

Art and Cake, January 21, 2018

Kota Ezawa  
The Crime of Art  
Christopher Grimes Gallery  
January 6 - March 10, 2018

By Jody Zellen



“The Crime of Art (Hollywood Edition)” is in many ways a sequel to “Gardner Museum Revisited,” Kota Ezawa’s 2016 exhibition at Christopher Grimes Gallery. In “Gardner Museum Revisited,” Ezawa recreated the 13 works stolen from Boston’s Gardner Museum in 1990 presenting them salon style as light boxes displaying to scale replicas of the paintings as flat posterized versions. Alongside the light boxes, Ezawa also exhibited a video using his signature rotoscoping process to transform newly released footage from the day before the crime. Ezawa’s process distills and reduces the originals to basic shapes and colors, giving them a cartoon-like aura.

In Ezawa’s current exhibition, “The Crime of Art (Hollywood Edition)” he presents a large -scale, three-channel projection that uses scenes containing art thefts from Hollywood movies, as well as three light box images. Depicted (to scale) are two famous works of art that were stolen and later returned: Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* and Gustav Klimt’s *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Ezawa also includes an image entitled *Munch Theft* that depicts the 2004 theft of the painting from the Munch Museum in Oslo.

In the centerpiece of the show, *The Crime of Art*, (2017) the projected animations are carefully sequenced so a few seconds of action appear on one wall at a time. This takes the viewer on a journey from wall to wall and creates a quasi-narrative from disparate clips. The animation loops indefinitely and can be entered at any point in the sequence. Appropriating scenes from *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), *How to Steal a Million* (1966), *Topkapi* (1964), and *Entrapment* (1999), Ezawa focuses on scenes that feature the artwork to be stolen in addition to the elaborate plans for the heist. The presentation also contains a soundtrack that follows the action

on the screen. It is curious that Ezawa did not rotoscope the entire clip; he leaves the depiction of the actual artworks as they appear in the films. By allowing them to retain their tones and details, he differentiates them from the rest of the imagery suggesting different levels of reality.

When Ezawa first began transforming imagery from the media, his process was original and stood out as an ingenious way to claim authorship over the imagery of others. His style became iconic and as recognizable as the images he appropriated. In today's digital climate, the conversation about real versus fake, authorship and appropriation has taken a new turn as there is an over-abundance of online source materials — photographs and videos— ripe for various forms of manipulation. Authorship and reality have become questionable. To appropriate, or to use imagery that is not one's own, is a type of theft and Ezawa is aware of this conundrum in his own work. By making images of stolen art, he is acknowledging the lineage of theft while simultaneously transforming stolen imagery.

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