

## Two-Person Exhibition “Whose Desire?” by Lea Embeli and Layla Yamamoto

Exhibition Title : “Whose Desire?”

Exhibiting Artists : Lea Embeli, Layla Yamamoto

Duration : 2/14 (Sat.) - 2/25 (Wed.), 2026

Opening Reception : 2/14 (Sat.) 4-6pm, Artist Talk : Same Day 5-6pm

\*One-drink minimum (¥1,000), last order at 5:40pm.

Venue : NIOAA GALLERY TOKYO (The Coffee Brew Club Gallery Room)

(3F, Tokyu Plaza Harajuku “Harakado,” 6-31-21 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001, JAPAN)

Hours : Weekdays 8am-11pm, Weekends and National Holidays 11am-6pm

Organized by WAITINGROOM / Curated by Kokoro Kimura

\*Open every day during the exhibition period.

\*Artists, Lea Embeli and Layla Yamamoto will be present at the opening reception on 2/14, Sat. 4-6pm and the exhibition opens at 11am before the reception.

Organized by WAITINGROOM (curated by Kokoro Kimura), the two-person exhibition “Whose Desire?,” featuring Lea Embeli and Layla Yamamoto, will be on view from Saturday, February 14 to Wednesday, February 25, 2026, at NIOAA GALLERY TOKYO (The Coffee Brew Club Gallery Room). While referencing different fields—AI and anime and manga culture—both artists examine how specific images are created, circulated, and shared, revealing the social norms and power structures embedded in the images themselves and within our inner lives. The exhibition explores “ideals” that are sometimes desired from within and sometimes imposed on our bodies. We invite you to see how the artists gather and transform the overlooked distortions and frictions that emerge in the process of approaching these ideals.



Left : Layla Yamamoto, Who said it was simple? 7, 2026, acrylic on canvas, 910 x 727 mm (Reference Image)

Right : Lea Embeli, Reformed from a swirl of ashes and starlight, 2025, acrylic, linen on panel, 900 x 1300 x 30 mm

### Tracing Entangled Desires, Imagining Alternative Ideals

The question “Whose Desire?” might seem to aim at separating the desiring subject and the desired object. In this exhibition, however, the question instead creates a space of hesitation before such separation, drawing our attention to the complex entanglements of desires between self and others, and between individual and collective, around socially constructed ideals.

Lea Embeli references traditional depictions of women in Western art history and transforms them with AI—a contemporary collective of intelligence and ideals. In works inspired by Venus, the goddess of Roman mythology, multiple imperfect images generated by AI models are layered. By tracing the long history of “replicating ideal bodies” in Western art, while simultaneously preserving the misinterpretations that arise through dialogue with AI, Embeli reveals alternative possibilities of beauty erased during the homogenization of ideals. Starting with the traditional ideal image, Embeli gathers the residual traces and deviations that appear during its reinterpretation, visualizing both the forces that sustain ideals as norms and the dynamics that disrupt them from within.

Meanwhile, Layla Yamamoto uncovers the male-centered perspectives within anime and manga culture and the its marginalized position in the art world, while exploring new forms of character representation from feminist and queer perspectives. “Sisterhood,” the central theme of her exhibited series, has served as a principle for reconnecting women divided by male-dominated social structures and inherently carries the potential for solidarity that transcends differences. However, as the words of Audre Lorde referenced in this series point out, when sisterhood assumes homogeneity, it risks rendering invisible differences such as race, class, sexuality, and cultural background, while marginalizing the frictions, conflicts, and sometimes ruptures that arise when different positions intersect. Solidarity that suppresses difference can, in turn, reproduce existing power structures.

As demonstrated by the practices of both artists, we desire to conform to, deviate from, overturn, or occupy all—or none—of these states in relation to socially constructed ideals. This constant flow of desire encourages us to look beyond identifying “who” desires or is desired, toward the political, social, and cultural structures that shape how ideals are desired, shared, and reproduced. By reflecting on these structures, we can begin to imagine forms of life that emerge in the gaps and outside normative ideals.

## About the artist



Left : Seated, 2024, acrylic, linen on panel, digital print, 900 x 600 mm

Right : Supernova 1/2, 2025, acrylic on panel, digital print, 250 x 250 mm

## Lea Embeli

Lea Embeli is an artist, mainly working in the field of painting. She graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade, specializing in Applied Painting, where she also completed her MA studies. During her studies, she was awarded multiple scholarships, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development scholarship and the Dositej scholarship from the Foundation for Young Talents. She is the recipient of the Aleksandar Tomašević Award for academic excellence, the ULUPUDS Award in the field of applied painting, and the Vučković Award for young artists from her hometown, Pančevo. In 2021, she received the MEXT Japanese government scholarship for research in oil painting at Tokyo University of the Arts, where she became a regular student and has been pursuing her second MA since April 2023. She graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts in March 2025 and continues to work as an artist between Japan and Serbia. Beyond painting, she began illustrating books in 2016 for publishers such as "Zavod," "Bigz," and "Kreativni centar," as well as the French publisher "Fleurus." She has also worked in animation as a character designer and concept artist for studios including ToBlink Studios and Bunker in Serbia, as well as Animoon Studios in Poland. Additionally, she briefly worked as a teaching assistant in painting techniques at the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade.



Left : I hate flowers 19, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 727 x 606 mm

Right : Whispers of Defiance 1, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 530 x 455 mm

## Layla Yamamoto

Layla Yamamoto is a Tokyo-based artist who investigates socio-political themes in Japan through feminist and postcolonial lenses. Her work critiques the history of nuclear power in postwar Japan and the structural sexual violence embedded in Japanese society, while reinterpreting anime and manga culture through feminist and queer perspectives. She studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and, upon returning to Japan, has primarily exhibited her work domestically. In addition to her artistic practice, Yamamoto has served as a guest lecturer at Tokyo University of the Arts, Joshibi University of Art and Design, and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, contributing to the field of education. She also works as an independent curator; her first curatorial project, which focused on state control over women's bodies and sexuality in Japan and its historical context, was awarded first place in the 2024–25 international open call by the New York-based nonprofit arts organization apexart.

## Lea Embeli

1994 Born in Pančevo, Serbia  
2017 University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Applied Arts, Bachelor's degree, Applied Painting  
2018 University of Arts in Belgrade, Master's degree  
2021 Tokyo University of the Arts, Research Student, Oil Painting  
2025 Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Fine Arts, Master's degree, Oil Painting  
Currently lives and works in Japan and Serbia.

## **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

2025 *Venus is the Hottest Planet*, Shimokitazawa Arts, Tokyo, Japan  
2020 *What Do You Think?*, X Vitamin Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia  
2019 *Out of Touch*, Ostavinska Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia

## **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

2025 *Meet Your Art Festival 2025*, Terrada Warehouse, Tokyo, Japan  
*The Self and the Other*, Medel Gallery Shu, Tokyo, Japan  
*Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi*, Gyoko Underground Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Pithecanthropus*, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Honten, MITSUKOSHI CONTEMPORARY GALLERY, Tokyo, Japan  
*Bridge* (Collaboration Exhibition : biscuit gallery × NISO [London, UK]), biscuit gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2024 *Sorry, this is (not) for you* (Atami Art Grant), Ozaki Land Bldg., Shizuoka, Japan  
*Grid Next*, biscuit gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Shibuya Awards*, Hillside Terrace, Tokyo, Japan

2023 *Watowa Art Award*, Watowa Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Beauty of Big Format*, Salon of the Belgrade Museum, Belgrade, Serbia  
*Miraiten*, Nichido Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Wherever You Are, That's Home*, JR Ueno Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2021 *51st Art Salon*, National Museum, Pančevo, Serbia

2020 *Autumn Art Biennale*, Sombor, Serbia  
*Private Value*, Swiss Residence, Belgrade, Serbia

2018 *Festum*, Student Cultural Center, Belgrade, Serbia

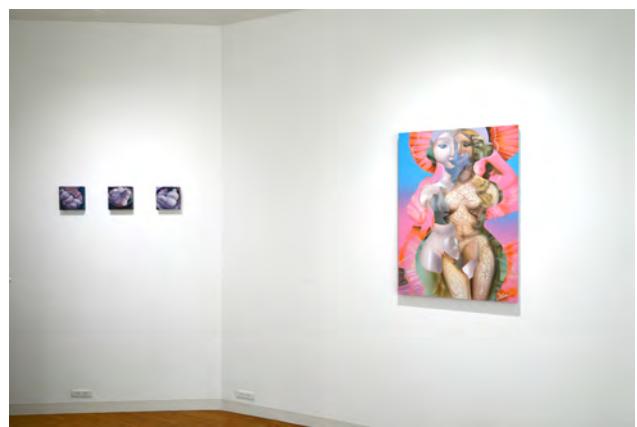
2017 *This Changes Everything*, Niš Art Foundation, Niš, Serbia

## **ARTIST WEBSITE**

<https://leaembeli.com/>



Group Exhibition "Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi" (2025, Gyoko Underground Gallery, Tokyo, Japan) installation view



Solo Exhibition "Venus is the Hottest Planet" (2025, Shimokitazawa Arts, Tokyo, Japan) installation view, Photo by Hiroko Suzuki

## Layla Yamamoto

1995 Born in Tokyo, Japan  
 2014 Graduated from Tokyo Metropolitan Senior High School of the Arts, Japanese Painting  
 2015- School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
 Currently lives and works in Tokyo.



Solo Exhibition "After the Quake" [Produced by SOUYA HANDA PROJECTS] (2021, Fukushima Building, Tokyo, Japan) installation view  
 Photo by Miri Lin, Courtesy of Souya Handa Projects

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 *Who said it was simple?*, Ritsuki Fujisaki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 2021 *After the Quake* (Produced by SOUYA HANDA PROJECTS), Fukushima Building, Tokyo, Japan

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2025 *Atomic Cowboy: The Daze After / Take It Home: for ( ) Shall Not Repeat the Error*, NJCU Visual Arts Gallery, New Jersey, USA  
 "Deconstructive Decoration" by Souya Handa Projects, Art Ka Bifun Ka Paichu, Tokyo, Japan  
*In the beginning, Womankind was the sun - Weren't we?*, KOTARO NUKAGA Three, Tokyo, Japan  
*Take it Home, for ( ) Shall Not Repeat the Error [Manhattan Project]*, apexart, New York, USA

2023 *Take it Home, for ( ) Shall Not Repeat the Error (Travelling Exhibition in Tokyo)*, Bazuchika, Tokyo, Japan  
*Take it Home, for ( ) Shall Not Repeat the Error*, SOGO Hiroshima, Hiroshima, Japan  
*UTSUTSU-A LIMINALISM OF JAPANESE CONTEMPORARY ART*, Pellas Gallery, Boston, USA  
*NEW ART OF YOUNGER 2023*, oto gallery, Osaka, Japan  
*Usual group show at an emerging gallery*, Ritsuki Fujisaki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2021 *Bangkok Biennial 2021 HOMETOWN TOKYO*, same gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2020 *New New New Normal*, Gallery Momo Projects, Tokyo, Japan

2019 *Multi-Cultural Appropriation*, KAWAGUCHI REACTION, Saitama, Japan

2016 *Draw on Raw Exhibition*, Lemoart Gallery, Berlin, Germany  
*Art Bash 2016*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (IL), USA  
*Noisy Kids Show*, AltSpace, New York, USA  
*On the VERGE*, RHE Siragusa Gallery, Chicago (IL), USA

2012 *The 8th Belladonna Art Exhibition*, TOKYO METROPOLITAN ART MUSEUM, Tokyo, Japan

## CURATED EXHIBITION

2025 *In the beginning, Womankind was the sun - Weren't we?*, KOTARO NUKAGA Three, Tokyo, Japan

## ART FAIRS

2025 *Meet Your Art Festival 2025*, Terrada Warehouse, Tokyo, Japan  
 2024 *Weekenders*, Sansiao Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Art Fair Tokyo 2024*, Tokyo International Forum, Tokyo, Japan  
 2023 *EASTEAST\_TOKYO 2023*, Science Museum, Tokyo, Japan

## AWARDS

2024 apexart International Open Call 2024-25, 1st place  
 2016 Art Bash Professor Recommendation  
 2015-2019 School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Distinguished merit scholarship  
 2021 Honorable Mention at the 8th Belladonna Art Exhibition



Group Exhibition "In the beginning, Womankind was the sun - Weren't we?" (2025, KOTARO NUKAGA Three, Tokyo, Japan) installation view  
 Photo by Kenji Agata

## \*Inquiry about the exhibition and artist

WAITINGROOM

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Hours: Wed. to Sat. 12-7pm Sun. 12-5pm

\*Closed on Mon. Tue. and National Holidays

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