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Umi Ishihara: *Nocturnal Melody*

esea contemporary presents *Nocturnal Melody*, a solo exhibition by Umi Ishihara, touring from Gasworks, London. Inviting us to enter a world of nocturnal animals, the exhibition unfolds within the transformative space of the night, where women come to life after dark: eyes glowing, claws extended, climbing high.

Upon entering the space, *Nocturnal Vibration's* strange, dissonant animal calls reverberate through the room interwoven with distorted fragments of club music. The sound installation creates an embodied experience of rupture and not-belonging, expanding within an unsettling sonic landscape.

Moving into the main gallery, the film *Nocturnal Melody* follows the experiences of Eri and Catalina, two dancers based in Tokyo whose lives are fuelled by music, nightlife and desire. They share their stories of childhood, growing up, dreams and politics as we join them in dressing rooms, dancing on stage and in the club, all under a cloak of darkness. In this world, orthodox rules and societal expectations loosen their hold; performance, labour, intimacy and sociality become intertwined in everyday life. As the film shifts amongst different registers, including documentary footage, interviews-to-camera, night vision shots and saturated glimpses of Tokyo at night, we're offered fleeting insight into the complexity of their lives and the roles they occupy.

Ishihara's participation in the alternative worlds of *Nocturnal Melody* has precedent in her upbringing. Growing up with parents involved in the free rave scene in Japan in the 1990s immersed her from a young age in a world populated by people pushed to the margins of society who found solace in music. As the film's narrator, Ishihara accompanies Eri, Catalina and their friends as a nocturnal animal, her voiceover bridging stories of pleasure and vulnerability in spaces that come alive after dark.

Shot on-location in Tokyo, and at Madam Woo's gentleman's club in the Shibuya district, *Nocturnal Melody* is interspersed with dream-like sequences of Ishihara's stylised nocturnal animals roaming the streets, licking and clambering over each other. With their night vision and proclivity for climbing, these creatures have adapted to move through the city with ease, navigating and reshaping the contours of their surroundings.

On the other side of the gallery, these animals take over. Bathed in blue light, we see them grind, bump and slide over surfaces, playing with themselves, each other, and with stacks of fake money. Dressed in pearlescent skinsuits, these uncanny creatures appear at once otherworldly and untamed – only within this space, beyond the constraint of dominant social structures, are they able to exist freely.

Originally commissioned and produced by Gasworks, London, Umi Ishihara: *Nocturnal Melody* is presented by esea contemporary for the first time in Northern England. The exhibition is supported by Japan House London Trust, Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, Matsuura Arts Foundation, the Kumagai Masatoshi Culture Foundation, the Yoshino Gypsum Art Foundation, Yutaka Kikutake Gallery, Arts Council England and Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Artist Biography

Umi Ishihara (b. 1993, Tokyo, Japan) is based in London and Tokyo. She gained an MA in Artist’s Film & Moving Image from Goldsmiths, London in 2024, and a BA in Fine Arts (Inter Media Art) from Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan in 2018. Recent solo exhibitions include ‘Thundergod’, Gallery Butaiura, Tokyo (2024); *Gravity and Radiance*, Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo (2021); ‘Mire of Dickhead Demon’, TAV Gallery, Tokyo (2017).

Recent group exhibitions include Home Sweet Home, Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Kagawa; Struggle, Fukuoka Art Museum (both 2024); *Home Sweet Home*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka (2023); *Coming of Age*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2022); Bloomberg New Contemporaries, South London Gallery (2019).

Ishihara’s works have been screened internationally at venues including Centre Pompidou, ICA London, BFI Southbank, Locarno Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, CPH:DOC. In 2024 she was awarded a GQ Global Creativity Award. She is a participating artist at the 2026 Busan Biennale and her work will be featured in 2027’s Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum.

About esea contemporary

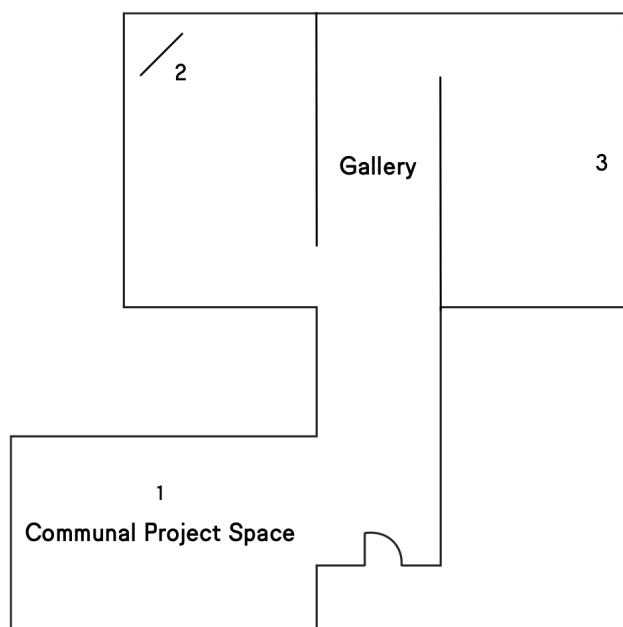
esea contemporary is the UK’s only non-profit art centre specialising in presenting and platforming artists and art practices that identify with and are informed by East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) cultural backgrounds.

esea contemporary is situated in an award-winning building in the heart of Manchester, home to one of the largest East Asian populations in the UK. Since its inauguration as a community-oriented visual arts festival in 1986, esea contemporary – previously named Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art – has continuously evolved to establish itself as a dynamic and engaging space for cross-cultural exchanges in the British art scene, as well as in a global context.

esea contemporary aims to increase the visibility of contemporary art practices from the East and Southeast Asian communities and their diasporas. It is a site for forward-thinking art programmes that beyond exhibitions also include commissions, research, residencies, publishing, and a wide range of vibrant public events. esea contemporary values creativity, compassion, interconnectedness, and collectivity in implementing its mission.

Exhibition Credits	Curator Rosa Tyhurst	PR Support Jenny Stewart
	Associate Curator Julia Jiang	Communications and Engagement Kathreena Soralde
	Curatorial Assistant Lauren Rees	Installation and Preview Photography Jules Lister
	Technical Manager Geoff Tabbron	
	Installation Fabricator Dan Simpkins, Kunstruct	
	Graphic Design Alvar Halonen	

Floor Plan



- 1 Umi Ishihara, *Nocturnal Vibration*, 2026, sound installation.
- 2 Umi Ishihara, *Nocturnal Breath*, 2026, video installation with sound, prop money, UV light, 4 min.
- 3 Umi Ishihara, *Nocturnal Melody*, 2026, video with sound, 24 min.

Discover More

Public Programme

'Nocturnal Melody' Opening Party

Friday, 9 October 2026, 11pm–4am, YES: 38 Charles St, Manchester, M1 7DB (The Pink Room)
esea contemporary and Umi Ishihara present *Nocturnal Melody* in Manchester — DJs: KD22LR, Kekeneko, Living Gatlato, Malvadona b2b DJ FUMING; Performers: Camilla Salvatore, Kazumi, Zara (pole dancing performance).

Artist and Curator-led Exhibition Tour and Talk

Saturday, 10 October 2026, 1–2:30pm, esea contemporary
Join us for an artist- and curator-led exhibition tour with artist Umi Ishihara and Rosa Tyhurst, Curator at Gasworks, London, followed by a conversation between the two speakers.

Artist Talk: Umi Ishihara in Conversation with Amal Khalaf

Wednesday, 13 January 2027, 11am–12:30pm, online
Join artist Umi Ishihara in conversation with Amal Khalaf, curator, artist, and Co-Artistic Director of the Busan Biennale (2026).

Exhibition Tour

We offer free guided exhibition tours every Saturday from 2–2:30pm. There is no need to book, just pop in. Free exhibition tours are available for schools, universities and other community groups. Please email hello@eseacontemporary.org to schedule a group visit.

Access

All of our spaces have wheelchair and buggy access. Please get in touch if you have any access-related questions and the team will be happy to help.

Venue Hire

Our RIBA award-winning city centre home provides a unique setting for your organisation to host events in the surroundings of our vibrant contemporary art exhibitions. Please get in touch via hire@eseacontemporary.org or 0161 832 7271.

Opportunities

For more information about our latest opportunities, visit our website at eseacontemporary.org.

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Donation

esea contemporary is a registered charity which relies on the generous support of our audiences, funders and partners to deliver our boundary-pushing, community-oriented programme. Please consider donating by using the QR code below or visit our website at eseacontemporary.org/support



Stay in Touch

We hope you enjoyed your visit today. We are always interested to hear feedback from our audiences. Scan the code below to take part in our short survey about your experience of the exhibition.



Free Entry

Opening Hours
Tuesday to Saturday:
10am – 5pm
Sunday:
12 – 5pm

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