

Rumor Has It

Taro Masushio

23 December 2020 — 20 February 2021



Empty Gallery is pleased to present *Rumor Has It*, New York-based artist Taro Masushio's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Masushio's conceptual practice positions photography as ontological proposition or speculative machine within a nexus which also includes prose, video, drawing, and sculpture. He investigates the capacity of images, not to document an underlying reality, but to manipulate and endlessly extend our own perception— mobilizing the domains of time, space, and affect as plastic qualities to be sculpted in the pursuit of other possible worlds.

The body of work which comprises *Rumor Has It* originates from Masushio's fateful encounter with an idiosyncratic archive of homoerotica housed within a humble Saitama apartment. Captivated by this trove of precious negatives and files, these charged repositories of furtive desire populated only by nameless boys, Masushio discovers the figure of En'ya, a suitable conduit for his obsessions. Consisting of photography, video, and a single monolithic sculpture, the exhibition is centered around the historical enigma of Jun'ichi En'ya (1916-1971), known colloquially as "Uncle from Osaka". Amongst many other things— a father, a husband, a photo-lab technician, and other roles which are doubtless unknown— En'ya was one of the earliest homoerotic photographers in Japan. An itinerant cameraman who was spurred by his compulsions to shoot the naked bodies of some two thousand different men; the author of a personal atlas of desire. Rather than seeking to evoke the inaccessible truth of this historical figure, Masushio instead conjures the specter of one possible En'ya through a ritualistic tracing (or repetition) of his life and work— one which is enacted through the volatile media of his own body.

This approach is crystallized in a series of rephotographed drawings which Masushio renders laboriously in graphite after individual frames by En'ya— each sketch, a single image from Uncle's archive. Through this concentrated act of (re)creation, it might be imagined that the reflected light inscribed not only on the photographic negative, but in the distant past, upon the surface of En'ya's retina (and thus within the chemical reactions of his cells) is channeled through Masushio's own nervous system and muscle fibers, undergoing changes in temperature and composition. A rigorous insistence on both a certain neutrality and a realist fidelity to the original images serves only to highlight their essential divergences— the unbridgeable space between these two actors; a chasm which can only be cleared by thought. The resulting works are subtle palimpsests, emanations from an untimely hybrid or doubled existence: En'ya-Masushio / Masushio-En'ya.

This process of doubling is echoed in the other works within the exhibition. A series of still-lives document ephemera and found objects, both real and imagined. Some were gathered by Masushio on pilgrimages to En'ya's old neighborhood— where armed with half-remembered anecdotes and addresses, he attempted to add his presence to the spaces once inhabited by this man— others are purely fictive, domestic props which may conceivably have populated discrete moments of a life. Seemingly stripped of context, these tawdry and commonplace objects are some of the most radically exposed, and therefore, erotic, images in the exhibiton. A cheap bar of soap, an open bottle of Sapporo, a bowl of *tamagogami*: all of these apparently simple commercial items conceal a hidden plenum of potential meaning. They serve simultaneously as fictive documents of the Showa-era material culture which En'ya inhabited, self-reflexive glosses on the photographic medium, and lewd inside-jokes. Sidestepping figuration, they nevertheless allude to a certain proximity to or intimacy with the rhythms, compulsions, and exigencies of an absent body.

Another series of images depicts Asagao or morning glories, the care of which is sometimes used as a tool for instructing Japanese schoolchildren in certain aspects of national character and virtue. As in Masushio's other still lifes, the cultural ubiquity or apparent blandness of the subject-matter functions as a sort of camouflage for other potential meanings. Although morning glories bloom during the day and close their buds tightly at night, Masushio chooses to photograph them during the latter part of this cycle, leaving the viewer to imagine the invisible movement occurring within the interior of these sealed blossoms; each closed form an active potentiality. These hermetic blooms imply both the idea of embodied time spent performing social roles, and the simultaneous maintenance of a private world— an allusion not only to En'ya himself but to a whole libidinal economy and mode of existence. By peeping on these flowers, and attentively capturing their minute nocturnal stirrings, Masushio directs our attention to a promiscuous dialectic of presence and absence, display and withdrawal, hiding and revealing— sensitizing the viewer to the manner in which something as simple as a glance, a gesture, or a mode of looking can conceal the threshold of a universe.

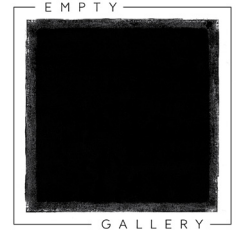
About Taro Masushio

Born in Japan, Taro Masushio is an artist based in New York City. He received his BA from UC Berkeley and MFA from New York University, and has taught at both institutions. His works have been exhibited internationally including at 47 Canal, Capsule Shanghai, Immanence, Pacific Film Archive, and other venues.

聽聞說

增鹽太朗

2020 年 12 月 23 日至 2021 年 2 月 20 日



Empty Gallery 誠意帶來最新展覽，來自紐約藝術家增鹽太朗與畫廊合作的首個個展《聽聞說》。在增鹽的概念實踐中，攝影被視為本體論命題又或是涵蓋散文、錄像及雕塑間連串關係的推測機器。他探究影像的容納能力，但這並非指要去記錄一個底層現實，而是去操控和無限延伸我們自有的知覺——動用空間、時間和情感領域，將其視之為造形特質，以雕刻進對其他可能世界的追逐當中。

《聽聞說》展出的作品皆是增鹽對存置於東京一所公寓裡的特殊同性戀檔案日夜沉迷研讀之果。增鹽被這些珍貴的底片和檔案、這些充滿著永遠年輕無名男孩們慾望的儲存庫、這些對隱藏在他們外表下另個一存在境域稍瞬即逝的瞥見所發出的氣味吸引，他發現了豔治（En'ya）這個人物，並將其成為他執念的理想導管。《聽聞說》由攝影、錄像和單件石雕作品組成，展覽圍繞著人們稱為「大阪叔叔」（Uncle from Osaka）的豔治順一（Jun'ichi En'ya）（1916-1971）這位謎樣的人物而開展。豔治有眾多身份（父親，丈夫、攝影實驗室技術員以及不為人知的其他角色），而其中一個是日本最早期同性戀攝影師之一。一個受到內心強烈衝動的鞭撻，拍攝大約二千個男人裸體的遊盪攝影師；個人慾望圖集的作者。增鹽沒有試圖喚起這個人物無法企及的歷史真相，反而是透過對其生平與作品一個儀式性的勾勒（或重覆），召喚其中一個可能的豔治魂魄——透過其自身的揮發性媒介而上演的那個。

這方式在一系列圖畫的再拍攝作品中清楚可見。增鹽花了很多功夫用石墨仔細描畫豔治多張單獨作品——每幅素描都是叔叔檔案裡的一張影像。透過這（再）創作行為，可以想像，當中所捕捉的現實不只刻畫於攝影底片，還在遙遠的過去，在叔叔的視網膜表面之上（也因而在其細胞的化學反應之中），並通過增鹽的神經系統和肌肉纖維，再經歷溫度和構成的細微變化。增鹽嚴格堅持對原影像要有某種中立性和實際的忠誠，而這更突顯兩者本質上的分別——兩位扮演者間無法橋接的空間；一道只能靠思考以跨越的鴻溝。得出的作品是精妙的重寫紙，散發自一個不合於時的混雜又或是雙重存在：豔治-增鹽、增鹽-豔治。

是次展出的其他作品均呼應著這種重疊的過程。一系列靜物作品記錄即耗現成物，既是真實也是想像。當中有些是增鹽在前往豔治舊居附近（那裡有部份記下的軼事和地址）的朝聖之旅時所收集的，他嘗試把自己的出現加進這個男人曾棲身的空間；而有些是純粹虛構的家用道具，或可想像，佔據它們當中的，是一個生命割裂的不同瞬間。像是把背景剝掉了，這些雜亂平常之物出乎意料地成了展覽中暴露得最徹底，並因此而色情的影像。一塊廉價的肥皂，一瓶開了的七寶札幌啤酒，一碗玉子蟹——所有這些看似簡單的商品都隱藏了一個充滿潛在意義的隱蔽空間。它們同時作為豔治所居的昭和時代物質文化的虛構文獻、攝影形式本質自我反思的評註，以及下流的圈內笑話。它們迴避形塑，但仍暗示某種與一個不在場身體的節奏、其無法壓抑的衝動與需要的貼近或親密。

另一系列照片拍攝的是牽牛花，有時日本學童需要照料它們以學習某方面的民族特性和美德。在增鹽的其他靜物作品中，文化的無處不在又或對題材明顯的冷漠乃作為對其他潛在意義的某種偽裝。雖然牽牛花日間盛放而晚上則花蕾緊閉，增鹽選擇拍攝這個循環的尾段，留待觀者去想像在緊閉花蕾內發生的這些隱形活動。這些於密閉中的盛放同時意味著花在履行社會角色的具體時間和對私人世界的維護。因著對這些花朵的窺視和專注地捕捉它們片刻的夜間萌動，增鹽把我們的注意力帶到一個在場與不在場、展示與回退、隱藏與揭示的混雜辯證——使觀者意識到某些簡單事物如匆匆一瞥，一個姿態又或一個觀看方式，都可隱藏一道進入一個宇宙世界的門。

關於增鹽太朗

藝術家增鹽太朗生於日本，現居紐約。他先後畢業於柏克萊加州大學及紐約大學的學士及碩士課程，及後曾於這兩所大學任教。他的作品曾於各地展出，包括 **47 Canal**、**胶囊上海**、**Immanence** 及太平洋電影檔案館等。