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Kathy Rae Huffman in conversation about a history of video programs at the Long Beach Museum of Art (full transcript)

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A Brief History of the Video Programs at the Long Beach Museum of Art

note: An edited version of this essay appears in California Video: Artists and Histories, edited by Glenn Phillips, published by the Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum. ©2008 J. Paul Getty Trust.

Between 1974 and 1995, the Long Beach Museum of Art [LBMA] operated one of the most successful and innovative video art departments in the country. In addition to an active program of exhibitions and screenings, LBMA developed a number of important projects for cable television broadcast, and maintained a post-production facility and visiting artist residency that provided artists with access to editing services and equipment. In 2006, LBMA's video archive, consisting of nearly five thousand tapes, was transferred to the Getty Research Institute, where it will be digitized and made available as a study archive. The following text has been synthesized from interviews with former LBMA staff to compose a brief history of LBMA's video programs, as told by David Ross, Deputy Director Television/Film from 1974-77; Peter Kirby, Video Station Manager 1976,77; Kathy Rae Huffman, Video Coordinator 1979 and LBMA Curator from 1980-1984; Kira Perov, Curatorial Assistant/Video 1983; Assistant Curator 1984, and Carole Ann Klonarides, LBMA Media Arts Curator from 1991-95.

Carole Ann Klonarides: When I was hired as Media Arts curator at the Long Beach Museum of Art in 1991, there was an article that came out in The Journal of Art about my hire, and in it I said I was proud to go to the Long Beach Museum to follow in the footsteps of David Ross, who had created this video program. Shortly thereafter, I received a letter from Jan E.Adlmann [who was director at LBMA until 1977], reminding me that it was his idea to bring the video program to the museum.

David Ross: Jan was the one who hired me. He was very enthusiastic about finding a way for this tiny little museum in Long Beach to make a difference. Jan and others from the city of Long Beach were interested in hiring I.M. Pei to design a new building for the Long Beach Museum. The Everson Museum, where I was video curator, was designed by Pei. Jan came to the Everson and saw the video program that we were doing, and he said, "Would you like to come to California and do this there?" Moving to Southern California sounded to me like a very good idea. I had done a couple of West Coast video shows at the Everson. At that point Bruce Nauman was still very actively doing video in Los Angeles, as was John Baldessari, and there were so many other artists who were active that, when I came out here in 1974, I just felt like I'd died and gone to heaven. Everybody wanted to work with video. They all wanted to try it; it was in the air. If in the 1960s everyone in southern California wanted to work with plastic and fiberglass and "finish fetish" and create artworks that were kind of like surfboards and kind of like sculpture, by the mid-seventies, everyone wanted to work with television. And it was not similar to the way artists on the East Coast wanted to work with video as an alternative media. On the East Coast, there was an ideological approach to the idea of an alternative community using media art to create a different political force, and to reinvent this hybrid between documentary and narrative. But that politic never came west—although in a way it was more political, because it was artists who were just saying "We don't need a reason to use this medium, it's just there. It's the lingua franca of our time, and we should obviously play with it now that we can, now that these tools are there."

Carole Ann Klonarides: How did you set up the program at LBMA?

David Ross: My first year's budget was \$2,000 to do all the exhibitions I wanted. Luckily, with video exhibitions there's no art shipping involved. Artists would put a tape in an envelope and send it to you, and if you had a monitor and a deck, you had an exhibition. Artists weren't asking for fees then for showing their work, and they weren't asking for production support to make their work. We were all part of the same kind of moment, and it was a shared sense of experiment and even community.

Carole Ann Klonarides: You also showed the videos in a communal way. You had pillows on the floor.

David Ross: Well, we couldn't afford chairs. My wife at the time, Cheryl, just sewed up all these big comfortable pillows, and of course immediately it became a place where all the teenagers in Long Beach came to get stoned and make out after school. That became a big problem, although they were seeing art at the same time, so it was also kind of educational and fun. But the exhibition program was very efficient. We did a Nam June Paik show for \$500. It was a great show, too. It had about a hundred of his fantastic pencil drawings, and he sent Global Groove (1973) and a few other earlier tapes. It was his first exposure in southern California. He'd never had a show out here, even though he taught at CalArts in 1970-71, and even though he and Shuya Abe built the second Paik-Abe synthesizer there. But, you know, even though this is a psychedelic town, video synthesizer art never really took hold here. That was much more in the Bay Area than Los Angeles for some reason. Paik's influence was still here, but of course the really strong influences were Allan Kaprow, John Baldessari, and Bruce Nauman. The first generation of artists who had been their students were responding in remarkably innovative and thoughtful, strange, and unpredictable ways to the use of this technology, which was still pretty crude.

Carole Ann Klonarides: You set up a production facility at the Museum in 1976, which had a major impact. How did that come about?

David Ross: When I arrived in California, one of the things that we saw was missing was access to any kind of post-production. A lot of artists here were making very long and very boring videotapes, because nobody had any editing equipment. Post-production in Hollywood was enormously expensive. There weren't that many editing facilities in the first place, and only the big studios and television networks had access to them. I was on a committee at the Rockefeller Foundation, and we had a meeting to talk about California. Howard Klein, who was the head of the arts program there, said, "Okay, we'll do something for Northern California and something for Southern California, and we'll give you each \$50,000." In Northern California the Bay Area Video Coalition [BAVC] sent in an enormously complex proposal—all these studies about what they were going to do for the Latino community, the Asian art community, the gay and lesbian art community, and all the things they would do to assess the needs and create a structure. In the long run, that was very smart. They built a house of bricks. But we were the other little piggy, and we just said, "We're going to buy

\$50,000 worth of editing equipment and put it in the attic of the museum and invite artists to come and use it, and we'll spend some of that money to hire people who actually know a little bit about video editing." And then we were lucky enough to meet Peter Kirby—who is in fact sitting behind the camera filming this interview right now—and we also had John Baker. Peter and John were the hands-on technicians, so the artists had someone there to help them learn how to do it. Artists came in all hours of the day and night. We set the equipment up in the attic of 2300 Ocean Boulevard, and it was like a little paradise. It was like a playroom in a way. You came to play, and it was that high level of play that has so much to do with how art gets made.

Carole Ann Klonarides: How did artists get access to the editing equipment? Did they just come to you?

David Ross: Yes. It very quickly became known that we had this equipment. And you weren't paying \$400 an hour to work on some system, so people were very happy to wait their turn. There were no financial implications. You would just get your work done, and stay as long as you needed to stay. They didn't chase us out at midnight—it wasn't that kind of museum. It was the attic of an old brown-shingle house. Somebody told us it had been Fatty Arbuckle's summer cottage—which turned out not to be true, but we labored under that misapprehension, that we were also working where the great Fatty Arbuckle had lived.

Glenn Phillips: Peter, why don't you describe the editing facility?

Peter Kirby: We had a convergence ECS-1 with two three-quarter inch decks, and two reel-to-reel decks with a thumb edit system. They put a skylight in the attic, painted it all white, and there was a big table in the middle with one of the edit systems on each side, and then some storage for the camera. We had a color camera that was really cranky and difficult to work with, and it broke all the time, because—well everything broke all the time back then. Even broadcast equipment broke all the time. And then David's office was directly off that—literally a closet with a view; it was maybe five feet wide and ten feet long, with desks underneath the eave and a little window and cabinets.

Carole Ann Klonarides: What was your title?

Peter: David's slave.

Kathy Rae Huffman: And I was David's second slave.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Kathy, you were working at the Museum as an intern under David, before eventually becoming curator there from 1979-1984.

Kathy Rae Huffman: I was a grad student in the Museum Studies program at California State University, Long Beach in 1974, and I was really challenged about this thing called video. I somehow immediately got attracted to the word. I'd never heard it before, so I came to the Long Beach Museum to look at what was happening there, and then I did my graduate project on video. David invited me to be an intern, although it was pretty much a full-time position, because there was so much that needed to be done. There were artists making works right there in the house, there were things to be ferried back and forth from Los Angeles, and equipment that needed to go places.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Didn't you find it kind of odd that the museum was a little house on the bluff?

Kathy Rae Huffman: No, it was a perfect place for it. The works were on television sets and it was in a house. That's what you associate television sets with: being in your home, so it never occurred to me that it was something unusual or odd.

Kira Perov: The Museum was a beautiful old Craftsman house, and other than the low ceilings it was perfect for video. It had lots of different rooms, and you didn't have to do a huge amount of building to create smaller rooms for installation pieces. Those were always exciting to put in, and we were able to cope with that within our budget. We did a lot of things on a very high level with very little money.

Carole Ann Klonarides: I'm interested to hear about some of the fun. I know there used to be a sign that would be put on the door to the attic that said, "Tape in progress," and that usually meant mischievous goings on.

David Ross: Well, it was the 1970s, so I would say that from time to time we were stoned. Although for the majority of the times we were just stone sober, because the work was grueling and hard, and when you're editing, it's really not that fun to be stoned. But there are some artists who only work that way, and the museum was becoming an active co-conspirator with the artists here. We weren't stepping back and waiting and assessing the quality; we were throwing our lot in with them. We were active agents in helping work get done. I think that museums cross that line regularly now, but back then some people raised their eyebrows, thinking that we had lost our level of academic objectivity because we were implicated in the production of the work.

Carole Ann Klonarides: And the Museum was still being run by the city at this time?

David Ross: Yes, but we had no relationship to the city, and the city gave us no money whatsoever. You have to remember that we mainly just kept wondering why they were stalling on the new I.M. Pei building. Why weren't they going ahead with this? And of course it had to do with the corruption that was taking place in Long Beach at that point in the real estate development community, and its relationship to the city and the city's redevelopment office and the city manager's office.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Did you have a board of trustees?

David Ross: There were some people, but no one gave money. Boards are only important in museums when they give enough money to have a voice. Our money came from the NEA, and the Rockefeller Foundation continued to backup their investment in the post-production facility. Every once in awhile we would find somebody who would give us a couple thousand dollars, but there really wasn't money involved, and that didn't matter. In fact, the lack of money—and thus the lack of the concerted interests that money carries in the art world—meant that we could do whatever we wanted, and that was a fantastic license to explore and experiment and allow artists to fail. Because the difference between a great museum involved with contemporary art and a mediocre one is that the great ones aren't afraid to fail along with the artists who they support. They don't insist on everything being a pre-determined homerun. They're willing to take risks, or let an artist take a risk, and stand behind them whether they succeed or fail, and we did a lot of that. Ultimately, I believe we played an important role in the growth of Southern California's ability to become more actively engaged in the kind of sea change that the evolution of video as a creative medium brought about.

Carole Ann Klonarides: And were you thinking about collecting? When did you start to actually acquire tapes and have them in the museum?

David Ross: We weren't thinking about collecting per se. First of all, we had no budget, and we weren't really making concrete acquisitions with contracts and all the things that today seem so obvious and essential. At this point, we had what I'd call an accretion rather than a collection. Artists would make a tape, they'd leave a tape. Artists would show a tape and wouldn't ask for it back, so it would just be there on a shelf. I mean, why would they want it back? They can just make another dub. It didn't have any value. It was just a box that you ran through a machine, and the notion of it having any long term value was completely alien. The notion of there ever being a market for video was not even imaginable. Who would want to pay for this? How would you own it? So you could work with any artist, and their dealers wouldn't care. Leo Castelli was always so grateful to us for being a place that would take care of all his kids that wanted to play around with video for a while. That was his attitude. It wasn't negative, but it was rather paternalistic, like "It'll go away."

Kathy Rae Huffman: But eventually the museum did start officially acquiring works. And of course there was always the request that artists who worked in the studio left a copy of their tape as part of the collection. It was understood that would be part of the deal. It was a growing collection, but I think nobody had experience in actual museology and database organization. Plus, nobody had computers at this time. It was all written down on little 4x5 cards and put in file indexes.

Carole Ann Klonarides: David, what was the concept behind creating the Southland Video Anthology exhibitions?

David Ross: The idea of the Southland Video Anthology was just to have a simple structure where we could contain the amazing explosion of activity taking place all throughout this region. There were hundreds of artists, and many of them were really interesting or had great potential. So, without wanting to be overly restrictive and overly curatorial, we wanted some structure that would allow us to be generous. There were no critical standards yet, and I wasn't interested in the establishment of premature critical standards. I was more interested in a forum where artists could get their works shown, because when the work of art isn't shown, the artist can't grow; the work of art can't have its life.

Peter Kirby: There was a great deal of energy and generosity emanating from the Museum during this period. The Museum was committed to showing the most diverse possible work, and getting as many people as possible to see it. That created an environment of trust and excitement, as well as a social scene. We were constantly grabbing equipment to go shoot projects. Of course, there was down time too. I mean there was lots of space. It seemed that there was all the time in the world, and that nobody was going to actually have a career doing this. There was a sort of ethic of poverty—that this was good because it wasn't monetized. It was good because you couldn't make any money, even though you had to have money to do it. I enjoyed that contradiction. It seemed like an ideology almost.

David Ross: It was a very interactive moment for everybody, because it was a shared sense of "We don't understand this," and we were all trying to understand what video would mean. It was very important at the time to try to understand the potential and the reality of video. To figure out what it meant, in terms of changes in the larger social fabric, when artists had access to their audience in a totally different way. That's what brought me to Long Beach in the first place, the idea of building the museum its own channel. It was Nam June Paik's idea, which he planted in my little, very empty, fertile mind at that time, which was that the museum of the future has to be a television station, among other things. That the museum needs to be a catalyst; it needs to be a node, a participant in a structure; it needs to push and be an active agent for change. In this case, the change that we were talking about was the ability for artists to eventually—as they fairly soon will be able to do—just sidestep that entire superstructure that comes between an artist and his or her audience, his or her viewer; the other individual, the other side of the equation.

Carole Ann Klonarides: It's hard to imagine the context of actually creating these programs before Los Angeles had institutions like MOCA. It seems that there was a wealth of creativity, but the absence of a larger audience.

David Ross: But audience didn't matter. What mattered for us were the artists. And people took notice. Giuseppe Panza, as you remember, first offered his collection to us in Long Beach. Of course, he wanted too much and we were all out of our depth in terms of being able to negotiate with a collector of that level of complexity—and of course many years later the major portions of the collection went to MOCA and the Guggenheim Museum. At this point, we were mostly caught up in worrying about why the new building wasn't happening. We had no idea that the only reason our building wasn't going forward was that the city redevelopment commissioner couldn't figure out how to get a kickback from I.M. Pei, because he wasn't a local architect and would never do something like that. And of course it was eventually the local gang of architects that called the FBI. A sting was set up, and the city manager and the redevelopment guy were caught literally red-handed with a shoebox full of Mexican gold coins being given as a bribe. The FBI was slick enough to have a photographer there, and it was on the front page of the Long Beach newspaper the next day. It wasn't even like a secret bust. This was like reality TV.

Carole Ann Klonarides: And how long did you stay after that happened?

David Ross: After that happened they hired a new city manager from San Jose or somewhere up north, and we met with him. The first sentence out of his mouth was “Well my wife likes art,” and I thought, “Oh, this is it. This is so over.” And Jim Elliott, who was the director of University Art Museum, Berkeley, which is now the Berkeley Art Museum, offered me the job as chief curator and assistant director for collections and programs at Berkeley. Who was I to say no? So I said yes, and moved up to Berkeley. Jim Elliott was an amazing guy. He loved what I was doing, and he wanted to see the Pacific Film Archive transform, and get more involved in video. He understood that his museum needed to look at the changes in art that were taking place. And I was happy to do it, because in fact I was beginning to feel that video, in its ghettoization, was not being well served. Video needed to be seriously engaged, but also seriously integrated into the collections of a museum. A Bruce Nauman video was meant to function like a work of sculpture on a pedestal, the way they were showing it at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery. Not just in soundproof rooms off in basements, the way the Museum of Modern Art was showing them at that point.

Kathy Rae Huffman: After Jan E. Adlmann and David left, the museum was faced with reorganization, because there was nobody at the time that knew what to do, and they actually put the museum under the auspices of the city librarian. There was a bit of retrenching going on in the city. Funding was lower, and this was seen as a way to perhaps bring the museum more into a community focus, because it had been seen at that time as more elitist. I think they wanted to have it be open more to the local community.

Carole Ann Klonarides: What about the artists’ community?

Kathy Rae Huffman: They came down from Los Angeles. This was a supportive organization for that community when it wasn’t happening anywhere else. Plus, the museum was supporting events that took place outside of Long Beach. We worked with organizations like LAICA, Beyond Baroque, different cable stations in Los Angeles, and places like that. After David left, Nancy Drew came in as curator, and I became her Video Coordinator. That was my first official title here. By this point, we were a bit more aware of the proper way to do an exhibition and the timing of press releases and things like that. The program became a bit more formalized.

Carole Ann Klonarides: You also started doing more outreach.

Kathy Rae Huffman: The first wave of exhibitions was all organized here at the museum. But by the time Nancy came in we knew about a lot of other programs going on, so we started doing more guest-curated programs. We expanded the network, and it was great to have other artists and curators come here, and for us to take work to New York and then later abroad. It needed to happen. In 1980 I took a show to Paris called California Video. That gave us an immediate introduction to a whole new world of artists working in the medium, and it was also an introduction of California video to Europe, because New York had always been seen as the video center. We met artists from all around the world, and all of a sudden they started coming here to Long Beach. We offered them some support and showed their work.

Kira Perov: There was always a communication between the little Long Beach Museum and the other major media centers across the country and internationally. I remember many times we’d show the Ithaca Video Festival program, which would come to us basically as a unit. Or we’d have exhibitions coming from places like Finland and Japan. The Museum was curating its own exhibitions, but we would also have these other shows that would come in as packages, and it was very stimulating, and important for the artists here to see them. And then our programs would travel as well. I think the Long Beach Museum may have been the first institution on the West Coast to buy European-standard PAL video equipment, which was important both for bringing international programs here and for allowing our programs to travel abroad.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Were you also commissioning new works?

Kathy Rae Huffman: Commissioning was something that we didn’t do as much of. We had almost no budget. But around 1978 or 79 we got money from the Rockefeller Foundation to open up an annex at the fire station in Belmont Shore. The city gave us that building to use, and we had big plans. Nancy Drew and I were really working hard scheduling exhibitions for the space, and then it turned out that we couldn’t have it be a public facility because there was no emergency exit, so we had to go back to the drawing board. Ultimately we turned it into a production studio, an editing studio, and a home for the archive. We were able to do programs there, but they had to be by invitation only. Later on they built an apartment, and it was wonderful. Artists could stay there while they were working. There was a lot of autonomy in that building for people to come in and go out, and a lot of moving back and forth, checking what was happening, and sitting around late at night when artists were editing.

Carole Ann Klonarides: So you were more like a producer.

Kathy Rae Huffman: We were often in a producing role, yes. We started a cable series with a local station, and we started producing a weekly program. It was very short, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, but they repeated it several times a day, because there wasn’t a lot of independent programming. It was called simply Video Art. We did interviews with artists on video, and sometimes we showed excerpts of the work. Whenever anybody came to town we would grab them and interview them. For the broadcast works we had to get release forms, and we had to be careful about the content of the works and the language before we could put them into the series. The first program we did was from The Kitchen in New York. It was Vito Acconci’s The Red Tapes (1976), and it was supposed to broadcast on a cable station in Long Beach, and then a station in Los Angeles, and then one in Santa Barbara. I was the bicycle. I drove from Long Beach, took the tape to L.A., and then took the tape up to Santa Barbara. But the Santa Barbara station refused to show the work. I was just incensed and said, “Why?” They said, “This is not art.” I said, “Well, I’m sorry. But it really is.” They refused to show the rest of the work, but we continued with the other two stations.

Carole Ann Klonarides: You were also working quite a bit with performance, like in the exhibition At Home which celebrated works of all media by women.

Kathy Rae Huffman: The At Home exhibition was curated by Arlene Raven in 1983, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Womanhouse, which was a big collaborative installation started by the Feminist Art Program at CalArts. [KATHY: WOMANHOUSE WAS IN 1972. WOMANSPACE

GALLERY OPENED IN 1973, AND THE WOMAN'S BUILDING OPENED IN 1973 AS WELL.] Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Wilding, Helen and Newton Harrison, Eleanor Antin, and Suzanne Lacy all did projects. It was a great exhibition, and we did a big performance festival here at the museum with video projections going on in all corners of the grounds. There were nuns up on the roof sprinkling powder over the audience—flour actually, but it was supposed to be radioactive powder. There were women crawling up the front of the museum. Bill Viola was our bartender. We had the cable station here with a “scary video” competition, so people could come and try to scare the camera, and then we gave a prize. We did a lot of things like this, and we had a huge public coming to see it. Actually, they were lined up down the street to come to this particular event, which was on Halloween. Lyn Blumenthal and I did a video program as part of the exhibition, and we did a performance series, which I worked on with various members of the woman's building. There were things that happened all over the city of Los Angeles, and it was a lot of fun.

Carole Ann Klonarides: How many shows did you do a year?

Kathy Rae Huffman: We probably did one exhibition a month, plus we did screening programs, had people coming on residencies, and we facilitated things in other places. So I'd say it was a very heavy schedule.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Who helped you do all these programs?

Kathy Rae Huffman: I had a number of assistants here when I was curator. Kira Perov helped for a number of years and she was fantastic. Vicki Whiting was here. Patti Podesta was my assistant for a couple of years. So we had very good people here who were all involved with video, and who could ensure the work was shown properly in the museum.

Carole Ann Klonarides: This was an interesting time to be involved with video because the NEA and the Rockefeller Foundation were both funding video at arts organizations nationally. This began a very rich and collaborative time that also matched the emerging technologies that were happening. Could you describe some of the other technologies you explored in exhibitions at the Long Beach Museum?

Kathy Rae Huffman: In the late '70s and early '80s there was a great deal of interest among artists to connect through television, telecommunications, and other technologies exploring remote communication. This very much pre-dates the things that are happening today through the Internet. One of the projects that were very exciting for me was the Picturephone performance series by Nam June Paik in 1979. He had been artist-in-residence at UCLA, and he'd spent maybe six months here in Los Angeles working with Professor Mitsuru Kataoka, who ran a very innovative program at UCLA. He'd arranged time at picturephone meeting rooms at AT&T. These were early videoconferencing board rooms, which cost about \$400 an hour to rent. UCLA didn't have the money, so I said, “Sure, let's do it. I'll pay the time, and we'll edit the tape and make an exhibition out of it.” We took our own equipment there to document the performance. It was quite exciting. Shigeo Kubota was part of this, as well as Al Robbins, Joan Logue, Shirley and Wendy Clarke, William Wegman, and others. We had a lot of animal exchanges. In Los Angeles we had Gary Lloyd with his dog, and in New York we had Bill Wegman and his dog Man Ray, and they were doing their performances together with their animals. It was one of those projects where you only had one shot at the whole thing. You didn't have a chance to explore the equipment and get to know the possibilities. So it was a one-off, and there were many one-offs at this time. Another was Hole-in-Space: A Public Communications Sculpture (1981) by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, which was extremely successful. They set up a live video projection feed between a window in The Broadway department store in Century City and a window at Lincoln Center in New York, so that passersby in each city could communicate with one another for three days. We had a whole series of documentary photographs printed up and on display at the Museum. Kit and Sherrie edited their documentation reel in our studio, and we had a very nice reception and exhibition of the work afterwards. So it had a legacy after it was shown, and it went on to become one of the pivotal works in telecommunications art. It got huge attention internationally, and they went on to create a whole organization built on this with their Electronic Cafe in Los Angeles.

Carole Ann Klonarides: You also did the show *The Artist and the Computer* in 1983.

Kathy Rae Huffman: I was quite interested in computers very early. I had invited an artist from Germany, Klaus vom Bruch, to come as a resident, and he came only on the condition that we have a computer for him. I bought an Apple III+ computer with a graphics pad and a lot of software, and he came and gave workshops to artists in L.A. about how to use basic computer programs. Everybody said “Oh, it's way too complicated for us. We can never do this.” Klaus made some works here, and we did start to use the computer at the Museum, mostly for credits and certain video graphics. It got me interested in artists who were using computers, and I started to find more and more. There was a new organization at the time called SIGGRAPH, and they were very, very helpful. There was an artist, Frank Dietrich, who later went on to develop huge programs with Silicon Graphics. Ed Emshwiller at CalArts was very helpful. He was already using computers in his video work. The show also included photographic work, and artists who were using computers to create designs for work in other media. It was the only time one of our exhibitions got a headline in the daily newspaper, and the people, again, were lined up down the street to visit the museum. It was an amazing event. Nina Sobell did her Brainwave Drawing piece. We had performances and conferences. John Whitney, Sr., and Woody and Steina Vasulka came out. Gene Youngblood came out and talked about the work. We had film screenings. We went all around the city of L.A., as well as Long Beach.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Did the show travel?

Kathy Rae Huffman: No, and I couldn't get any financial support for the show either, so I couldn't even do a catalog. But around this time we started up a new cable television series, called *Shared Realities: A Cultural Cable Series*, and we made *The Artist and the Computer* the subject of one of those programs. *Shared Realities* was a big experiment. We were always interested in reaching an audience outside of the museum, so of course we were interested in television audiences and in cable television, which was really changing at this time. There were really good things about the series. The bad things about it, of course, were that none of us knew how to make television, and the programs are pretty unwatchable. But looking at them twenty-five years later, we were really trying to get to grips with how to make a new kind of presence for artists on television, and it opened up future possibilities for funded projects with cable TV.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Shortly after this you left the Long Beach Museum to go to the Contemporary Art Television (CAT) Fund, which was specifically commissioning works for television.

Kathy Rae Huffman: Yes. I moved to Boston where I was the curator/producer for the CAT Fund. This was a project with WGBH Television and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, to produce artists' works for broadcast and eventual sales to TV. We never got to the point where sales actually funded new production, but we did relatively well.

Glenn Phillips: Kira, when did you start working at the Museum?

Kira Perov: I was there in 1983 and 1984. Prior to that, my husband Bill Viola and I had been living in Tokyo. After we moved to Long Beach, I realized that I needed, apart from my photography, something else to do, so I started working with the video program at the Long Beach Museum. First I was on the Video Council, which was an advisory committee at the Museum, specifically for media. We worked in general to support video projects and programming, but one of the main things we did was help secure grants. The Museum was being run by the city, and in order to apply for grants it needed an official body separate from a government body. The Video Council applied for those grants, and we also had to report on those grants as a separate body. The Museum was considered a regional museum, and because of this it was actually generating revenue in terms of grants. In fact, I think that is one of the main reasons why the city agreed to continue the video program. In addition to my work on the Video Council, Kathy brought me on to help project-by-project.

Glenn Phillips: What were some of the projects you worked on?

Kira Perov: The largest one that I was involved in was the exhibition *Video: A Retrospective: Long Beach Museum of Art 1974-1984*, which lasted a whole year. We realized that it was coming up on ten years of video programming, and in order to document that we felt we needed to produce a catalog and to actually look at the video collection itself, to catalog and assess what we had. I was hired to work a couple days a week—and of course I worked full-time, practically day and night, to get these programs going and to produce the book, which took years off my life. But I had the great pleasure of actually going through every single file that had been created in the video program, looking at letters and seeing how all of these programs had been constructed, who had curated them, and then documenting it in this book. It was a real pleasure for me to be able to put all of that information together in one document, and to also include the holdings of the Museum's video library as part of the book.

Glenn Phillips: In 1984 video was still quite young, but nonetheless old enough that you could really start to think about its history. What was that like to go back and see all of these phases that video in general and the Long Beach Museum specifically had gone through?

Kira Perov: Well it was really fascinating, and it's also wonderful that the Long Beach program continued for more than a decade after that—and it should still have continued—but the really unique thing was that this was the first program on the West Coast that actually had a production facility attached to it, and that changed the face of video on the West Coast completely. Once you have a place not only to show work, but also a place to make the work, it stimulates a large number of artists who normally wouldn't have access, and who probably wouldn't even think of using this kind of medium. It caused a lot of people in southern California to just pick up this medium and start using it. In the area of performance art, in particular, video became a critical tool, and not enough has been done to really study West Coast performance art. All of a sudden, video allowed performance artists to create an extension of them that was not just a record of what they were doing. They could use video to create things that their own body could not do, either through editing or even through simple acts like turning the camera upside down or using slow-motion. Some artists only used video once and then never used it again, but that experience of working with video still informed their other types of work, whether it was sculpture, painting, whatever.

By the time that we were actually creating this book in 1984, we really felt that video had come a long way, and we created a one-year-long program to celebrate that. There was plenty of work—in fact too much work—to show over a whole year. Connie Fitzsimmons put the final programs in the series together and myself—by this point Kathy had left—and we organized things into categories. We started off with individual artists who were important in the field. Then we moved into work that dealt with media and communications, such as the first cable projects and other work that commented upon television. Then we had programs focusing specifically on West Coast artists, and the fourth category dealt with international artists and cross-culturally based works.

Glenn Phillips: You were also using your skills as a photographer to capture video stills. At this point, the only way to get a good video still was to photograph the video on a monitor, and that was very difficult to do. I feel like I can always tell when a still is yours before I even check the credit line, because there's a clarity that you managed to get with the camera that most people weren't able to do.

Kira Perov: Well I have always taken stills. After I became interested in photography I was always doing my own kind of photographs, but I was also working with Bill [Viola] a lot, and Bill did quite a number of works during the time I was working at the museum. So I always had access to video equipment and photo equipment, and I knew how to use both. It was very frustrating, because the equipment itself couldn't pause things very cleanly, but I was somehow able to coax certain tapes to do that, and I got to know which filters to use for color. So I just got the knack of it. But what interested me was how to represent a video artwork as a still image, and I quickly came to find that there were some pieces with which you could never do that successfully. I got to know a lot of the videos very, very well because I was constantly looking, extremely carefully, to find which frames would be well served graphically in print, while also conveying the meaning of the work.

Glenn Phillips: Peter, you stopped being Technical Director at the Museum post-production facility in 1978, but you came back in 1986 to direct the Open Channels program?

Peter Kirby: Yes. Open Channels was a grant program that made broadcast- or cable-level facilities available to five artists per year through a jury process. I was hired to be the producer, starting with the second series. The work involved was an extension of the same kind of thing I had been

doing. After working at Long Beach, John Hunt and John Baker and I stepped into starting a company, called Video Transitions, with broadcast-quality equipment for commercial editing work. John Baker brought in a financial backer, we hired real engineers, and very quickly there were eighteen, twenty people working there. Both Johns dropped out after the design phase, but I continued working there until 1985. I started bringing in artists to do work at night or on weekends, and I would only charge them a little bit, or sometimes nothing if I was doing the work myself. This was mostly with artists I already knew, but what we were offering at Video Transitions was the closest equivalent Los Angeles had to the Standby program in New York, which got artists access to commercial facilities. I started working with the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions [LACE] Video Committee in 1984, and when I was leaving Video Transitions, I said to the committee, “We have to start something else. We have to branch out,” so I helped put together five or six facilities in L.A. that would make their services available to artists at reduced rates, and that worked for several years. What we did with Open Channels was similar, but it was working with actual Cable television stations.

Glenn Phillips: So you would go out and try to find television stations to lend their studios for free?

Peter Kirby: Yes. And, by and large, we did. We even found places in Northern California that gave us access. You just needed to find the right person at the station who was enthusiastic, and then the doors would open. Sometimes it couldn't happen again because management got wind of it or it inevitably took too long, but I think we produced a lot of really wonderful work, and it got broadcast. During this time, Connie Fitzsimmons was the curator at Long Beach, and she was doing a series called Viewpoints on Video. This was a monthly cable TV show that was shown on something like a dozen cable channels all over California, and it was remarkable. It showed work ranging from Marcel Odenbach, Dara Birnbaum, Juan Downey, Paul McCarthy, Doug Hall, Shirley Clarke, Paul Kos, and Jim Shaw...

Glenn Phillips: So basically each month there would be a sixty-minute program of video art pieces being broadcast throughout California? That could never happen today.

Peter Kirby: Never.

Glenn Phillips: Would the works produced for Open Channels be broadcast as part of Viewpoints on Video?

Peter Kirby: Yes. Open Channels produced enough work each year to fill one or two Viewpoints on Video programs, depending on the length. And then Open Channels would also produce an exhibition and a catalogue. And it was good work. When you look back, it was almost all very high-quality work, done with very little money. I don't know what the grant was, but it wasn't a whole lot

Glenn Phillips: And then in 1988 you became the video curator at the Long Beach Museum?

Peter Kirby: Briefly. I was interim curator after Connie Fitzsimmons left.

Glenn Phillips: And then the next curator was Michael Nash.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Michael Nash was my predecessor, and a very savvy curator and prolific writer. He continued some of the series that were in place, but he also took the programming in new directions, and did several programs exploring connections between video art and popular culture, like the museum first, Art of Music Video: Ten Years After. He also made catalogs for every exhibition and recognized the importance of archiving and preserving the video collection, and did manage to get a little bit of money to preserve some tapes. I was living in New York during this time, and had been involved in curating video and producing my own videos and working with The Artist Television Network to cablecast artist video on Soho TV with Jaime Davidovich. I got a call from Michael in 1991 telling me that he was leaving the Museum to work for Voyager Press, which was a laserdisc production company in Venice that was doing very innovative productions at the time. I was hired to replace him. I sold nearly everything I owned and moved to Los Angeles in October of 1991.

Glenn Phillips: What were some of the exhibitions you organized at the Museum?

Carole Ann Klonarides: I worked with the collection a lot but the first show I did at the Museum nearly got me fired. This was during the first Gulf War, and I did a show in 1992 about Arab identity, The Call: Personal Insights on the Middle East and North Africa, a collaboration with the Long Beach Opera and the Persian artist Kami. Included were some very powerful Palestinian tapes that did not go over well with some members of the audience. No matter how difficult, I was interested in making video art accessible, and to ensure its status as an important art form within the museum context and beyond.

I recognized that LBMA had the potential to create video art programs for home market distribution. In 1993, I organized Gary Hill's first retrospective exhibition, and with the artist and LBMA Annex Manager Joe Leonardi, created the catalog in video format, which also included some of his single channel work in its entirety. We produced four thousand copies of the Gary Hill video on VHS and sold all of them, and the video was also broadcast on KCET, the local public television station. As a new comer to California, I really liked working with the community. One of my favorite shows that I organized was called Diaries, in 1993. There had been a devastating fire at the public library in Los Angeles, and it was going through a process of renovation. They had all these books in storage that had survived the fire, and they were trying to find ways to make books available in other venues during this period of flux. And I thought, “Well, I'll do a show about diaries, because a lot of artists use video as a diaristic medium.” The diary is a form that is cross-genre—so I contacted the library's librarians of different specializations, and with their suggestions, put together a small library room of diaries. We also created a writing room with blank diaries, so museum visitors could sit down and write their own diary entries. And then we had a video diary; there was a little hole in the wall with a camera, and you pressed a button and you could record your own video diary. In the viewing room were artist's video diaries by Michel Auder, Lynn Hershman, Sadie Benning, and George Kuchar. Every night I would view the tape with the recorded video diaries, and then I would read the written diaries, and I kept storing them. And it was really fascinating, because both the written diaries and the video diaries—which were in a public place, mind you—were incredibly intimate. People were revealing their most intimate secrets – this was before reality television!

Glenn Phillips: What was it like coming from New York to Long Beach, not too long after the art market had crashed in New York? Contemporary art in Los Angeles was about to go through a renaissance in the 1990s, which brought a lot of international attention.

Carole Ann Klonarides: Well, I don't think people in LA really recognized that at the time. The art market crash really affected Los Angeles too. New York galleries had moved out here, and they had all closed. In 1991 there was a recession; you saw For Sale signs everywhere, and people were leaving. And it was also kind of a biblical time. There were floods, fires, earthquakes, and there were the riots. We did a show at the Museum called Relocations and Revisions: The Japanese American Internment Reconsidered, and the LA riots happened during the installation. The artworks were created by mostly Sansei artists—third generation Japanese-Americans—who were exorcising the experience of their parents, and in some cases their grandparents, who were interned during World War II—experiences that the artists themselves did not experience because they were not born or too young to remember. They expressed frustrations and observations about the internment never expressed before through their art, and in the midst of installing their work, Los Angeles had this riot—which really became a race riot between Asians and African-Americans. We had quite a few artists from out of town, and we were all sequestered in the museum, with a curfew. The riots were really bad in Long Beach—they ran a week longer there than in LA. There was an incredible amount of tension, and you could see the fires encroaching on the museum. The experience only heightened the emotions – it was cathartic. Together, we created a video catalog with performances, remembrances and testimonials by the artists. That was the first time, as far as I know, that the museum had a video for sale. AT&T sponsored the exhibition and gave the museum enough funding to purchase its first video installation, the Yonemoto's Framed. It was during the process of making the exhibition and the tape that I became aware that art in California had its own unique history and was different than the art world I had experienced in New York, which, for the most part had become very insular and self-serving. Perhaps because the art community is geographically so spread out here, one has to have an interest in being involved in a bigger picture. It's a community of a lot of different minds, individuals, and cultures, which is evident in many of the single channel programs shown at the museum.

The art schools had a lot to do with the renaissance. By this point, CalArts had been acknowledged as an important MFA program for twenty years, so this idea of great artists coming from California was well rooted. And programs at schools like Art Center, Otis, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, and UC San Diego had developed their own reputations. Initially career opportunities didn't really exist here, so artists would leave for New York after getting their degrees. But by the mid-'90s, artists were starting to stay; that made a big difference. Artists were staying, having international careers; they were beginning to prosper.

Glenn Phillips: When you got to the Long Beach Museum, what state was the collection in?

Carole Ann Klonarides: I was surprised, actually, at what good conditions a lot of the tapes were in and together, reflected the entire history of video art. It was almost orgasmic for me to walk into that archive. I just couldn't believe what was housed there. I was living in the Annex for the first two months that I was in Long Beach, and spent my time in the evenings just looking at tapes. I was amazed at what I was finding, but it was frustrating that the only way you could locate a tape was to memorize the shelves and figure out where things had been put. There was no other type of archiving. The Museum had not established rights to the works and very little permission had been officially obtained for the works that it had. Meanwhile, artists would come and say, "I want my video to be in the archive," and they would just hand over their tape. There was no form, no set procedure. While the NEA was still active, we managed to get two grants to begin to archive the collection. An archivist was hired, and we did some research, because there was no standard and one had to be established. Around this time, the Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco applied to the Getty for a grant to help it start taking a leading role in developing preservation standards through seminars, panels, workshops, and its own preservation program. The Getty called on me to be a consultant, since they did not know very much about this area at the time. They did not want to get involved in preservation, but they thought this project was worthy, and BAVC was awarded the money. I very much thought—mistakenly—that the Long Beach Museum could have a paternal role in all of this. I wanted the preservation of this pivotal collection to be something that could have helped other organizations.

But the Museum was beginning to become more traditional by this point, and it was really difficult to explain to the administration and the board that preserving this archive was something that they had to do. It had been this small renegade museum for so many years, and this video collection it had created was completely unacknowledged but unique. LBMA had been run by the city for years, but then it went private, and with that came a Board of Trustees and a Director who had a different agenda. I found myself in the position of trying to convince them of the importance of what they had. Meanwhile, the NEA closed down their media grant department. Museums were firing media curators right and left. By 1995, it seemed like there were maybe seven media curators left in the country, and that only underscored a growing feeling at the Museum that "We don't need this. We don't need to invest in this. We don't need to support this." To this day, the fact that LBMA closed the video program on my watch is very painful. They kept the Annex open for a few more years because it was still generating some income. It was a very sad ending, but I'm happy the collection and its history are now being preserved by the Getty Research Institute.

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