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ART PAPERS

HIRAKI SAWA

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Hiraki Sawa, *Going Places Sitting Down*, 2004, 3 channel video projection with sound, 8 min. 40 sec. loop

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire describes the genuine artist as both “man-child” and “eternal convalescent,” one who possesses the “genius of childhood” that results from seeing everything as novelty, from “drinking in shape and color,” and noticing even the most trivial of objects. Hiraki Sawa’s video exhibition *Going Places Sitting Down* [Frist Center for the Arts; March 2-June 3, 2007] takes us on a fantastic journey through domestic interiors that come alive with animated features, oddities of scale, and logical impossibilities: toy airplanes that fly above spotters standing on a kitchen counter; a teakettle, cheese grater, and toilet roll moving about on human legs; camels that traverse the tattered bindings of an *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Living up to both dimensions of Baudelaire’s genuine artist, Sawa combines a child’s unfettered imagination with the convalescent’s deliberate observation of his most immediate surroundings.

Two black-and-white digital videos, *Elsewhere*, 2003, and *Spotter*, 2003, are displayed on flat screen monitors in the smaller of the two Gordon Contemporary Project galleries. *Elsewhere* features household objects with moving legs created through the digital manipulation of photographic sequences. Pots, alarm clocks, spoons, and other utensils sprout legs and, punctuating the stillness, walk across various surfaces. One passage even gives a whole new meaning to the expression “running with scissors.” Whimsical, this vision is much like a child’s fanciful understanding of what might occur in her house when she is away. In *Spotter*, toy airplanes take off and fly through the artist’s apartment while miniaturized spectators with binoculars observe from a variety of locations, including the interior of a bathtub. As planes fly past cabinet doors and potted ferns, the disruptions of scale lend an uncanny feel to the piece. In this, *Spotter* enlists a sense of apprehension that recalls the scenes of Paris’ Orly terminal in Chris Marker’s 1962 film *La Jetée*, a work that plays upon the protagonist’s obsessive childhood memory and internal visions.

With *Going Places Sitting Down*, 2004, Sawa shifts to color imagery. It is also accompanied by Dale Berning’s subtle, ambient soundtrack. The projected, three-channel, digital animation begins with an image of a window on the center screen. As a slow tracking shot of a well-appointed middle-class domestic interior anchors the work, details from the rooms occupy the lateral screens—tiny riders on elephants or camels, birds flying against a wallpaper backdrop, miniature ships sailing on water next to a shoreline made of leather-bound books, and the repeated motif of the rider-less rocking horse. First seen on the central screen in the nursery, the stars in a number of extraordinary situations. Here, it bobs along in a rushing river beneath a sink’s dripping faucet; there, it sinks into the white keys of a piano; elsewhere, it swims through the surface of a wooden tabletop. The most stunning passage transforms a white and fluffy bedside shag into a snowy tree-rimmed domain—the roaming grounds of a green empty saddled hobbyhorse.

Sawa’s *Going Places Sitting Down* is a work of beauty without irony. It provides an utterly convincing passage back to the peculiar solitude of childhood, where moments of reverie combine with gentle sadness. It also brings about an encounter with the “eternal convalescent,” whose unbridled imagination emerges in these limitless ramblings.