

the warhol: resources & lessons

Artists Past & Present: Kota Ezawa

Kota Ezawa is a Japanese-German artist currently based in San Francisco. Ezawa meticulously recreates, frame-by-frame, animated sequences from television, cinema, and art history using basic digital drawing and animation software. His aesthetic is a highly stylized mixture of Pop Art, Alex Katz, and paint-by-numbers pictures, to name but a few of his stylistic antecedents. This painstaking process creates an intriguing facsimile of the source material, which include the Kennedy assassination, the O.J. Simpson trial, and clips from the film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*

One of his works, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (2005), borrows the title of Milan Kundera's famous book to animate the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. The source material for Lincoln and Kennedy is, respectively, a segment from D.W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the Zapruder 8mm film of the Kennedy assassination. The reanimation of these horrific, yet familiar, historic events gives the work its emotional charge. Ezawa forces us to acknowledge the historic and cultural distance between us and the depicted figures that feature so prominently in America's public memory. A similar effect is achieved in his 2002 work *Simpson Verdict*, where Ezawa animates the delivery of O.J. Simpson's verdict using the courtroom footage as source material while keeping the original audio from the footage in place. Both of these works' stylistic artificiality underscore the manufacturing of the historical spectacle and paradoxically preserve the power of the original events. Ezawa's ability to wring genuine emotion from the artificial makes clear his allegiance with previous Pop masters like Warhol and Lichtenstein.



Kota Ezawa
The Simpson Verdict, 2002,
DVD, 3-min. loop. Edition of 15

"I drew all the hands, eyes and figures using drawing software and re-created all the motions, trying to simulate the motions of the people in the video. What results is very stylized, but it's an honest effort at translation."

--Kota Ezawa, quoted on Haines Gallery website:
http://www.hainesgallery.com/Main_Pages/Artist_Pages/KEZA.bio.html

Sources and Links:

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Benjamin Genocchio, "Life, One Frame At a Time", *New York Times*, 25 December 2005.
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