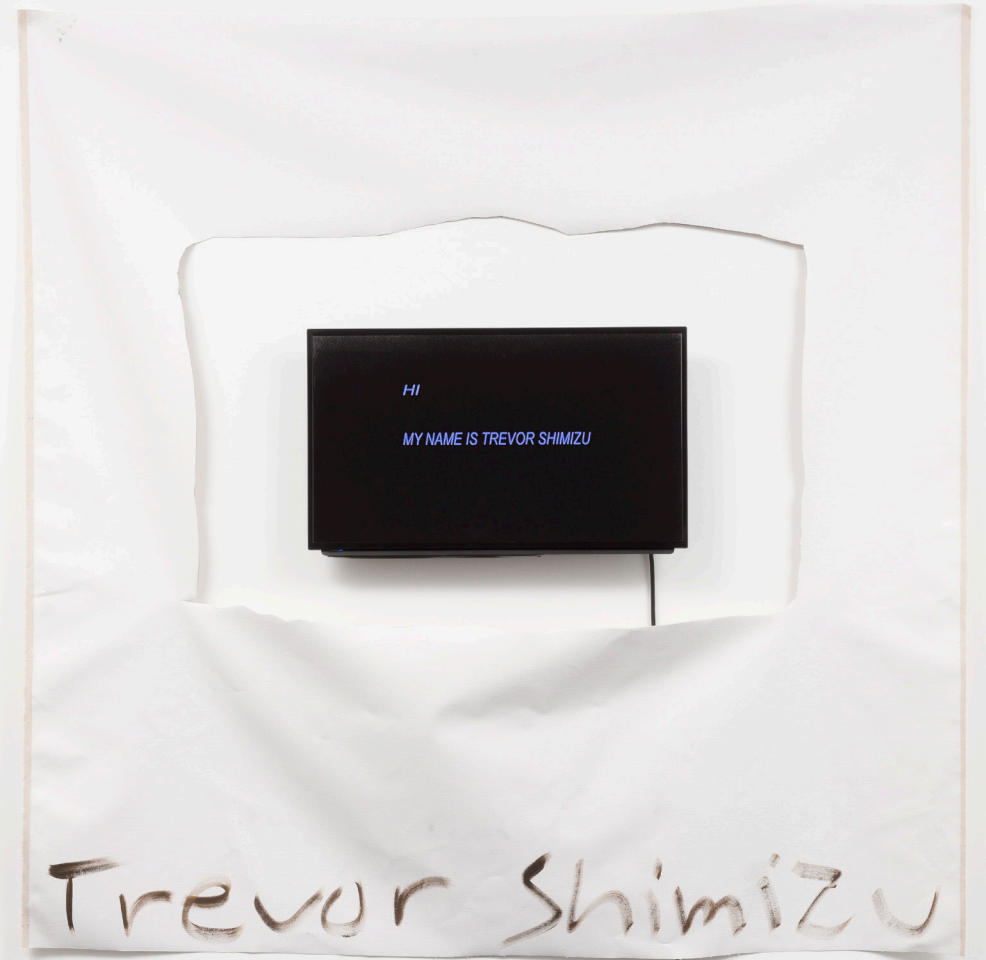
118 S. 36th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA
icaphila.org

KUNST
HALLE
LISSA
BON

R. José Sobral Cid 9E
1900-289 Lisboa, Portugal
kunsthalle-lissabon.org

NOV 20, 2019–FEB 1, 2020

Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist



ICA AT KUNSTHALLE LISSABON

Trevor Shimizu (born 1978; 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.

Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist presents 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. While Shimizu is recognized primarily for his paintings and drawings, 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. Just as those artists first produced work using Sony Portapak 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 the marks made directly on what appears to be the lens of the camera, to the touch screens 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 pairs his existing videos with large unstretched canvases with holes that have been cut out to fit a device. 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

COVER: *Memoir*, 2005. Single channel video, color, sound, 6:23 minutes. 32" monitor, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches (182.88 x 182.88 cm). Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York. Photo: Joerg Lohse

Within these works, his deadpan delivery sometimes makes it difficult to discern Trevor Shimizu the *individual* from the artist as *character*. The dry 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 sub-cultures such as incels, edgelords, and brogrammers, Shimizu offers a more vulnerable depiction of mediated masculine subjectivity. Instead, his self-conscious and often self-effacing portrayals — from the passive fan to the rejected romantic, as well as his idealized fantasies of other possible selves — speak to shared insecurities and a collective need to belong.

— Alex Klein, Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber (CHE'60) Curator
Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia

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>.



MEMOIR, 2005

Single-channel video, color, sound, 6:23 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)

Memoir acts as an introduction to the exhibition and 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. Around this time Shimizu also began working at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), one of the first nonprofit organizations in the United States dedicated to advocating for and developing video as an art form. 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.



Bruce and Kathy, 2000

Audio, 12 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Produced while Shimizu was an art student in San Francisco, *Bruce and Kathy* is an audio work created using a combination of rudimentary speech-to-text software, field recordings, and original music compositions. The narrative charts the melodramatic relationship of the protagonists, Bruce and Kathy—named after their eponymous computer voices—as it develops and detours. Based on the artist’s own experience, the structure of the dialogue reflects both his interest in dramaturgical forms by playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht and Wallace Shawn and the predictable format of mainstream romantic comedies. In this merging of the personal with the stereotype, Shimizu presages his later engagement with the distancing effects of digital interfaces that have inured us to the public promotion of what were formerly intimate experiences.



Suffering Thespian, 2000

Single-channel video, color,
sound, 5:47 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)



Emotional Month, 2000

Single-channel video, color,
sound, 2:44 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)



*What a Boring and
Disappointing Life, 2002*

Single-channel video, color,
sound, 21:21 minutes

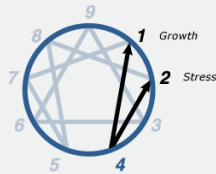
Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)

In these 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.

4

THE INDIVIDUALIST Enneagram Type Four

The Sensitive, Introspective Type:
Expressive, Dramatic, Self-Absorbed, and Temperamental



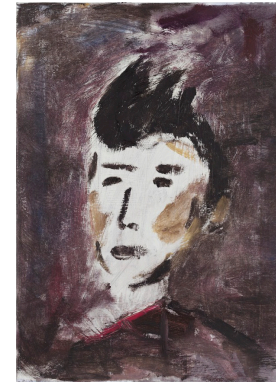
Personality Research Center, 2019
Printouts, TV/DVD player, and books

Courtesy of the artist

Personality Research Center can be understood as another form of self-portraiture and is the outgrowth of the artist’s engagement with the Enneagram Personality Test, described by its makers as a “powerful and insightful tool for understanding ourselves and others.”² Developed in 1997 by The Enneagram Institute—whose roots can be found in the commune Arica and the late 1960s human potential movement—the test seeks to connect individuals with their “basic personality type” through a diagram and series of introspective questions. Shimizu determined himself to be a Type 4 personality, “the individualist,” described as “expressive, dramatic, self-absorbed, and temperamental.”³ The artist read this result as a justification for his formerly low self-esteem and depressive tendencies, while also finding within it a potential for fantasy and artistic projection. In this resource center you are invited to learn more about the Type 4 personality through official Enneagram literature and the work of celebrities and authors who share Shimizu’s personality traits.

2 Enneagram Institute, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/about>.

3 Ibid.

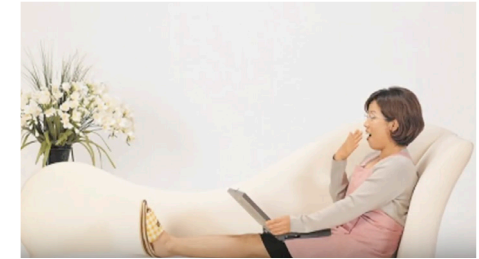


Self-Portrait Asian Heartthrob, 2008
Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

Shimizu wryly observes, “I didn’t feel sexy until *Crazy Rich Asians*.”⁴ *Self-Portrait Asian Heartthrob* 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 instance, Shimizu was inspired by seeing actor James Franco styled as Hollywood icon James Dean and imagined himself in the role of the rugged, romantic lead. 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.

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



YAWN, 2005–2009
Single-channel video, color,
sound, 1:04 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)

While working at EAI in the mid-2000s, Shimizu noticed an abundance of works by artists responding to the availability of found, online content made newly possible by the advent of Google Images. This video can be read as a tongue-in-cheek response to a certain fashionable internet aesthetic, while simultaneously dabbling in the form itself.



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

Oil on canvas, monitor, and 6 single-channel videos, color, sound, 17:33 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

Inside Out Toys Unboxing (Compilation) refers to the genre of “unboxing” videos found online in which a consumer opens a new product and displays it in the round. Here, Shimizu imagines himself as a hand model 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.



Happy Friends Day, 2016–2019

Oil on canvas, monitor, and single-channel video, color, sound, 1 minute

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

This video painting makes use of the personal photo compilations produced by Facebook as digital keepsakes and public affirmations. What would previously 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.

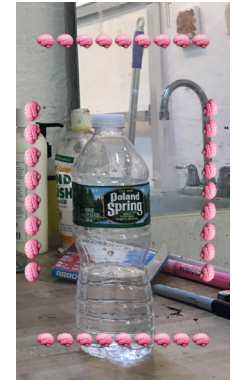


Rage Against the Machine and The Red Hot Chili Peppers Live at the Tibetan Freedom Concert, 1996–2019

Oil on canvas, monitor, and 2 single-channel videos, color, sound, 56 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

In 1996 Shimizu attended the Tibetan Freedom Concert in San Francisco, which featured a star-studded lineup including the Beastie Boys and Björk. While watching Rage Against the Machine’s set, he was struck in the face and suffered a black eye. Looking back on the experience, he found the footage of the concert online and recalled himself holding an ice pack on his injury while watching the Red Hot Chili Peppers perform. For Shimizu, this merging of personal experience, collective memory, and nostalgia is also a kind of off-camera performance.

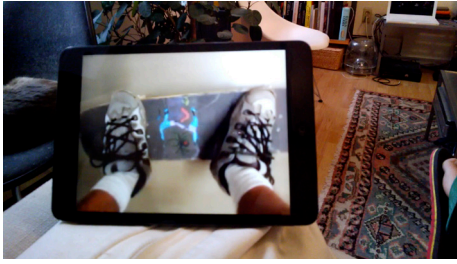


Deleted Stories and Unused Story Ideas, 2018–2019

Single-channel videos, color, sound, 2 minutes

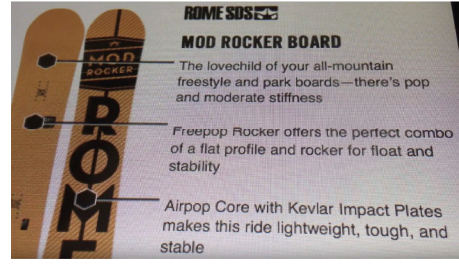
Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts InterMix (EAI)

Prompted in part by his facing the reality of turning forty, and similar in tone to his slapstick-style self-portraits, *Deleted Stories* and *Unused Story Ideas* presents what one presumes is the artist in a series of potentially embarrassing situations. Shimizu sees these short videos — which would have been momentarily viewed by a small audience via Instagram Stories before disappearing — as a kind of exclusive performance. While this format is meant as a temporary stream of an individual’s most enviable moments, Shimizu subverts the purpose of the social media platform by using it to memorialize painfully bad jokes and content as banal as an egg-and-cheese sandwich.



*The Lonely Loser Trilogy:
Skate Videos, 2014*
Single-channel video, color,
sound, 14:02 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)



*The Lonely Loser Trilogy:
Browsing Snowboards and
Snowboard Gear, 2014*
Single-channel video, color,
sound, 16:56 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)



*The Lonely Loser Trilogy:
Mountain Bikes, 2014*
Single-channel video, color,
sound, 18:13 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI)



*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 experience and living vicariously through a world of screens. In *Skate Videos*, Shimizu dons a pair of unfashionable Google glasses and records 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." Finally, in *Internet Concert* 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 and from the comfort of his living room.



Unfollowers (2), 2019
Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal



Unfollowers (3), 2019
Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal

The comedian Groucho Marx famously stated, “Please accept my resignation. I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member.” With this in mind, Shimizu used special software to detect who had “unfollowed” him on Instagram. Noticing that both friends and family members were among the “unfollowers,” he decided to commit these slight and secretive social infractions to painting. In the process, he both suggests a reversal of conceptual artist Vito Acconci’s iconic *Following Piece* (1969) and harkens back to the sad-sack character encountered in many of his own works.

Support for the research and development of *I is for InSTITUTE* has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.



The Kunsthalle Lissabon was founded by João Mourão and Luis Silva in Lisbon, Portugal, and is supported by República Portuguesa, Direção-Geral das Artes, FfAI and Coleção Maria e Armando Cabral. Additional support for *Trevor Shimizu: Performance Artist* is provided by Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento, Fundação EDP, Galerias Municipais/EGEAC, Galeria Francisco Fino, MONITOR LISBON and Galeria Vera Cortês.

