

Observer/Observed Film/Video Works by Takahiko Imura

Program Two: On Time In Film

Sunday, March 15, 2009 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

presented in association with the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival
Takahiko Imura 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 Imura 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 Imura*) 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.

Imura is perhaps best known for his work exploring the temporality of cinema – the various ways the film viewer's elemental sense of time can be "played" by the filmmaker. Frequently using the most basic of film elements – white light, black leader and the projection environment, Imura's work in this area is among the most abstract and elemental in all of cinema, postulating time and the interval as ground for deeply engaging cinematic experience. (Steve Polta)

2 Minutes 46 Seconds 16 Frames (1972) by Takahiko Imura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 9 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*2 Minutes 46 Seconds 16 Frames* [...] involves three 100-foot strips of clear leader, on which Imura has printed numbers. In the first [...], numbers from 1 to 24 are printed, one per frame. When the film is projected at 24 fps, one can see that a series of numbers is passing, but no individual number becomes identifiable. Instead, retinal collages are created [...]. After a while, one sees that every frame in the strip of leader is being tabulated and comes to feel the one-second rhythm of the 24 repeated numbers. The result is an unusual degree of awareness of the basic pulse of the film experience. During the second 100-foot strip, numbers from 1 to 60 are printed in the film, one number each twenty-fourth frame. The result is an almost entirely different experience. Instead of flickering numbers catching and holding our attention, their one-per-second appearance seems to measure off duration of light. Further, instead of our concentrating entirely on the number of basic temporal units per second, we come to feel the spiritual and intellectual potential of the framing rectangle. Not only in the potential illusory depth of the frame apparent (while the flickering numbers on the first 100-foot strip emphasize the two-dimensional nature of the film image, the longer spans of light here give the mind time to 'see into' the frame), but the real space of the film experience—the space of the room the film is projected in—becomes particularly evident. The final 100-foot strip is measured in minutes: '1' appears at the end of the first minute, '2' at the end of the second. After detailed measurement of the first two 100-foot strips, the third is experienced as a continual duration which has the paradoxical effect of seeming both very long—we feel the full reality of each minute—and quite short—we don't feel the potential of either of the individual frames or the individual seconds." (Scott MacDonald: "The Films of Takahiko Imura." *Reviews of Takahiko Imura (2): Film, Video, Multimedia (1978–2004)*. Published 2004 by the Takahiko Imura Media Art Institute, Tokyo.)

Timed 1, 2, 3 (1972) by Takahiko limura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 11 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*Timed 1, 2, 3* [...] is a particularly effective interweaving of visuals and sounds. Visually, each section of the film is composed of 10-second spans of clear and dark leader, arranged in a progressive fashion so that at first there is more and more light and less darkness, then vice versa. During *Timed 1* a sound 'blip' scratched directly onto the soundtrack is audible each second in; in *Timed 2* the sounds are audible every 10 seconds; and in *Timed 3* we hear them every 100 seconds, or at the halfway point and at the end. While the use of sound in a variety of regular measures results in some of the same small units of time which are developed in *2 Minutes 46 Seconds 16 Frames* [...] *Timed 1, 2, 3* tends to create an overall experience which is more sculptural, more environmental." (Scott MacDonald: "The Films of Takahiko limura." *Reviews of Takahiko limura (2): Film, Video, Multimedia (1978–2004)*. Published 2004 by the Takahiko limura Media Art Institute, Tokyo.)

24 Frames Per Second (1975) by Takahiko limura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 12 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"Because of the intricacy of the structure of *24 Frames Per Second* [...] a viewer can see the entire film without ever seeing how it is structured. As soon as one does understand its organization, however, *24 Frames Per Second* provides an opportunity to examine a variety of the essential aspects of film. One is able to experience every possible duration of light and darkness, in every possible position within the 24-frame, one-second units. Further, various sorts of filmic space are dramatically juxtaposed: the two different forms of the frame and screening room space created by light and dark leader alternate with the attention-directing two-dimensional space created by the one-second strips [indicated by] the [on-screen] fractions. Naturally, limura's orderly exploration of these elements requires that the viewer be perceptually and intellectually active, but if one is, the clarity and purity of the film's form can be quite exhilarating." (Scott MacDonald: "The Films of Takahiko limura." *Reviews of Takahiko limura (2): Film, Video, Multimedia (1978–2004)*. Published 2004 by the Takahiko limura Media Art Institute, Tokyo.)

One Frame Duration (1977) by Takahiko limura; 16mm, color, sound, 12 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

+ & – (1973) by Takahiko limura; 16mm, b&w, sound, 26 minutes, print from The Film-Makers' Cooperative

+ & – involves the viewer in a process of adding spans of time, then subtracting one span from another. During the first half of the film the viewer first sees a passage of dark leader, then a '+' sign scratched into a single frame, then a second passage of dark leader, then a '=' sign, then a third passage of dark leader as long as the first two passages combined. After a single clear frame, the next equation is presented. [...] Every time a series of additions is completed, limura includes a 10-second shot of a sheet of paper on which all additions to this point are typed. The second half of + & – presents a series of subtractions [...]" (Scott MacDonald: "The Films of Takahiko limura." *Reviews of Takahiko limura (2): Film, Video, Multimedia (1978–2004)*. Published 2004 by the Takahiko limura Media Art Institute, Tokyo.)

I Am (Not) Seen (2003) by Takahiko limura; digital video screened as DVD, color, sound, 5 minutes, from the maker

"This video deals with the perception of 'seeing' including the words as 'I see you,' 'I am seen,' and 'I am not seen.' These words are superimposed over the pictures of a face, eyes, and a face in the frame. The video changes in quite rapid motion framewise with the occasional stills inserted." (Takahiko limura)

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