

Taro Masushio
Liar, Liar
April 6–May 13

Ulrik is pleased to present Taro Masushio's first solo exhibition in New York. The show comprises new works made over the last six months during the artist's stay in Mönchengladbach, along with earlier series made in Osaka and New York.

Number:

When Taro Masushio dialed (0720) 41-1680, an announcement declaring the absence of a receiver repeated three times. For the artist, the announcement was like a diagram of an absent sculpture, rebuilding and dismantling itself. In *(0720) 41-1680*, the numbers—abstractions—are turning into flesh. Masushio discovered this phone number while doing research at the archives of city hall in Hirakata, a small town in Osaka prefecture. The number belonged to one of the earliest pornographers in Japan, Jun'ichi En'ya (1916-1971), often referred to as "The Uncle from Osaka."

Located between a restaurant and an apartment building, En'ya's "Sun Photo Lab" allowed him a place to create and circulate illegal homoerotic images. En'ya's prolific photographic output (and the secrecy and criminality surrounding it) provide a thematic basis for Masushio's practice. These aspects of En'ya's life resonate with an at times self-contradicting hermeneutics at work in Masushio's use of images. Suspicion provides a useful tool through which to view this exhibition.

Diptychs:

The objects in *Untitled* diptychs are markers of Masushio being in a foreign place called Nordrhein-Westfalen. They follow a logic of soft-personal anecdote and alienated shopping. Masushio was inspired by Hausmuseum Otzenrath in Jüchen, where an elderly woman has collected objects from her old neighbors who were being displaced.

One diptych presents an unformed assemblage of toxic metal materials. These ambiguous objects commemorate a Germanic New Year's tradition where molten lead is thrown into cold water, an act of collective divination for the coming year.

Hot dogs originate from Austrian or German wieners or wüsts, but then they are reverse imported back with a different symbolic function of a hot dog as an idea, packed in bottles with stars and stripes. In the diptych, one stands and the other...does not.

Twinks:

The vast majority of En'ya's work was eventually confiscated by the police and destroyed, but some remain in an "archive". *Untitled 3, 5* and *6* are based on snapshots secretly taken by Masushio during his visit to this archive, as cameras are not allowed there. He traced the photographs to make the drawings from the images and then rephotographed them. Hiding a form in another form, Masushio is interested in the erotics of distance.

The Soloist

Shot in the dense opaque darkness, *Untitled 26* evokes a figure who might have been En'ya's model, or conversely the antiheroic protagonist himself. This image was taken with a very simple set up of only three lights, tatami, the body, and the socks. The face is obscured, and the identity irresolvable—but it is a device.

Still Lives

These still lives, based on objects collected from En'ya's neighborhood, exist in the same black virtual non-space, a vacuum representing the distance between layers of time.

The bar of soap in *Untitled 11* was purchased from a Sentō (bath house) near En'ya's dwelling. Is the image engraved on its surface an eye and thus a reference to the photographic action taken?

In *Untitled 17*, the bottle in front bears a classical and recognizable symbol alluding to a historical time. Not unlike Coca-Cola, Mitsuya cider has continuously been manufactured since 1884. This particular bottle design started selling in 1972, a year after En'ya died. The phantom bottle standing behind it bears a contemporary label and acts as a counterpart.

Untitled 16 portrays an everyday item popular for its long shelf life, emptied onto a bowl. Stemming from the canned foods, the term canning (or canned) in Japanese means being restrained under a circumstance as though one is inside of a can, indeed one is like the severed fish filets. Emptied onto a bowl the fish exposes its skeletons and organs. The time has come.

Bio:

Taro Masushio is a Japanese artist based in New York. He received his BA from UC Berkeley and MFA from New York University, and has taught at both institutions. Masushio's work has been exhibited and screened at Empty Gallery, Bonner Kunstverein, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, Normal Screen, 47 Canal, and Hordaland Kunstsenter, among other venues.