

NEW YORK

James Cohan Gallery

HIRAKI SAWA

FIGMENT

Left

YUE MINJUN

The Artist and His Friends
1991
Oil on canvas, 187 x 198 cm.
Private collection.
Copyright the artist.
Courtesy Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris.

Right

HIRAKI SAWA

Lineament
2012
Dual-channel HD video with audio.
Copyright the artist.
Courtesy James Cohan Gallery,
New York/Shanghai.

A long, low instrumental note—reminiscent of those played to allow an orchestra to tune to concert pitch—signals the start of *Lineament* (2012), a black-and-white, audiovisual installation by Hiraki Sawa. Two large screens mounted on adjacent walls display different aspects of the same narrative: a lone man in an apartment room interacting with a surreal sequence of animated objects. This installation is the focal point of "Figment," the third solo exhibition at New York's James Cohan Gallery for the Japanese-born, London-based artist.

Lineament, originally commissioned by the Shiseido Gallery in Tokyo, is a continuation of a larger project entitled "Figment" (2009). Comprised of three alternative videos that explore the various phenomena associated with amnesia, "Figment" was inspired by a friend of the artist who was afflicted with a sudden onset of complete memory loss. The project is an ongoing means for Sawa to process this experience.

The conceptual narrative of *Lineament* follows the male protagonist, who is dressed in a white, button-down shirt, navigating the apartment room. Though occasionally mobile, the man is silent throughout the video, seemingly entranced by the many peculiar objects—including intricate cogs and clockwork mechanisms—that appear before and around him in a dream-like sequence. Accompanying the video installation was a modified turntable sitting in a corner of the gallery, which played a record forward and then backward—a transfixing audio piece by the musicians Dale Berning and Ute Kanngiesser.

The vinyl record is also a prominent motif within the video. In one scene, the grooves of an LP—positioned in front of the man's face—uncoil to become a black line that inches across the apartment in an animated form. It moves its way through the walls of rooms, spirals into

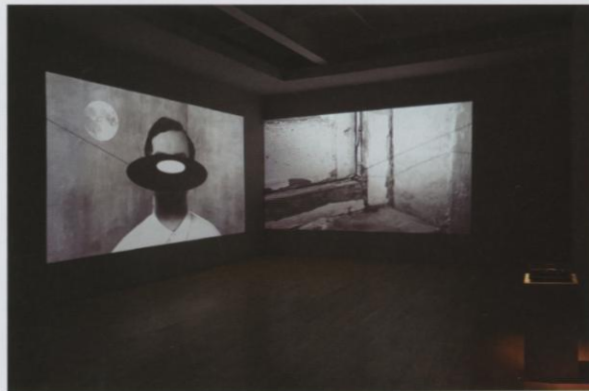
an obsessive array of circles, and even worms itself into (and out of) the ears of the unnamed man. The line is seemingly a literal thread of memory, as though tracing and connecting together all the elements that surround and affect the protagonist's mind.

At the gallery, colorful light seeped in from the room abutting this main exhibition space—a distraction that prevented one from fully enjoying the immersive experience of *Lineament*. This adjoining room displayed five video works—four small screens encased in black frames and a larger video projection on the wall—that showed images that, at times, seemed conceptually incongruous with those in the surreal *Lineament*. The projection featured a montage of vibrant flowers, while two of the smaller screens, both hanging on the wall, showed beatific scenery of various trees and countryside. All of these scenes of nature were displayed in color. One screen on a pedestal showed a ticking metronome in color, while the final video was a black-and-white wall piece depicting a woman in a tank-top turning round and round.

A mysterious female figure also appears in *For Saya* (2011). This two-channel video was displayed on monitors inside a wooden box placed on the floor in a small room across from the gallery's reception desk. A woman in a black dress is seen skipping against a white background—careful observers might recall that a smaller, white version of a similar figure appears for a fleeting moment in *Lineament*, traipsing across the background like a fairy or ghost. Also in this front room was *Souvenir Study 4* (2012), a black-and-white video piece on the wall, which shows residual images of a female figure twirling around in a skirt, in an empty, wallpapered room—her ghostly remnants seemingly trapped in a forlorn yet eerily elegant loop.

Rotation and repetition were recurring motifs among the installations shown in "Figment": the shifting cogs, the spiraling coil, the record player and the turning movement of the women. In his work, Sawa often focuses on the trickery of memory, how it can be altered and manipulated by time, as well as by emotional and mental influences. In exploring loops and meditative repetition in his work, the artist is seemingly attempting to decipher the enigmatic mechanism of remembrance and memory.

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