

OKTP

KOTA EZAWA

4.01.2010

Kota Ezawa is still mixing things up. He recasts a famous French New Wave film as a 3D blockbuster. He disassembles Eisenstein's montage step sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* and reorders it, using ink rather than video as his medium. Somewhat surprisingly, he has reworked a found image of that most traditional artistic icon, the flower, and recast it. Recognizing that technologies are changing quickly, Ezawa manipulates whatever is at hand and doesn't worry too much about whether the method is old, new, or both, employing drawings, prints, light boxes, and animated videos. His work

continues to probe the concept of reinvention. He asks the viewer to look carefully to see that the new image is not simply reproduced, but given a completely new meaning with thoughtful editing. In this way, he continues to comment on the current cultural condition.

—Kenneth Caldwell

Q: Tell me about some of the source material for these prints.

A: *Last Year at Marienbad*, a film by Alain Resnais from the early 1960s, is the source for *Lyam 3D*, *M 3D*, and *X 3D*. I did two different versions of the video. Both versions are devoid of char-

acter movement. The actors stay frozen in position; they behave like statues.

Q: So the perspective moves, but not the people?

A: Exactly.

Q: But that isn't true in the film. That's your own revisiting?

A: Alain Resnais dispersed scenes without character movement throughout the film. I edited out these scenes and re-combined them in my animation. The animation recreates the cinematography of Alain Resnais in 2D. That was the first version. And then a year later, I made



(above) **Flowers**, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 20.5" x 27"; Edition of 50

(left)
Stairs, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 14.5" x 16"; Edition of 50



(above) Kota Ezawa and Renee Bott in the studio.

(top left) **X 3D**, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 20" x 30"; Edition of 35

(bottom left) **M 3D**, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 20" x 30"; Edition of 35

(right) **LYAM 3D**, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 20" x 27.5"; Edition of 35

(bottom right) **Man and Woman**, 2009
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 14.5" x 27.5"; Edition of 35



another version of the film, and that one has this red-green 3D effect, and you wear 3D glasses.

The 3D version amplifies the spatial effect. I really like using the 3D on this well-studied film. The 3D glasses have this kind of silly reputation [from being associated with] monster movies from the 1950s. I like how these different sets of expectations meet in this piece.

Q: Why did you decide to translate it to print?

A: Even a very basic form of 3D is kind of a high-tech trick, and I like to combine this kind of high-tech trick with something very old and traditional like aquatint etching. It energizes it. I don't expect that the effect will be overwhelmingly 3D.

Q: Yes, it's sort of there and sort of not. It's like your other work, where there's this tension between the piece and the original source.

A: It is just a different way of seeing this material. I don't want to call it blasphemy, but maybe that's what is.

Q: You mean watching a version of such a serious film with little 3D glasses?

A: Nowadays, 3D has a blockbuster connotation. So, I am turning *Last Year at Marienbad* into a pseudo summer blockbuster.

Q: These other prints, *Soldiers*, *Stairs*, *Man and Woman*, are images taken from the step sequence in Eisenstein's film?

A: Yes.

Q: They look like your watercolors.

A: Spitbite gives you the texture of watercolor.

Q: The step sequence is quite complex, with its montage technique.

A: There are 160 cuts in the sequence. I painted the first frame of each cut. So I had 160 ink drawings. I took them

out of the original order and organized them by similarity. The images that look somewhat similar are actually relatively far apart in the film.

If you reorganize them in this way, I think you're returning to the way that Eisenstein recorded the film before he edited it and created his montage effect. I like that there is a flipbook effect.

This grid arrangement brings out other kinds of grid arrangements that artists have done in the past. For example, you might be familiar with Bernd and Hilla Becher. They took pictures of industrial buildings and arranged them in grids. You don't see it as a flipbook sequence, but you could see it as a typology of images, a family of images joined in one frame, or joined on one piece of paper.

Q: *Flowers* is something completely different.

A: All the other prints are so subdued, and then this one just really jumps out.

This idea comes out of a recent exhibition I had with Katya Bonnenfant at Haines Gallery. She asked me to make a drawing of flowers for her show.

Q: Did Katya take the source photograph?

A: It's a found photograph that she gave me. I was excited about this image. I think that's the thing about collaboration or dialog with other artists, that you do something that you normally wouldn't do. I have always been a fan of different artists' flower projects. I really like the Mapplethorpe flowers. And I also like that flowers are kind of a no-no in art discourse. Flowers are something that belong to the past, not to contemporary art. I personally think it's a post-punk image. The flowers are so important. I really want to make beautiful things. I'm very excited to have it.

Q: Do you still see video or animations as primary modes of expression?

A: It is changing because of what's hap-

pening to video. I would say that animation is still the backbone of a lot of these projects. For example, the *Battleship Potemkin* project is not a film anymore, it's more an image sequence. An image sequence is also a kind of animation. There is a static quality to the prints that is not so true in the light boxes, because the light boxes are illuminated. They are glowing. I mean, you may not consciously know it, but the light is coming at you in waves.

When I visited the press four years ago, it was a big step, because I had not used a paintbrush since high school. Everything I did was sculptural or technology based. But it was a really happy moment when this project, which started as a contemporary technology project, translated into this ancient technology.

Working here set off all kinds of new possibilities. I was already doing paper cutouts, but now I had the confidence to make a book of ink drawings. That is the

direct result of this experience with intaglio etchings. I'm still very interested in doing LCD projections while I am doing something in parallel like an ink drawing. I don't think of ink drawing or prints as traditional and projection as contemporary and/or something else as the future.

For example, bicycles became popular again. I rode my bike here today. It seems much more progressive than using a car, even though a car has a lot more digital technology than a bicycle. And I think it's kind of the same way with ink drawings. Ink drawings are very economical. You have this little ink bottle, and you have a few brushes and a piece of paper, and there you go. For a video projection, you need a projector that's wrapped in Styrofoam and electricity. Ink is a very progressive medium. ✱



PAULSON BOTT
PRESS

2390 C FOURTH ST. BERKELEY, CA 94710
T 510.559.2088 • F 510.559.2085
WWW.PAULSONBOTTPRESS.COM

First Class Mail
U.S. Postage Paid
San Leandro, CA
Permit #85



(above) **Last Sitting, 2006**
Color Aquatint Etching;
Paper size: 23.5" x 19.5"; Edition of 35

(left) **Soldiers, 2009**
Color Aquatint Etching; Paper size: 24" x 27.5"; Edition of 35

DESIGN: MICHAEL OSBORNE DESIGN