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Who's afraid of computer animation -- or modern art by one of Italy's greats?

By Kenneth Baker

San Francisco artist Kota Ezawa has quickly made a name for himself by subjecting passages of famous footage to the simplifications of hand-executed computer animation. His latest effort in this line, "Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey" (2003), plays continuously at Haines to remarkable effect.

Ezawa has taken two snippets from Mike Nichols' 1966 black and white film version of Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and rendered them in flat black, white and gray.

The two scenes play projected side by side, like Andy Warhol's "Chelsea Girls," yanking one's attention back and forth as peaks in the action alternate.

On the unaltered soundtracks we hear Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, George Segal and Sandy Dennis in the performances of their lives.

The animation works a Warhol effect on the drama, leveling the performers' ages and demeanor and heightening cinematography, sound and dialogue.

The fact that Warhol borrowed Liz Taylor for a celebrity icon remake is an internal joke, as is Ezawa's title. "Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey" refers both to Albee and to abstract painter Barnett Newman, who titled a famous work "Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?"

Newman inspired several minimalist artists of the 1960s, whom critics saw as Warhol's stylistic opposites. The grayness of Ezawa's "Who's Afraid" recalls the grayness forever wedded to minimalism in the minds of those who saw it first emerge.

But art historical wit aside, "Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey" continues Ezawa's inquiry into the recipes for impact behind popular media.



Kota Ezawa plays on other artists and old films in "Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey?"