

Palestinian-Israeli conflict—the humiliation of daily strip searches endured by Palestinian men—the sculpture's anonymity and lack of color universalizes it into a counter-monument of sorts.

An installation—titled *Action 136: Put this in your record: I am Present!*, after Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's 1964 poem "Identity Card"—of three slides of media images showing other blindfolded and bound men, digitally manipulated so that the figures appear eerily alone, accompanied the sculpture. Projected on a wall inside the warehouse's locked former office—a freestanding two-room enclosure within the larger structure—these images could be viewed only through a large window, with the sculpture looming behind us reflected, spookily, in the glass. If, following Emmanuel Levinas, the origin of ethics is the face-to-face encounter, then how, as viewers and witnesses, can we ever achieve ethical or even empathetic access to these humiliated men, robbed of the dignity of their sight? Despite our desires otherwise, we remain implicated in their oppression. Hovering ominously in our field of vision like some hooded angel of death, the sculpture seemed to emphasize this, demanding retribution for the countless others like him.

—Murtaza Vali

TOKYO

Hiraki Sawa

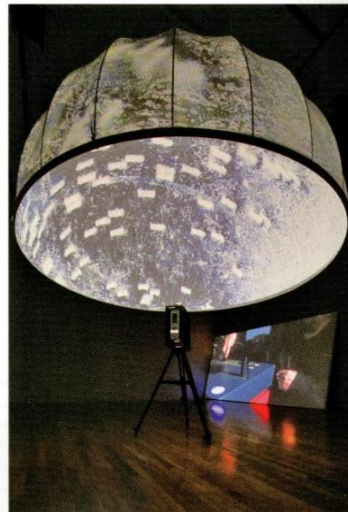
OPERA CITY ART GALLERY

Hiraki Sawa's semiretrospective "Under the Box, Beyond the Clouds" featured twenty video works, ranging from his signature piece *Dwelling*, 2002, in which toy-size passenger planes take off and land elegantly inside a gray East London flat, to new installations that expand into spatial dimensions. Also, along the corridor leading into the darkened exhibition area, miniature plaster sculptures from 2013–14—casts of an ammonite, a metronome, and a broken teacup, for instance—and drawings for the design of the exhibition itself, also 2013–14, offered clues as to what to expect.

Lineament, 2012, is a two-channel video based on an episode from the life of a friend who lost his memory after waking up from a short nap. Sawa's recurrent themes of time, memory, and nostalgia culminate in this piece as it unfolds as a meditation on amnesia, expressed poetically with, among other devices, black string unthreading from the edge of a rotating LP record and dispersing into architectural spaces—the recorded memory dissolving into thin air. Here and in other recent works—*Within*, 2010, *Sleeping Machine I*, 2011, and *Did I?*, 2011—Sawa works mostly in black and white, with a consciously antiquated mise-en-scène and slow-paced movements that give his works a unique fairy-tale quality. In stark contrast to the wall-size screens of *Lineament*, a small wooden wall nearby housed more intimate works (*Within*, *Eight Minutes*, 2005, and *Ages*, 2006); the playful shift in scale was effective, almost dizzying, as if one had walked into a tiny hut deserted by dwarfs.

The large-scale installation *Lenticular*, 2013, was inspired by Sawa's meeting with a self-taught astronomer at Mills Observatory in Dundee, Scotland. On a

Hiraki Sawa, *Lenticular*, 2013, mixed-media assemblage with color video and sound (by Bun), 8 minutes 30 seconds.



flat-screen on the floor, we see the astronomer in the observatory's planetarium, while the second channel projected onto a large domed screen echoes and abstracts to simple lines and visual effects the rotating motions of the planetarium covers and winding of mechanical devices on the telescopes seen on the flat-screen. Although the shape of the screen obviously refers to the planetarium, Sawa uses the curved surface as an arena in which to evoke such devices as the zoetrope, clock, or kaleidoscope.

The mysterious video installation *Envelope*, 2014, shows a woman in a white dress undertaking a sequence of ritualistic acts: She bows, swings back and forth, lights and then snuffs out a candle, picks flowers, breaks a teacup. More than Sawa's previous works, this one relies heavily on the theatrical, abstract, and unmistakably metaphoric performance of its protagonist. Fragmented actions with abundant symbolism, however, do not add up to a comprehensible narrative, and the piece not only is cryptic but sometimes feels contrived. Nonetheless, the setup of the installation is masterful: Three large mirrors facing the vertical projection stand behind the viewing benches, reflecting in darkness both the video and the viewers; viewers are sandwiched between dynamic crisscrossing reflections that seem to merge the real world with the image world. The title and credits appear reversed in the beginning and at the end, as if to emphasize the dominance of the mirror images over direct experience. The hyperclarity of the images and the high and agitating notes of a piano on the sound track further the icy tension of this work. Viewing the show was like sliding into the dark tunnel of a dream, experiencing dramatic changes in moods and contrasts of scale—taking a tumble down the video rabbit hole.

—Shinyoung Chung

SYDNEY

19th Biennale of Sydney

VARIOUS VENUES

The Nineteenth Biennale of Sydney may be remembered more for a boycott by participating artists than for the curatorial vision of artistic director Juliana Engberg, who subtitled the show "You Imagine What You Desire." It is the blackest irony that the curator's vision of art "imagining a world beyond the prosaic grounded life" should be ambushed by the festering political controversy surrounding Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. The target of the artists' protest was the Biennale's sponsorship by Transfield Holdings, a shareholder in Transfield Services, which runs Australia's offshore detention centers on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea) and Nauru. These camps are central to a government policy of deterring "unauthorized" refugee arrivals. While one local politician accused agitating artists of "vicious ingratitude" and another advised them to confine political statements to their art, the threatened boycott got results. The son of Transfield's founder resigned from his position as chairman of the Biennale board, and the reconfigured board severed financial ties with the company.

While the Biennale's lead-up was overshadowed by these events, Engberg put together a show overflowing with aesthetically engaging, thoughtful, and—yes—political works. As in the past, the exhibition sprawls across vastly different inner-Sydney sites, from conventional museum spaces at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Museum of Contemporary Art to the abandoned maritime and penal architecture of Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour. Artists from Australasia and Europe (East and West) are plentiful, with a smattering of low-key works from Chinese artists (among them Zhao Zhao and Yingmei Duan) and big-production videos from Wael Shawky and Yael Bartana.