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Gagosian to Present Landmark Tetsuya Ishida Survey Curated by Cecilia Alemani

Featuring More Than 80 Paintings, *My Anxious Self* Is the Most Comprehensive Exhibition of the Artist's Work Ever Presented Outside of Japan

Opening in New York on September 12, 2023



Tetsuya Ishida, *Refuel Meal*, 1996, acrylic on board, in 2 parts, overall: 57 3/8 × 81 1/8 inches (145.6 × 206 cm), Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan © Tetsuya Ishida Estate

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At first, it was a self-portrait. I tried to make myself—my weak self, my pitiful self, my anxious self—into a joke or something funny that could be laughed at. It was sometimes seen as a parody or satire referring to contemporary people. As I continued to think about this, I expanded it to include consumers, city-dwellers, workers, and the Japanese people.

—Tetsuya Ishida

NEW YORK, September 5, 2023—Gagosian is pleased to announce *My Anxious Self*, an extensive exhibition of paintings by the late Tetsuya Ishida (1973–2005) at Gagosian, 555 West 24th Street, New York, opening on September 12. Curated by Cecilia Alemani, the survey follows the announcement of Gagosian's global representation of the Tetsuya Ishida Estate, which, along with notable private collections and the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan, lent more than eighty works to the exhibition. *My Anxious Self* is the most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work to have been staged outside of Japan, and his first ever in New York.

Over the course of just ten years, Ishida produced a striking body of work centered on the theme of human alienation. He emerged as an artist during Japan's "Lost Decade," a recession that lasted through the 1990s, and his paintings capture the feelings of hopelessness, claustrophobia, and

disconnection that characterized Japanese society during this time—even in the wake of its rapid technological advancement. Before his untimely death in 2005, Ishida conjured allegories of the challenges of contemporary life in paintings and works on paper charged with Kafkaesque absurdity.

In his introduction to the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, Michiaki Ishida, the artist's brother, confides, "Tetsuya's wallet, which he kept until the end of his life, contained several American one-dollar bills. Perhaps it was his wish to go to New York, the center of contemporary art, one day. We are grateful that he finally has a chance to spend them." Larry Gagosian, in his foreword to the publication, observes that Ishida's oeuvre constitutes "a grand inquiry into the human condition in a way that feels urgent, timeless, and unusual for an artist so young."

Nick Simunovic, senior director of Gagosian in Asia, commented: "I've been captivated by Ishida's work since first being introduced to it over fifteen years ago. On the fiftieth anniversary of his birth, we are honored to present his paintings in New York. With a significant selection of over eighty works out of just over two hundred that Ishida created during his lifetime, this exhibition offers a chance for a new audience to encounter his extraordinary oeuvre."

In his catalogue essay, Diethard Leopold, cofounder and curator of the Leopold Museum, Vienna, and a former psychotherapist, examines Ishida's frequent use of his own face in his paintings. This notably un-Japanese strategy is applied, he argues, not for the purposes of self-portraiture, but instead as a tool for critical observation of the common "salaryman." Leopold characterizes the motif as an instance of the psychoanalytical meeting the sociological and traces this form of self-portraiture in Ishida's oeuvre through various categories of image, all of which are represented in Alemani's selection for the exhibition in New York.

My Anxious Self is divided into five thematic parts, each of which occupies a separate room in the gallery. "Waiting for a Chance" explores ideas of estrangement and the loss of self through images of assembly lines and regimented worker-consumers. Many of the paintings in this grouping also depict people fused with or partially transformed into machines; *Interview* (1998), for example, reimagines a trio of interviewers as enormous microscopes preparing to examine a hapless candidate. Another section, "Helpless Metamorphoses," features works portraying human bodies comingled with animals or objects, strongly recalling the oneiric themes of Surrealism but augmenting that movement's rangy probing of the unconscious psyche with a social critique specific to Ishida's millennial time and place.

"Desperately Lonely" focuses on scenes of solitude and isolation set in built interiors that are often also being invaded by nature or merging in other ways with the outside world. In *Plant-Eating Dragon* (2004), for example, a curled-up man surrounded by drug paraphernalia wraps himself in a blanket that takes the form of a grassy field dotted with trees and crisscrossed by dirt paths. Another section, "Neo-Tokyo," concentrates on cityscapes and urban exteriors, additionally featuring source materials for Ishida's work such as movies, news broadcasts, and the artist's favorite manga and anime. Finally, "Restless Dream" comprises paintings dominated by haunting images of maternity and childhood, dreams and death. In *Characters* (2003), a naked figure—as ever, it could be the artist's own—lies on a white bed surrounded by falling leaves. Within his body, four progressively smaller and paler versions are nested, matryoshka style, the smallest one sitting up as if ready to take its leave.

The exhibition catalogue features an introduction by Michiaki Ishida, a foreword by Larry Gagosian, essays by Alemani and Leopold, and "The Red Cocoon," a short story about a surreal metamorphosis by award-winning Japanese writer Kobo Abe.

Tetsuya Ishida was born in Yaizu, Japan, in 1973, and died in Sagami-hara, Japan, in 2005. Solo exhibitions include Sumpu Museum, Shizuoka, Japan (2006); *Canvas of Sadness*, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan (2007); CB Collection, Tokyo (2007); *Self-Portraits of Ourselves*, Nerima Art Museum, Tokyo (2008); and *Notes, Evidence of Dreams*, Ashikaga Museum of Art (2013, traveled in Japan to Hiratsuka Museum of Art; Tonami Art Museum, Toyama; and Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art through 2014); *Saving the World with a Brushstroke*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2014–15); and *Self-Portrait of Other*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2019, traveled to Wrightwood 659, Chicago). Ishida's work was also included in the 4th Yokohama Triennale (2011), 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014), and 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015).

#TetsuyaIshida

TETSUYA ISHIDA

My Anxious Self

Curated by Cecilia Alemani

Opening reception: Tuesday, September 12, 6–8pm

September 12–October 21, 2023

555 West 24th Street, New York

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