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All that glitters is murderously bold in Jamie Vasta's art (from left, *The Knife and Cottontail*), now on display at the Patricia Sweetow Gallery. Meanwhile, Takeshi Murata plays with pixels and greases the joints between real and virtual with his new video work, *Escape Spirit VideoSlime* (right), at Ratio 3.



#### THE REEL WORLD: TAKESHI MURATA AT RATIO 3

Among the coverage of the horrific San Francisco Bay oil slick, I saw a short video of a fowl gliding through sea glimmering with petroleum. The bird maintained grace in this toxic environment, navigating marbled, paper-like swirls in the blackened water. That image had an indelibly uncomfortable beauty, the sort that occurs in Takeshi Murata's videos, in which cinema — transferred to digital media — begins to transmogrify into something that slithers like mercury and soaks into our psyches.

His current show at the recently relocated and vastly expanded Ratio 3 gallery is centered on a new six-minute work, *Escape Spirit VideoSlime*, though the addition of another piece, *Untitled (Pink Dot)* (2006) creates a satisfying double bill. Both works feature buzzing electronic soundtracks by Robert Beatty, vivid acid-trip color schemes, and not-so-veiled references to environmentalism. *Escape*, the more narrative of the pair, was created with generic nature footage of chimps in the forest, while *Pink Dot* appropriates scenes from *Rambo: First Blood*. In both, Murata deconstructs the imagery. Pixels reveal their capacity to act like paint, then reconfigure into fleeting photographic images of animals, explosions, and consuming, liquefied landscapes. They evoke a morass, an underworld similar to Barbarella's Matmos, befitting the term *VideoSlime* and its promise of creaming the virtual.

The pieces are screened in separate stalls, yet if you stand between them they can be viewed simultaneously. Their ominous soundtracks, however, constantly blend together into somewhat overdetermined eeriness. Both are nightmarishly memorable, though the graphic

quality and the recognizable but surprisingly earnest use of Stallone make *Pink* a somewhat stronger work. In totality, Murata's project fits a contemporary moment in which the digital and the analog are merging in ever more complex and perhaps confusing ways. His work can be seen in context with groups such as PaperRad and a number of young artists who create neopsychedelica from Saturday-morning cartoon detritus and the comforting, rudimentary digital nature of Pac-Man. Murata has mined this territory in earlier works such as *Monster Movie* (2005), but what set his recent projects apart are the sophistication and complexity of the visions.

His 2006 piece *Untitled (Silver)* — seen in Murata's first show at Ratio 3 and in "Cosmic Wonder" at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts — is a knockout, with its metallic gray footage of horror-film star Barbara Steele floating through a well-appointed goth interior that undergoes Murata's process of liquefaction. *Silver* may still be the artist's benchmark, but these new works reveal he's got plenty of fuel left in the continually tenuous worlds, both actual and media, that we inhabit. (Glen Helfand)

#### TAKESHI MURATA: ESCAPE SPIRIT VIDEOSLIME

Through Nov. 30  
Wed.-Sat., 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; and by appointment  
Free  
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