

Takeshi Murata at Ratio 3

In his new digital video, *Untitled (Silver)*, Takeshi Murata twists and stretches a sequence from an old movie into a psychedelic odyssey—a fitting afterlife for a 1960s horror film by the Italian director Mario Bava.

The black-and-white footage takes on an abstract life of its own. Quivering, enlarged pixels become Op-art patterns that curl into waves or melt into puddles with dizzying three-dimensionality. At times the image momentarily congeals, revealing the protagonist: a lovely gowned woman seen in some grand interior, slipping furtively down hallways and gliding across drawing rooms. Her movement through these

spaces is reminiscent of video-games played on devices like Xbox in which the background is sucked backwards while the figure seems to speed ahead.

In one part, an abstract image magically resolves into a close-up of a white hand extended across the screen. Elsewhere, a shot of the woman lifting her arms to adjust her coif becomes a symphony of rippling movement as her arms are transformed into fluttering wings. Frustrating the gaze, her beautiful face never stays still long enough to really be looked at. Instead, it keeps distorting to monstrous proportions or turning into liquid reflections. Accompanying these heady visuals is an ambient soundtrack by Robert Beatty and Ellen Mollé of gurgling water, echoing voices and deep electric chords. The projection, at 42 by 75 inches, is surprisingly intimate.

A main part of Murata's technique involves digitally compressing the footage so that the movement of a series of frames is reduced to a single twitching image that records only the net difference in movement from one frame to the next. Ironically, this high-tech wizardry recalls old-fashioned animation and moving-picture precedents such as flipbooks, zoetropes and Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies. The video's visual effects also evoke the way Impressionist painters broke down images into brushwork and blurriness, which similarly gave way to abstraction. For his part, Murata likens the liquid look of his digital distortions to the physical deterioration of old film stock.

If you are searching for a narrative, there is none. Atmosphere and ambiguity prevail here. This comes as no surprise when one learns that Murata's piece is based on a selection of his favorite frames from Bava's film *Black Sunday* (1960), which he has reordered and altered in every imaginable way in pursuit of the visual effects he desires.

—Melissa E. Feldman

Still from Takeshi Murata's *Untitled (Silver)*, 2006, DVD, 10 minutes; at Ratio 3.

