

## Observer/Observed Film/Video Works by Takahiko Iimura

Program One: '60s Experiments & Early Conceptual Videos

Saturday, March 14, 2009 — Sundance Kabuki Cinemas

presented in association with the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival  
Takahiko Iimura In Person

Working in film since the early 1960s and in video since the early 1970s (with significant forays into performance, installation and computer-based work), Takahiko Iimura has long been a pioneer artist of Japanese experimental media art. His body of work has deeply explored the material and conceptual foundations of each medium with robust intellectual rigor and flashes of playful humor. In the wake of a recent Microcinema International DVD release (the first volume of *The Collected Films of Takahiko Iimura*) and a related book (*The Collected Writings* from Wildside Press), this two-part mini-retrospective represents an overview of this artist's rich and remarkable body of work. (Steve Polta)

***Kuzu (Junk)*** (1962) by Takahiko Iimura; 8mm screened as 16mm, b&w, sound, 12 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"It's a mixture of [dead] animals, pieces of [broken] furniture, industrial waste, kids playing. I didn't have in mind any of the kind of historical perspective, nor was I trying to make an ecological statement. I was showing the new landscape of our civilization. My point of view was animistic. I tried to revive those dead animals metaphorically and to give the junk new life." (Takahiko Iimura interviewed by Scott MacDonald: "An Interview with Taka Iimura.")

***Ai (Love)*** (1962) by Takahiko Iimura; 8mm screened as 16mm, b&w, sound, 15 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*Love* is reminiscent of Willard Maas and Marie Menken's *Geography of the Body* (1943). Close-ups of a male and a female body during lovemaking are photographed in such a way that we are frequently unsure which particular portion of which body we are seeing. These close-ups are juxtaposed with long shots in slightly fast motion of the bodies entwined or rubbing against one another. The film emphasizes the essential biological nature of the human organism. In a more formal sense, too, *Love* is interesting, because of the dramatic black and white contrasts in the imagery, created in part by shooting in 8mm and then blowing the film up to 16mm, and because of Yoko Ono's soundtrack, which combines a 'shhhhhh' reminiscent of white noise with a variety of other intermittent sounds (to make the soundtrack, Ono hung a microphone out the window)" (Scott MacDonald, "The Films of Takahiko Iimura.")

***On Eye Rape*** (1962) by Takahiko Iimura; 16mm, b&w, silent, 10 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"[...] made with footage I picked out of some trash. It was originally an educational film which recorded a plant growing out of the ground. The content isn't important. I punched almost all the frames with a puncher. I made big holes so that when it was projected, people could barely see what was originally in the frames. I didn't punch every frame; there was a lot of flicker from the holes. People got very annoyed and complained. They were afraid they would get hurt by the light. (Takahiko Iimura interviewed by Scott MacDonald: "An Interview with Taka Iimura.")

***A Dance Party in the Kingdom of Lilliput No. 1*** (1964) by Takahiko Iimura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 12 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"References abound [...]. Iimura's homage to Godard's *Le Mepris* (1963) has been previously mentioned: Godard's [...] *Une Femme est Une Femme* (1961) also provided the 'chapter heading'

scene division limura adapted for his own uses. Fernand Leger's [...] *Le Ballet Macanique* (1924), a classic cubist work with a celebrated loop-printed staircase sequence [...], inspired *Dance Party...*'s endless apartment staircase ascent. The title's 'Kingdom of Lilliput' refers of course to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a work limura understands to feature 'a protagonist who moves through a series of strange, disorienting, foreign landscapes and goes about as if in a travelogue, like my Mr. K.' *Dance Party...* also takes its title from a 'happening' [...], performed [...] by artist Kazakura, who repeated fragments of that event as the star of [the] film. [...] 'Mr. K.' refers both to [Kazakura] and to Franz Kafka's paradigmatic protagonist..." (Sam McElfresh, "Dancing with Taka limura: *A Dance Party in the Kingdom of Lilliput.*")

***A Chair*** (1970) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 10 minutes, from the maker

***Blinking*** (1970) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 2 minutes, from the maker

"[limura] first combined the art of film with video thus making a kind of flicker effect in video in two pieces: *A Chair* and *Blinking*. [...] Experiments in perception, [the works] are very minimal in form, consisting of a single object which requires a lot of attention. In *A Chair*, a chair, illuminated by a film projector, casts its shadow within the frame of a TV screen. The shadow, which flickers, synchronizes with the sound of white noise." (Takahiko limura)

***Time Tunnel*** (excerpt) (1971) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 5 minutes, from the maker

***Man and Woman*** (1971) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 2 minutes, from the maker

***Visual Logic (and Illogic) (excerpt)*** (1977) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 8 minutes, from the maker

***Double Portrait*** (1973–1987) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 5 minutes, from the maker

René Magritte once posted a famous paradox in his drawing *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1926): the careful drawing of a pipe is, of course, not a pipe, but a drawing of a pipe. Similarly, in *Double Portrait* the viewer sees Takahiko and Akiko limura identifying themselves [...] and then negating those statements [...]. But the negation does not void the specifics of personality; rather, negation calls into question the specifics of existence, for what the viewer is seeing is a video image of Takahiko limura saying "I am Taka limura," the viewer is not seeing the actual Takahiko limura [...]. Yet the medium of video is founded on its recorded immediacy, and, in this simple yet effective way, limura has penetrated the conditions of illusionism in the medium [...]. (Daryl Chin: "The Video Art of Takahiko limura.")

***I Love You*** (1973–1987) by Takahiko limura; analog video screened as DVD, b&w, sound, 5 minutes, from the maker

What is interesting here is the tricky relationship between the screen images and the words. All you can hear are the voices of a man and a woman. The image shown on the screen determines whether the voice is perceived as coming from inside or outside it. The object of the same personal pronoun can also be changed. When the man's voice saying "I love you" is matched with the image of the woman facing forward, it becomes the words of a man in the same video scene facing the woman. When matched with the back view of a man, it becomes the voice of a third person in the video or a voice outside of the video commenting on it." (Keiji Asanuma: "The Play of Codes or the Revenge of Codes? Two or Three Comments on Takahiko limura.")

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