

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Soshiro Matsubara, *Last Night VI*, 2020, glazed ceramics, epoxy, light bulbs, and cable, 9 7/8 x 13 x 4 3/4".
ROME

Soshiro Matsubara

MACRO - MUSEO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA ROMA

Via Nizza, 138

February 3, 2021–June 13, 2031

The title of Soshiro Matsubara's solo show “Caresses” may nod to an enigmatic painting by Fernand Khnopff, featuring an androgynous youth stroked by a sphinxlike creature, but the exhibition itself owes just as much to the Belgian symbolist painter's *Memories (Lawn Tennis)*, 1889. Holding tennis rackets against the backdrop of a grassy expanse, the seven figures it depicts are all modeled on Khnopff's sister and sitter Marguerite, whose effigy is endlessly refracted in Matsubara's body of work presented at Rome's MACRO museum.

The exhibition is a variation on a theme explored through different artistic media, from posters for the show itself to framed drawings referencing Khnopff's paintings to delicate glazed ceramics, notably the seven light fixtures outfitted with powdery, mask-like faces crowned by pink hair. The many guises of Marguerite that stare back at us in these works capture a face's elusive and shifting quality—by turns anguished, sad, impassive, pensive, resolute, smiling, or lost in reverie.

The slippery subject-matter goes hand in hand with the changing nature of the display, presented in the museum's "Rehearsal" space, which lends itself to that kind of experimentation. In the show's first iteration, many of the objects on view were either floor-based or hung unusually low, most strikingly in the case of the seven candelabra, nearly touching the black floor that reflected their illuminated contours like an obsidian mirror. In the show's present (and final) guise, these have been mounted onto the makeshift walls of a labyrinthine structure painted a dusty rose which, if anything, enhances the distorting mirror effect at its heart.

— *Agnieszka Gratza*