

David Pagel. "Review: Takako Yamaguchi's hyper-real paintings: Portraits that won't look you in the eye," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 2018.

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The way men look at women has been an issue in contemporary art for at least 50 years. The way men behave toward women has become a major social issue only recently, especially as it relates to the disgusting behavior of high-profile predators in business, politics and entertainment.

Such emotionally loaded and morally charged ideas come to mind when at Takako Yamaguchi's exhibition at As Is, a recently opened gallery in Pico-Union. Made up of nine quietly astonishing, larger-than-lifesize oils on canvas, Yamaguchi's show reveals that we all have lots to learn when looking at one another — and, equally important, that we reveal ourselves when we do so. Looking is a two-way street.

Each of the L.A. painter's exceptionally detailed pictures is a tightly cropped close-up of her chest, torso or waist. Each is meticulously rendered, in Photo-Realist fashion, so that every thread, button and bit of embroidered fabric appears to be the most important thing in the world, its textures palpable, its tints vivid.

The same goes for the soft shadows that fall across the cardigans, coats and blouses Yamaguchi wears, as well as the pores of her skin, which can be glimpsed above the high necklines she favors as well as through the tiny openings of a crocheted top and a fancy red blouse.

To get a sense of the devotion and labor-intense craftsmanship that Yamaguchi brings to her paintings, think of each as a portrait painted by someone too humble or shy to look her subject in the eye.

Now imagine a self-portrait painted in that manner: the painter casting her glance downward, perhaps bowing her head as she does so, and then rendering, with exceptional fidelity to what she sees — her own chest and neckline.

That internal conflict — and the complexity of identity it implies — takes potent shape in Yamaguchi's subtle paintings. At the same time, her contemplative works invite visitors to experience similar complexities: of our own selves divided between outside and in, viewer and viewed, subject and object. What you see is a whole lot more than what you see.

Yamaguchi's inside-out self-portraits function much like Charles Ray's larger-than-lifesize mannequins, Cindy Sherman's photographic role-playing and Salomon Huerta's portraits of the backs of people's heads: All turn the tables on established relationships to emphasize the elusiveness of identity and our ever-changing places in it all.