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Kota Ezawa - Michelle Gonzalez Valdez



Kota Ezawa, Hibernia Bank Robbery, 2005. Courtesy of Artpace

When art...depicts its world in dazzling colors, a moment of life has grown old and it cannot be rejuvenated with dazzling colors.

—Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle

It's as if San Francisco-based artist Kota Ezawa has taken a cleaver and hacked away at a fundamental axiom in Debord's seminal publication. Momentous occasions, such as Yoko Ono and John Lennon's hotel protest, have faded from the forefront of the American public only for a burgeoning artist to reinvigorate their significance.

Ab initio, Ezawa leads viewers into a filtered rendering of historical and cinematic events through tracings, animations, aquatinted light boxes and static etchings. Currently on display at Artpace in San Antonio, the artist demonstrates an adroit ability to cull and cover relatively familiar images with thick, chromatic blankets. Living in South Texas, one seems tempted to make comparisons to the recently

Rotoscoped science fiction of *A Scanner Darkly*. While Richard Linklater purveys a schizophrenic, unsoundly landscape of drugged dystopia through animation, Ezawa lands softly on the other end of the illustrating spectrum by using subtle movement and crisp edges of iconic images to stimulate the collective consciousness.

In *The Simpson Verdict*, visitors listen as the judge instructs faceless jurors. Lawyers fidget while Simpson himself concentrates on keeping remarkable stoicism. The animation reduces the spectacle into a repetitive loop of dizzying anxiety. Memorable characters become flattened and diffused of power. A fleeting smirk emerges from the curiously two-toned lips of Simpson as his life transmogrifies from accused to exonerated.

Derogating the idea that such a celebratory contemporary artist persists sacrosanct; most of the pieces on view at Artpace amalgamate in a mellifluous flow in both content and chromatic sensibilities.

The carousel slide show of etchings and tracings, *The History of Photography Remix*, perpetuates innocuous images and pushes them into something more than their originals while giving the audience less information. The Hudson (Show) Room radiates with this renewed playfulness for degenerating slices of American pop culture.

Ezawa places images from the last century onto a different plane for us to puzzle over. The results slip between revelatory and ambiguous. It's difficult to see a Cindy Sherman self-portrait flicker onto the wall followed by battlefield scene, then an x-ray of metacarpals displaying a wedding ring. Associations become skewed and confused. The videos overlap soundtracks, creating a busy, sometimes overwhelming realm of voices from the past. Ezawa's color aquatint etching, *Polaroid Land Camera*, captures obsolescence while turning the photographer's lens onto itself. His rendition of a self-portrait, *Kota* brings a sense of gentle humility next to the wistful view of the Earth from Moon.

The laminated Duratrans transparencies and lightboxes give this solo exhibition a small, elucidative fulcrum to balance the kinetic, Brobdingnagian projections. *Hibernia Bank Robbery* offers a surveillance perspective of miscreant activities in San Francisco, circa 1974, as Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army [SLA] instigate fiduciary conflict. Ezawa's work erases the vinyl dimples in the furniture and shadows in the clothing and background scene. Hearst's expression in the actual photo appears almost jubilant while her animated doppelganger exudes a bit of melancholia. Ezawa's work evokes hyper-realistic rhetoric and our interpretations of current events as they ellipse into archives. It makes sense to call Ezawa a quintessential descendent of Jean Baudrillard's assessment that hyper-realism is "the meticulous reduplication of the real."

Leaving the exhibit, viewers get one last glance at a light box titled, *Leaping Into the Void*. A man captured mid-air heads for terra firma with a look of acquiescence. Somehow, this illuminated self-murder acts as a veritable, *mal du siecle* bookmark for this fragmentary archive of the 20th Century.