black box
a space for new media

Takeshi Murata

Takeshi Murata (b. Chicago, Illinois, 1974; lives and works in Saugerties, New York) takes "found-object" images from feature films and digitally re-works and re-joins them, weaving them into his own throbbing cinematic tapestries. Each short hallucinogenic film involves thousands of individually rendered alterations and can take up to a year to complete. The effect is like visual quicksand—as viewers sink in deeper and deeper but cannot recall what visual shifts led from one to the next. Murata's pieces explore the array of expressive possibilities in this specialized manner of work that might be called "electronic painting."

While the title for *Cone Eater*, 2004, brings to mind the retinal photoreceptors called cones that may determine the eye's sensitivity to color and level of visual acuity, the artist confides a dual reference: "Growing up we lived near a buffalo sanctuary and ice cream stand. Tourists were always pulling up and eating ice cream that melted while they watched—we call them the 'cone-eatas.'" The film begins with a split second of dimensionless black space. A stylized face emerges reminiscent of the symmetry of ancient heraldry, masks and totems depicting gods and demons, and icons from videogames. The center of the imagery holds until the soundtrack signals a burst into a morphing mosaic, described by film archivist Andrew Lampert as, "A psychedelic digi-death Rorschach test of melting pixels."

For *Monster Movie*, 2005, the artist sampled *Caveman*, a 1981 B-movie featuring Ringo Starr. Its playful nod toward evolution makes it an apt metaphor for Murata's approach, but don't look for Ringo between the pixels. What drew the artist's attention was the wonderfully cheesy yeti. Its submersion and emersion offer occasions for the artist to shift in and out of abstraction. When *Caveman* was released, theatre-goers received glossaries for deciphering the made up prehistoric terms. Murata also uses the film as a departure point to invent his own—in this case pictorial—vocabulary.

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One of the most memorable moments in *Rambo, First Blood*, 1982, is when Sylvester Stallone emerges from his perch, camouflaged within a mud bank to become a pumped-up fighting machine. In several sequences in *Untitled (Pink Dot)*, 2006, Murata manipulates the hero, the action really, from this and other scenes to different dramatic effect. The pink dot throbs like the viewer's pulse. Set against different backdrops, the spot seems to widen like the viewer's incredulous eye beholding an action film. Whatever begins as an on-screen conflict from the movie, in the artist's hands is quickly deconstructed into cascades of colors that spill, flow, and dissolve into mesmerizing abstractions. Uzi gives way to ooze.

Murata's works coincide with an ironic development in the evolution of filmmaking. In early cinematic devices, hand-cranked motion allowed figures to move across a flowing background. This scheme was also characteristic of early cartoons, in which hand-drawn aspects were accentuated. Advances in camera and projection technology moved mainstream cinema toward the "real" rather than the "trick" film associated with obviously hand-wrought techniques. For decades, Hollywood relegated animation—with a few notable exceptions in which it was mixed with live-action, such as Gene Kelly's *Anchors Aweigh*, 1945, and *Invitation to the Dance*, 1956, and director Robert Zemeckis's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, 1988—to kids' fare until digital technologies made hand-worked imagery once again key to animated features as well as live-action filmmaking. Murata's *Monster* might be considered his "missing link" between the antiquated scuffle between figure and ground in the first cartoons and the infinite visual permutations available to filmmakers today.

Kelly Gordon, Associate Curator

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