

Sly Morikawa

What was, what will be

15.03.2025–27.04.2025



List of works

Ground floor (L-R):

City of Roses, 2024, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 29.7 x 42cm

Untitled, 2022–24 inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 30.3 x 36.5cm

Devotion, 2024, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 124.5 x 85.4cm

First floor (L-R):

Untitled, 2021–24, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 21 x 29.7cm

White Socks, 2023, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 125.2 x 85.2cm

Born Under a Bad Sign, 2021, single-channel video, 4m 32s

24/7 Paradise, 2023, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 85.2 x 125.2cm

Born Under a Bad Sign, 2021, inkjet print on Hahnemühle photo rag pearl, 85.2 x 125.2cm

There is a scene in Yasujiro Ozu's 1951 film *Early Spring* where middle-aged couple Shukichi and Shige Mamiya converse over a packed lunch in a Tokyo park. The family patriarch Shukichi Mamiya (played by Ichirō Sugai) sighingly proclaims "How time flies" before reflecting upon his family: "Koichi's married. We have grandchildren. Noriko's getting married. This may be the happiest time of our lives." His wife Shige (portrayed by Chieko Higashiyama) turns to Shukichi, beaming: "You think so? Things might get even better" delivered in an uplifting tone. "No, we mustn't get greedy," he replies with reserved dignity, expressing a deep appreciation for the here and now.

This brief moment of introspection is underscored by the intangible sentiment of 物の哀れ (mono no aware), often translated as 'the pathos of things,' a guiding principle of Sly Morikawa and her photomedia practice. A uniquely and intrinsically Japanese phrase, 'mono no aware' was revived in the 18th century by Heian period literary scholar Motoori Norinaga and attempts to define an unspoken understanding of the grounding ephemerality of the beauty within existence, among all things living and inanimate. Of the concept, Morikawa explains:

When I think of 'mono no aware,' I think of the transient and delicate nature of life, the passing of precious time. I feel a gentle sadness towards the experience of impermanence in life, but I also feel a deep serenity in my acceptance of the inevitable.

This exhibition title, *What was, what will be* acts as a personal translation of 'mono no aware' by the artist, encompassing both her philosophical outlook on our world and Morikawa's relationship to the medium of photography. Using vintage, consumer-grade cameras and standard 35mm film, Morikawa's practice exists in integers of instants. "Beauty lies in the fleetingness of time, and for me these moments, these memories, have always been best preserved through the practice of photography," she explains, considering her relationship to the material properties of the artform.

The artist approaches photography as an outsider, never undertaking formal education in fine arts and gravitating to personal interests existing within fringe and underground subcultures. While Sly Morikawa often works in both candid and directed portraiture, it is within precious incidental encounters of the everyday that crystallise her sense of 'mono no aware.' It is the dancing plumes of screeching tyre smoke as finely tuned Mitsubishi drifts on hot bitumen; the elegant fluttering of a stranger's laundry in the wind; the simple sharing a meal with loved ones.

Through mirrors and mechanics a snippet of life is impressed on acetate which, once chemically processed, creates an object of permanence: the negative. The physical negative is both a recording and a symbol of a memory; it is an item ascribed importance through personal narrative while also an impartial document. This duality characterises *What was, what will be* as Sly Morikawa navigates the idea of space between two states of being, one that has passed and one that is yet to be. In Japanese, this state of flux is known as chasms in time-space, 間 ('ma,' otherwise known as the gaps in-between). This exhibition sees the artist presenting works throughout her career enmeshed, selections across bodies of work unbound by her established compilation and publication practice. For Morikawa, the exhibition process offers a sense of calming wholeness: "I want to experience everything to truly understand the meaning of balance and harmony."

Like Ozu's characters, Sly Morikawa places us between wistful nostalgia and an anxiously excitable future. Expressed through the sentimental grain of analogue photography, Morikawa whisperingly asks us to slow down and cherish the present—the fragile impossibility of our concurrent existences. We mustn't be too greedy, after all.