



Video: Histories

ists have been at the forefront of an international movement that has contemporary art.

t comprehensive survey of California video art—focuses on fifty-eight laboratives who have embraced video technology and expanded its plex sculptures and installations, devising lush projections, experiment-erating guerilla video, or producing vanguard works that engage with sts from Northern and Southern California have used video to express

with pioneers and luminaries such as John Baldessari, Chris Burden, ater, Bill Viola, and William Wegman, *California Video* sheds new light g-overdue recognition to others. The volume's commissioned essays, nscripts, and hundreds of photographs reveal a distinctly West Coast of video art.

cialist and consulting curator in the Department of Contemporary Research Institute.

otographs



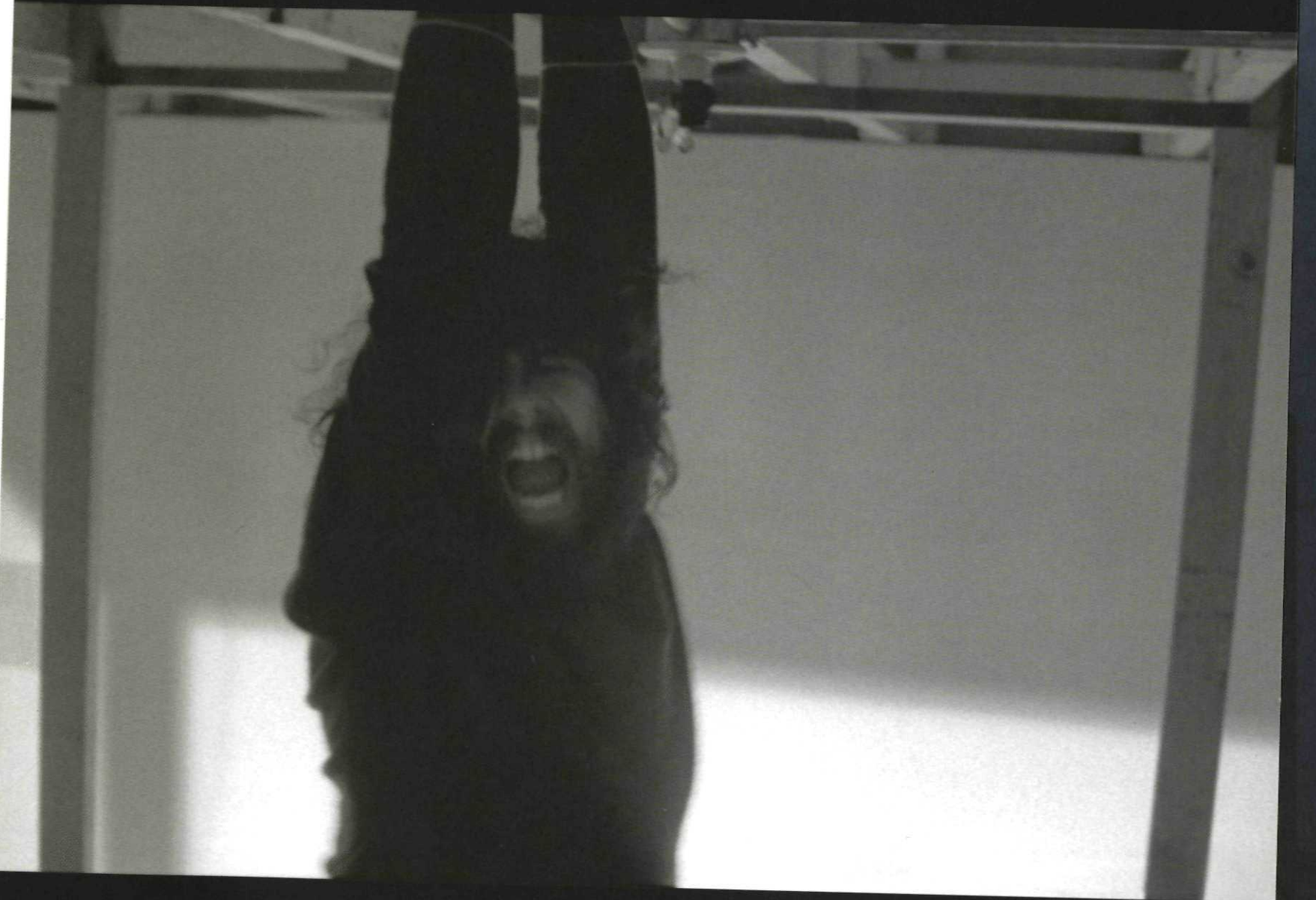
California ● Video: Artists and Histories



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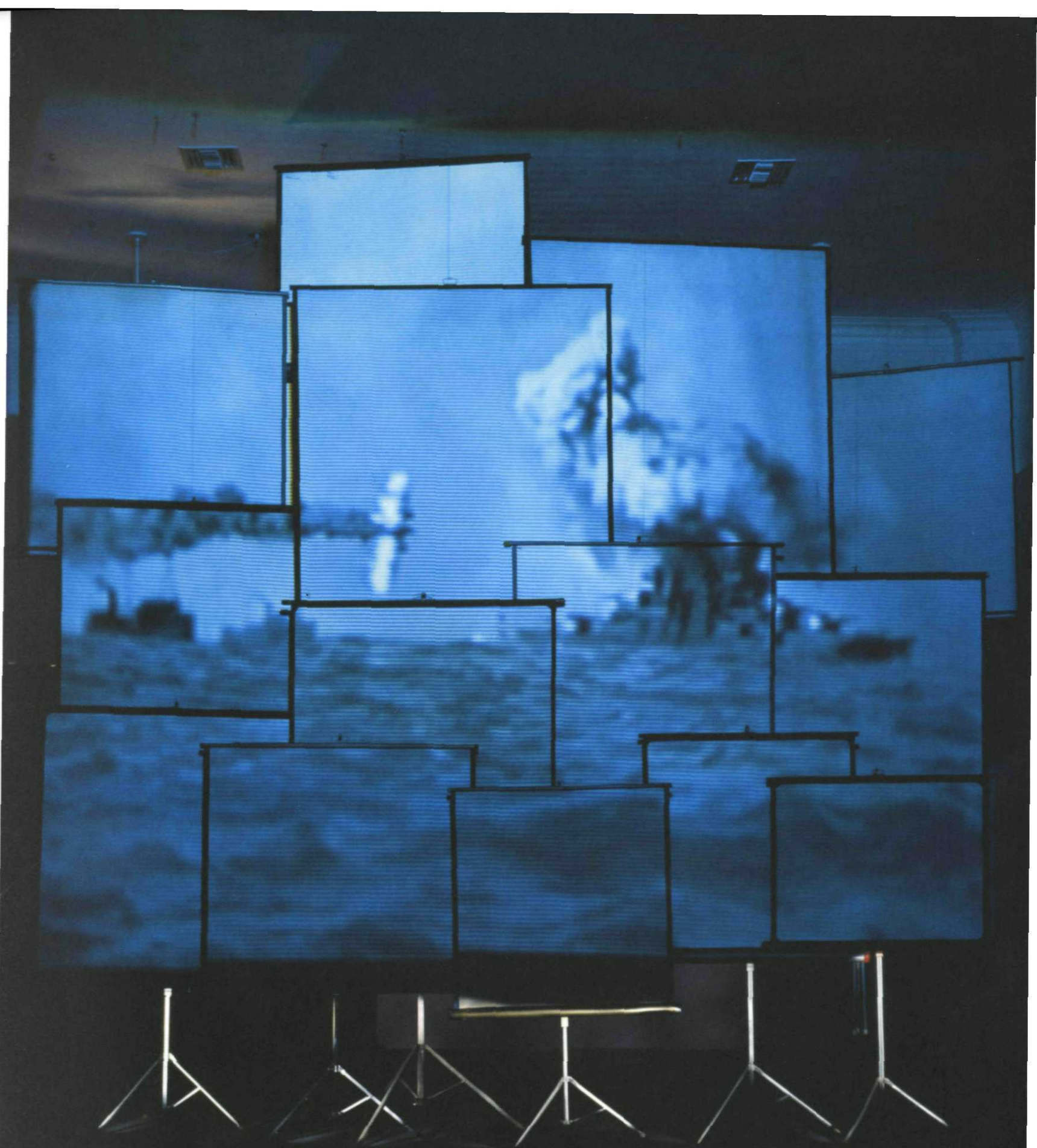
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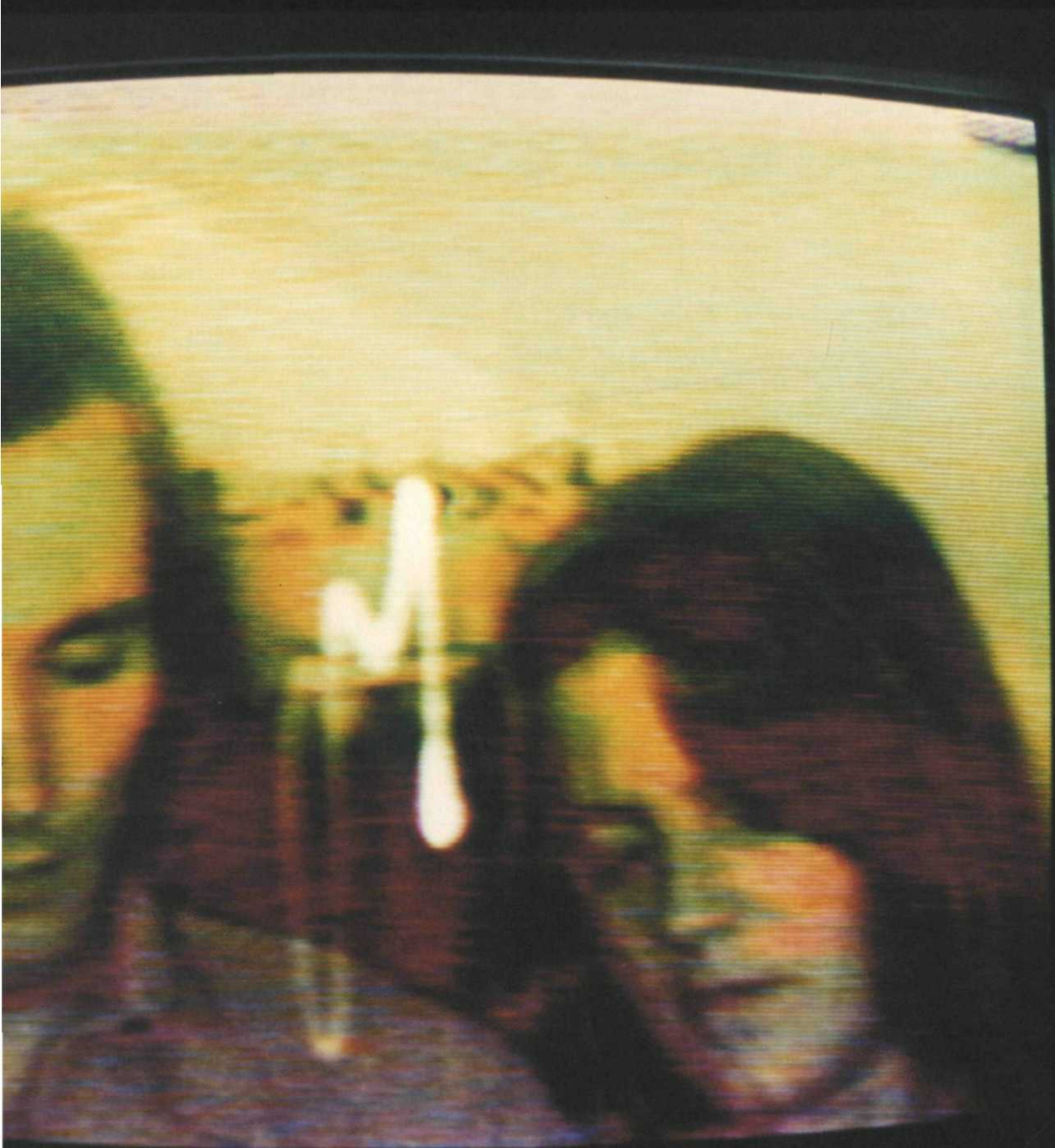
**SCIENCE
HAS
FAILED**

SONY





Alan Ackoff • Eleanor Antin • Skip Arnold • David Askevold • John Baldessari •
Enid Baxter Blader • Stephen Beck • Cathy Begien • Ante Bozanich •
Brian Bress • Nancy Buchanan • Chris Burden • Jeff Cain • Jim Campbell •
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Sam Green • Dale Hoyt • Ulysses Jenkins • Warner Jepson • Allan Kaprow •
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Erika Suderburg • Skip Sweeney • Diana Thater • T.R. Uthco and Ant Farm •
Bill Viola • William Wegman • Bruce and Norman Yonemoto



California Video: Artists and Histories

Edited by **Glenn Phillips**

2008

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Los Angeles

The Getty Research Institute

The J. Paul Getty Museum

ce and Norman Yonemoto,
Environmental, 1993. Video installa-
tion: two-channel video projection,
seventeen home-movie screens, and
black-and-white photographs; dimen-
sions variable. Photo by
Borissov.

in Bress, production still from
er Cover, 2007 (single-channel
video, color, sound; 13 min., 16 sec.).

Bozanich, still from *Bands*, 1977.
Single-channel video, black-and-
white, sound; 10 min., 16 sec. LBMA/
(2006.M.7).

ifer Steinkamp, still from *Oculus*
ter (left eye), 2008. Video instal-
lation, color, silent; dimensions
variable. Photo courtesy of Lehmann
Museum, New York; ACME, Los
Angeles; and greengrassi, London.

Sobell, still from *Interactive*
troencephalographic Video
wings, 1973. Interactive video
installation with live video and EEG
readings; dimensions variable. Photo
by Feingold.

page
Segalove with Portapak video
camera, 1981. Black-and-white
photograph, 25.4 × 20.3 cm
(10 × 8 in.).



NOTES TO READERS

All works designated in captions as “LBMA/GRI” are from the Long Beach Museum of Art Video Archive, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute. Transferred by the Long Beach Museum of Art Foundation and the City of Long Beach, 2005.

Forty-two new interviews with artists and curators were conducted for this project, and transcripts from those interviews are excerpted in this book. Videos and complete transcripts for all interviews are available at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

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FOREWORD

Since the birth of cinema, the moving image has held a place in avant-garde art. As generations of filmmakers throughout the twentieth century developed the complex language of cinematic narrative, parallel generations of visual artists created dizzying works of abstraction and experimentation that challenged every convention of the medium. It was not until the advent of the portable video camera, however, that visual artists were able to develop a form of moving-image art that could easily shift outside the “black box” of the theater and mix freely with painting, sculpture, and photography in the “white cube” of art galleries and museums. With this change—one that neatly coincided with the development of conceptual art, performance art, and other forms of dematerialized and time-based artistic production in the 1970s—video became one of the central forms used by artists in the latter portions of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Now—when digital technology offers us a steady stream of innovative new methods of creativity and distribution—the groundbreaking work of the earliest video artists takes on an air of Old Master authority.

California Video celebrates the achievements of artists working since the late 1960s in a specific locale, California, where generations of young artists were often supported by equally young arts institutions as they created some of the most radical and innovative video art produced anywhere in the world. The Long Beach Museum of Art had the vision and determination not only to collect cutting-edge video art but also to provide facilities where artists could create it. Over the course of three decades, LBMA amassed nearly five thousand videotapes and documents. When it realized that it could no longer maintain so large and, in many ways, fragile a collection, the Long Beach Museum of Art turned to the Getty Research Institute as a place where this art could be housed and catalogued, protected and conserved, studied and exhibited. *California Video* is the Getty’s first—but certainly not its last—attempt to present this collection to the public. We at the Getty Museum are grateful to our colleagues at the Long Beach Museum of Art and, just across the plaza, at the Getty Research Institute for undertaking the intensive and imaginative work of collecting and preserving this important archive.

Our collaboration with the GRI on *California Video* reflects the desire of the Getty Museum to continue to contribute meaningfully to the promotion and showcasing of contemporary art. In the ten years since the Getty Center opened in December 1997, we have commissioned a number of new works, among them Martin Puryear’s *That Profile* (1999), eleven pieces related to our collection and created by outstanding Los Angeles-area artists for our *Departures* exhibition (2000), and Bill Viola’s *Emergence* (2002), jointly commissioned by the Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, and included in the Getty’s 2003 exhibition *Bill Viola: The Passions*. In 2006 we opened the new Center for Photographs, a seven-thousand-square-foot space devoted to both historic and contemporary photography, and in 2007 we commissioned four new works by Tim Hawkinson for his *Zoopsia* project, which was presented in conjunction with the West Coast debut of Hawkinson’s *Überorgan*, displayed memorably in the Museum’s Entrance Hall.

We at the Museum thank Glenn Phillips, senior project specialist and consulting curator in the GRI’s Department of Contemporary Programs and Research, for having conceived and organized the *California Video* exhibition and for having edited and contributed to this companion volume. Inspired by the Long Beach archive, Glenn expanded the scope of the show and the publication to include works from across the Golden State. He was supported by the former director of the Getty Research Institute, Thomas Crow, and Andrew Purchuk, assistant director for contemporary programs and research, and we are grateful to them both for their involvement in this project. We also thank Quincy Houghton, assistant director for exhibitions at the Museum, and her team for the brilliant design for the installation of this challenging medium.

The work on view in the exhibition and in this publication results from the brave and fervent imaginations of the featured artists. It is to them that we owe our deepest gratitude and to whom we dedicate this book and this show.

MICHAEL BRAND, Director
THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

FOREWORD

This publication accompanies an exhibition of landmark video works from California that brings to light a story too seldom seen, even in its place of origin. Less apparent to visitors will be the background efforts of the Getty Research Institute that have allowed this story to be told with such scope and impact. The largest part of the video works in this exhibition, and the even greater number featured in this publication, are drawn from collections of the Research Library at the Institute. Abundant as they appear, these works represent only a small fraction of those stored in the Research Institute, which has assumed a crucial public role in preserving, restoring, and making accessible a record of the key artistic medium to have emerged in our lifetimes.

An artist’s videotape cassette (or any of its more recent replacements) lives two lives. In the playback circuit, it is a work of art, unfolding, as it must, in the dimension of time. Switch off the machine and put the plastic vessel back on the shelf, and the work as such ceases to exist. But the creative effort of the artist remains in another and equally important form: as latent information. To keep that information intact and available on demand requires some rare skills and even rarer facilities. And, fortunately, the Getty Research Institute has both.

Most of the videos housed at the Research Institute were originally amassed by a single museum. Just as the medium was coming into its own, the Long Beach Museum of Art threw itself into supporting this emergent art form. Video artists enjoyed regular exhibition and, just as importantly, were encouraged to use the museum’s editing facility at a time when such equipment lay beyond the reach of most individuals. Having retained copies of nearly every work shown or made under its auspices, the Long Beach Museum came into possession of the most important video archive in public hands. In keeping with the democratic ethos of the movement, it made the tapes available, as in a library, to anyone wanting to view them.

In recent years, however, the investments of space and staff required for this undertaking outgrew the means of a medium-size institution with many other commitments. Wear and tear on unique copies posed growing problems of long-term conservation that were likewise becoming insurmountable. Could this astonishing resource be preserved in the region where it was made? With the collaborative transfer of the Long Beach Museum of Art Video Archive to the Getty Research Institute, the physical well-being of the archive has been assured; researchers and artists who want to gain access to the medium’s rich history can be served; and regular exhibition will allow visitors to witness the full creative dimensions of an artistic medium in the process of its emergence.

The holdings of the Long Beach archive are, moreover, far from being the only documents of video art preserved in the Institute: more have arrived in the personal archives of individual artists; others through the remarkable public programming and curating of Glenn Phillips, overseen by Andrew Perchuk as assistant director for contemporary programs and research. Associate director and chief librarian Susan M. Allen has championed this vital direction in art documentation. The exhibition *California Video*, along with the crucial testimony gathered in the present catalogue, provides an exciting first sampling of what will become over the years a nearly inexhaustible treasure. More wonders await.

THOMAS CROW, Director (2000–2007)
THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE



INTRODUCTION

GLENN PHILLIPS

This book traces the origins and developments of video art in California through the words and recollections of people who experienced them firsthand. California—particularly the San Francisco Bay Area, Greater Los Angeles, and San Diego—has been the site of remarkable experimentations with video over the last forty years, although the stories of these developments have rarely been compiled in one place. Envisioned as a reference tool, *California Video: Artists and Histories* presents this complex history in pieces, allowing readers to freely structure their investigations and make their own connections as they go along. The book's "Artists" section presents fifty-eight stylistically diverse entries devoted to individual artists and collaboratives. The texts in this section include biographical and interpretive information about each artist, thirty-six new interviews conducted for this project, as well as a number of commissioned essays, important and rare reprints, video transcripts, and pictorial spreads. The "Histories" section contains an in-depth group interview tracing the history of video programming at the Long Beach Museum of Art, and six commissioned essays that focus on larger, often under-examined themes. The materials in both sections represent a rich set of documentation that can be used for future research. Beyond that, they provide a new context for well-known artists, offer overdue recognition for others, and shine a spotlight on emerging talents.

Focusing on both individual artists and the institutions where they found support, this introduction broadly considers the multiple points of origin for video art in California in the late 1960s and early '70s, then turns to a smaller sampling of activities that emblemize some of the shifts wrought by a younger generation of artists in the later 1970s and early '80s. This is a story that could be told in many ways, but I have often chosen to focus on lesser known artists, artworks, and institutions, both because they are frequently more indicative of developments that occurred across the state and because I hope that *California Video* will be part of a larger historical revision of accounts of the medium. For most of my examples, I've drawn directly from this volume for the numerous and parallel histories that emerged throughout California, and many of the topics discussed in this introduction are elucidated further in the artists' entries and the essays in this book.

.....

Video art came to California the same way as it came everywhere else: in fits and starts, and then in waves. But the isolated bursts of experimentation that occurred mostly in California's San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s, followed by the explosion of activity throughout the state in the 1970s, proceeded in directions unlike anywhere else in the world. Visual artists in California embraced the new medium freely and with an ease that—at first glance—appears to bear less of the detached intellectualism found in video art from New York and Europe. Of course, artists in California were every bit as serious as their counterparts in other regions, but even when West Coast artists produced the same types of rigorous formal experiments and technologically oriented investigations happening elsewhere, it was often the artists' own quirky personalities that managed to take center stage in the work, making California feel a bit lighter and more cocky in its coolness. Throughout its history, California video turns again and again to humor and the charisma of the artist to carry its ideas and hold the interest of the viewer—even when it is at its most deeply conceptual, its most stridently political, its most darkly expressive and obsessively esoteric.

By the mid-1960s, the availability of video as an artistic medium existed almost as a rumor, with news of experiments in New York and Europe spreading by word of mouth and occasionally through the press. Artists such as Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik began experimenting with

Figure 1.
Wolfgang Stoerchle, stills from
Untitled Video Works, 1970–1972.
Single-channel videos, black-and-
white, sound; 62 min., 30 sec. LBMA/
GRI (2006.M.7). Courtesy of Wolfgang
Stoerchle Estate/Carol Lingham.

television sets and video signals, and organizations such as Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) started working to make all types of new technology available for use by artists. At the time, access to video technology depended almost entirely upon access to the small number of institutions and lucky individuals who had managed to acquire equipment.

In California, the first such arts institution was probably the National Center for Experiments in Television, or NCET, which, loosely affiliated with the television station KQED in San Francisco, was founded in 1967 (as the Experimental Television Project), and remained active until 1975. Under the directorship of Brice Howard and, later, Paul Kaufman, NCET became a creative center where artists could experiment with a wide array of video technology without any pressure to arrive at a finished product or work for broadcast. NCET is most notable for its massively multidisciplinary approach, inviting painters, poets, writers, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, sculptors, and other creative individuals to participate in the experimental environment.

Described as a “video Bauhaus” by artist Stephen Beck, NCET was geared specifically toward rethinking the creative possibilities of broadcast television from the ground up, without reference to any of the inherited genres (theater, film, radio, and print advertising) that network television was so prone to imitate. The result was a type of work that seemed completely alien at the time of its creation—and still looks rather alien today. NCET’s works are distinguished by their focus on image processing—the electronic manipulation of the video signal—and by an equally experimental approach to sound. Works produced at the center tend to veer toward abstraction and rely heavily on the intervention of custom machinery to distort and expand the possibilities of video image making. Beck, who developed the Beck Direct Video Synthesizer while in residence at NCET, produced lush video abstractions without the use of any video camera whatsoever (see pp. 42–45); other artists associated with the center, such as Warner Jepson, Willard Rosenquist, Bill Gwin, Don Hallock, Bill Roarty, Loren Sears, Richard Felciano, and many others, used the abstracting properties of the video signal to examine the human figure, movement, music, landscape, color, and light.

Among the first and most extraordinary works produced as part of NCET is poet Joanne Kyger’s video *DESCARTES* (1968), an early—and highly successful—attempt to translate concepts of poetry into the video medium (fig. 2 and see pp. 146–48). Using nearly every type of processing, image, and sound-mixing tool available at NCET, Kyger produced a visual illustration to her prose poem *DESCARTES AND THE SPLENDOR OF* (see pp. 146–48). Recasting Rene Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* in distinctly personal terms, *DESCARTES* uses multiple variations of the properties of video feedback as a central visual metaphor emblemizing the mind’s turn toward itself in Cartesian philosophy. As Kyger recites the poem, the sound of her voice is often heavily modulated, collaged with other voices, or accompanied by an electronic soundtrack. The video alternates between highly edited sequences of the artist in a domestic setting and distorted images of the artist’s head or body floating in a blank expanse. The infinitely receding imagery resulting from video feedback often seems the perfect analog to Kyger’s solipsistic narrative. In one nearly abstract section, it is the fed-back imagery of the control console itself (the source of all these distortions) that accompanies not only the narrator’s realization that “I think, hence I am” but also her thoughts about the existence of “Mother God”—a moment in the video that might pull the viewer out of this heady philosophical ether and plant him or her firmly back in the world of post-Beat, Bay Area bohemia. In a final self-reflexive gesture, the concluding portion of the video focuses on the stage lights and video paraphernalia on the KQED soundstage, before ultimately pulling back to reveal the sets that had been used in the making of the video. A distinctly Californian vibe pervades this work, in part through its psychedelic imagery, but even more through Kyger’s words, her cadence, and her very appearance.¹

Despite the strength of the work produced at NCET, it was mostly working in isolation from the larger community of artists in San Francisco, few of whom even knew of its existence. Within the broadcast community, NCET’s professional outreach and educational efforts raised awareness about alternate possibilities for television; however, except for the artists who had the privilege of working there, NCET ultimately did not have an immediate impact on the larger development of contemporary art. In that realm, artists were thinking not about broadcast space but about gallery space, and the video works created by Bruce Nauman beginning in 1968 posited video as an artistic medium whose products could be perfectly in line with current developments in sculpture (see pp. 182–85).



Figure 2. Joanne Kyger, still from *DESCARTES*, 1968. Single-channel video, black-and-white, sound; 11 min., 25 sec. Courtesy of the artist and the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California.

Nauman had, in fact, been involved with one of the earliest works produced at NCET. In 1967, artist William Allan, who was in residence at NCET, invited Nauman to collaborate on the production of a video. The resulting work, *Flour Arrangements*, follows the format of a television interview program. As two “hosts” (Allan and artist Peter Saul) banter onstage, Nauman uses a two-by-four to manipulate a large pile of flour into various sculptural piles, as he had done in a 1966 photo project by the same name.² While this imitation of genre differs from any other video work ever produced by Nauman, his onscreen actions clearly indicate the direction his solo video work would take. During the time he spent in the Bay Area, from 1964 to 1968, Nauman had, in addition to his sculptural and photographic work, produced a small number of activity-based 16mm films and performance works. During a winter spent in East Hampton, New York, at the end of 1968 (before he moved to Los Angeles in 1969), Nauman acquired a Sony Portapak³ from his New York gallerist, Leo Castelli, and he began a series of single-channel videotapes and video installations that had a nearly immediate and international impact on the art world.

Nauman’s model of working with video became emblematic of a video art “look,” which was based primarily on the limited circumstances of its creation. Typically, such videos feature the artist, alone in the studio, performing a predetermined action in front of a stationary camera connected to a monitor that the artist can watch as the video is being made. The activities Nauman performed tended to fill an entire reel of videotape, and there was no discernible narrative direction in the work—no clear beginning, middle, or end—which made it particularly well suited to ambient display in a gallery.

While volumes have been written analyzing the meanings, motives, and implications of Nauman’s early film and video works, it can be productive simply to step back and grasp their utter strangeness and simplicity as art. With titles such as *Bouncing in the Corner, No. 1* (1968), *Stamping in the Studio* (1968), *Pulling Mouth* (1969), and *Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms* (1967–68), Nauman’s films and videos depict the artist doing the types of things that many people, most artists, and all children may be prone to do when they are deep in thought, alone, and sure that no one else is watching. The videos’ series of bouncing, pacing, and stomping around, or pinching, squeezing, and otherwise examining the body, strike an unacknowledged familiarity in the viewer, combined with the shock

of seeing this activity on a television, in a gallery, and proposed as art. In 1968 and well into the 1970s, very few people had ever seen a video image that had not been produced by a television network, and one must imagine how strange and radical this must have felt for a viewer—and how powerful it must have felt for an artist. During the heyday of the conceptual art movement, it often seemed that each new artwork existed as a proposition aiming to expand the definition of what, in essence, art could be. Video's ability to capture an expanse of time, to present the performance of an activity as the making of an artwork, and to present the making of an artwork as the finished work itself seemed, at the time, to hold revolutionary potential.

Nauman's solo exhibition at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles in January and February 1969 included (in addition to other works) a video, *Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube* (1969)—a simple work in which Nauman, sitting on the floor in a darkened room, does exactly what the title of the work says (see photo on p. 184)—and the exhibition can be said to have set off a flurry of longing among artists who saw or heard about the work.⁴ For many artists, Nauman's show at the Wilder Gallery provided their first occasion to see the possibilities of video as an artistic medium, presented in the context of gallery display. As artist Howard Fried notes in his interview in this volume (see p. 90):

When I entered the gallery, the tape where [Nauman] manipulates a fluorescent tube was playing. I was the only person in the gallery. I had come in at a point in the tape where he wasn't moving, and for a time, there was no sound. After what seemed like a long time he moved, or he moved the tube and it made a sound. I realized I had never seen television silence for more than a few seconds. It was really magical.... The aesthetic and political implications were staggering. Today, that probably sounds ridiculous; but the effect of a first encounter with a transcending technology can't be understood except in a context where it doesn't exist. At the time, commercial media was totally stilted. It was unnatural because there was no personal media to inform it, and media production was so expensive and so cumbersome that it had to be bureaucratized in order to exist.

The promise held by video, that it could create "personal media," that normal people could control the production of video imagery and bypass the tightly controlled corporate structure of commercial media, seemed like a revolutionary and democratic advance. Video was seen as a potentially radical political tool that could subvert the relationship between dominant media structures and the audience, eventually allowing artists and anyone else to directly address the public without the need for a support structure of broadcast television, museums, galleries, or other forms of distribution.

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At the time of Nauman's Wilder Gallery exhibition, easy access to video equipment was almost nonexistent in Southern California, but that situation would change dramatically with the opening of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in fall 1970.⁵ Blessed with a utopian vision and extremely generous funding from founders Walt and Roy Disney, CalArts purchased more than two dozen Portapak units and set out to recruit the best teachers and students possible in all artistic fields. The initial group of faculty there included several artists who were already working with time-based art such as video, film, or performance, including John Baldessari, Allan Kaprow, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Shuya Abe, and Wolfgang Stoerchle. Faculty and students alike set about freely experimenting with video, and this led to a period over the next ten years at CalArts that could be described as a mass experiment by multiple generations of students and teachers that sought to explore nearly every creative possibility offered by the simple Sony Portapak.⁶

CalArts was certainly not alone in driving a wave of artistic exploration with video. Elsewhere in Southern California, new Master of Fine Arts programs at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of California, San Diego, took similarly ambitious approaches to recruiting faculty and students. By the early 1970s, one could find students interested in video at nearly every art department in the Southland. While not every school was well equipped at this point,

artists were finding access to video equipment in other ways, often making friends with the technicians working in the various dental and medical schools and psychiatric facilities where video was being used as a tool for teaching and observation.⁷ By the early 1970s, a number of smaller spaces and museums were beginning to show video as part of their exhibition program, including the artist-run F Space Gallery in Santa Ana, the Newspace Gallery in Los Angeles, the Pomona College Museum of Art, the Pasadena Art Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Like Nauman, the first generation of video artists in Southern California began by working with an incredibly limited set of tools—typically a stationary Portapak connected to a monitor. William Wegman's observation—that you can always recognize a piece of '70s video art because it ends when the artist walks over to turn off the camera—was as much a necessity as a style, because artists had almost no access to the editing equipment that would allow their videos to end in any other way. And despite its revolutionary potential, the Portapak was a fussy machine. Unlike with film, with video it was difficult to make clean in-camera edits by stopping and restarting a recording—not only would the image usually distort and roll each time the recording was stopped, but the camera's microphone would record the sound of the button being pressed. The camera performed poorly in low light levels, but it was also so sensitive to direct light that overexposure could permanently damage the machine. And, while technically portable, the camera was heavy, bulky, and difficult to use while moving. Therefore, the most successful early videos in Southern California tended to be works that could be completed with a stationary camera, in a single take, and in a controlled lighting environment.

Despite these restrictions, artists used the camera in surprising and ingenious ways, and in doing so revealed a new set of formal possibilities for art making. This was certainly the case with Wolfgang Stoerchle, who, while teaching at CalArts from 1970 to '72, produced an extraordinary series of untitled videos that systematically dissect the properties of the medium. Stoerchle often turned the camera's limitations into strengths, sometimes exploiting possibilities afforded by working with multiple cameras at a time. In an early work, Stoerchle marched toward the camera in a cavernous darkened room while swinging a lantern back and forth, creating fleeting and abstracted impressions of his body that were enhanced by the camera's modest abilities to capture moving light. The effect was refined in a later work in which the artist intermittently activated a high-powered flash in a darkened room. The flash was bright enough to temporarily burn an image on the camera tube, creating what seemed to be ghostly photographs that would slowly fade again to black. In another work, Stoerchle framed an image of his head on a monitor that he used as a stool, while a second camera filmed him from the neck down as he tried to keep a black bar over the video image of his eyes (fig. 1). Other pieces involved the artist interacting with previously recorded videos, as he attempted to pause, reverse, and stack multiple layers of footage together in his increasingly complex experiments.

Stoerchle's formal innovations developed almost as a side effect of his primary artistic concern, which was to explore his own body as an object. Stoerchle was using the formal possibilities of video to create new ways to capture and contain his image, but he also used the space of the video screen to articulate a place—physically and symbolically—where the body could both struggle and be free. This included activities such as squirming his sweatsuit-clad body into a state of undress, designating the upper and lower frame of the monitor as the anchor points that hold his sleeves and pants in place, and, in another work, framing and articulating the edges of the screen based specifically on the range of motion allowed by his exuberantly bouncy penis, which, being filmed with an upside-down camera, appears to defy the laws of gravity. Stoerchle's most shocking work from this period features a series of miniature figurines of Disney characters being extruded from his foreskin—a clear indication that the culture around CalArts in the early 1970s was a far cry from the community of fresh-faced young animators-in-training envisioned by its founder, Walt Disney.

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The explosion of video activity in Southern California in the early 1970s went hand in hand with an explosion of artists working with performance art. Like Stoerchle, artists such as Paul

McCarthy, Linda Montano, and John Sturgeon began using their bodies as sculptural material, and video was often an ideal means for recording the transformations and ordeals to which artists subjected themselves. In its more infamous incarnations, performance art in California meant activities such as Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971), during which the artist had someone shoot him in the arm with a rifle. More universally, however, performance art was advancing a freedom and openness with the body that expanded video art into new political and expressive realms. At the forefront of this movement were feminist artists who used performance and video to, as Suzanne Lacy describes, explore "every body function, every emotional experience, every taboo, everything that we could." (See Lacy's interview on p. 155.) In Los Angeles, much of this activity initially centered on the short-lived Feminist Art Program at CalArts before shifting to the Woman's Building and the Feminist Studio Workshop, which were established by artist Judy Chicago, art historian Arlene Raven, and graphic designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville in 1973.⁸ Not only did the Woman's Building function as a school where women could be educated as artists, activists, and citizens, but it was also an important exhibition venue for video, performance, and all other artistic media.

Feminist artists took the formal tools of conceptual art and applied them to political ends, expanding an arena for narrative, personal expression, and didactic content in the realm of fine art. Video was a natural tool for feminist artists, and the political goals of this worldwide movement helped push formal developments in video art in new directions, redefining possibilities for the medium. The goal for many artists was nothing less than a reorientation of art-making toward the social and political and away from the bourgeois notions of art as high-priced collectible. Feminist artists made one of the strongest pushes to see the role of art extended as a politically relevant component of society at large, to be used as an educational medium and tool for social change. In her interview in this volume (see p. 200), Martha Rosler describes the promise of video:



"...Not that the work of the modern artist must by any means resemble the past, but he must show some sense of it, a realization of its presence and attraction. Otherwise he dissipates himself in sheer quality and fails to impose that order and shaping which are indispensable concomitants of high art, and without which the truly cultivated spectator is left thirsty. High art resumes everything that precedes it, otherwise it is less than high."

Clement Greenberg
(Partisan Review, July, 1948)

Video was good for cheap, crummy-looking moving images. They were like movies made on the cheap out of toilet paper, which, therefore, could not be judged by the normal aesthetic standards. The same way performance could not be judged by theatrical standards, video could not be judged by the standards of cinema. . . . Alongside performance, video was a very important tool in the women's movement, because it was new, provisional, cheap, simple, time-based, and speaking. Like performance, it was time-based and speaking; like performance, it was provisional; like performance, it evaded expectations of professionalism and genre. But unlike performance, it was exactly repeatable and transmissible to others elsewhere. . . . Video created a community, it resided within a community, and it moved to other communities, creating a new, discontinuous "imagined community." It had many possibilities because it was new and no one was telling you what you had to do with it.

Feminist artists made a point not only to produce work that fit within the larger context of contemporary art but also to educate themselves about the power structures of mass media and to interrogate its tactics and inherent prejudices. Artists such as Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, Martha Rosler, Nancy Buchanan, Susan Mogul, and Eleanor Antin produced stylistically diverse works that find a point of origin in performance and conceptual art (fig. 3). These artists rarely produced straightforward performance video, however, opting instead to incorporate formal aspects of other genres—news media, television, film, and fictional and autobiographical storytelling techniques. In works like Rosler's *Losing: A Conversation with the Parents* (1977), the normally vapid conventions of a middle-class "lifestyle" interview are adapted to produce a video about anorexia and global food supply (see p. 200). Suzanne Lacy's *Learn Where the Meat Comes From* (1976) uses the form of the television cooking show to collapse notions of consumption and the body (see p. 156); and in *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977), Lacy, Labowitz, and a group of collaborating artists adapted the form of a television press conference to stage a performance protest about violence against women, carefully orchestrating every aspect of the event to ensure that its imagery and words could not be twisted by manipulative television editing (see p. 156). Additionally, the international network of supportive organizations and institutions that developed in tandem with the growth of the women's movement created alternative channels for distribution and exhibition, which helped spread locally produced work to national and international audiences.

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By the mid-1970s, the number of video artists in Southern California had reached critical mass, and when the Long Beach Museum of Art (LBMA) inaugurated a permanent video program in 1974, the stage was clearly set for interesting things to happen. Originally aiming to expand the role of the museum to include cable television broadcast as a theoretical new artistic arena,⁹ LBMA recruited David Ross, a young curator from the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, to be LBMA's deputy director and curator in charge of video. Ross immediately responded to the needs of the new program by bringing in exhibitions by established artists such as Nam June Paik and the extraordinary series of videotapes produced at Art/Tapes 22 in Florence, Italy. He showcased the range of video being produced locally in Southern California by initiating the exhibition *Southland Video Anthology*, which, in its two incarnations in 1975 and 1976–77 featured the work of dozens of artists and encapsulated the massive range of video activity occurring throughout the region. Ross describes this early period of California video as follows (see p. 253):

[W]hen 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 to conventional mass 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 equally 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 work with it—now that we can; now that these tools are available.”

In 1976, LBMA received a \$50,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, which it used to set up a post-production facility within the museum, inaugurating a period of more than twenty years during which the museum would actively contribute to the creation of hundreds of video art pieces produced by both local and international artists. Easy access to editing and post-production assistance undoubtedly amplified both the volume and quality of work being produced in Southern California, and for the next twenty years LBMA’s video archive served as one of the main educational resources in the region.¹⁰

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LBMA was not, however, the first California museum to make production services available to artists. In Northern California, video technology became available to some artists through the activities of the de Saisset Art Gallery and Museum at Santa Clara University, which acquired a Portapak in 1971.¹¹ Under the leadership of director Lydia Modi Vitale and artist, curator, camera-person, and video technician George Bolling, the de Saisset set up an ambitious exhibition program that prominently featured video. In addition to video exhibitions by artists such as Douglas Davis and Bill Viola, an early survey of Japanese video art, and the annual *Saint Jude Invitational* exhibition, which included video works each year between 1972 and 1977, the de Saisset exhibited or commissioned a number of works by Bay Area conceptual artists such as Paul Kos, Tom Marioni, Howard Fried, Terry Fox, Joel Glassman, and Bonnie Sherk, in many cases providing them their first opportunity to work with video. In the extremely vibrant and somewhat self-contained Bay Area arts community, these artists were translating tactics of East Coast and European conceptual art into highly visual and often humorous artworks that often felt more connected to natural processes and the social fabric than their counterparts elsewhere.

Along with the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco (founded in 1970 by Tom Marioni), the de Saisset was instrumental in the creation of a number of important video works by Bay Area artists, although its approach was also highly selective and curatorial, primarily granting access to a handful of outstanding artists working in a particular conceptual vein. Elsewhere in the Bay Area, individuals who were loosely organized around artist Skip Sweeney and a group called Electric Eye were taking a more grassroots approach (see pp. 226–29). Sweeney began working with video early in 1967 while studying at Santa Clara University, after a friend acquired a camera and basic editing equipment. Sweeney’s innate technical facility left him undaunted by the camera’s limitations, and he immediately began experimenting with different forms of camerawork and editing, while also producing several feedback-based abstractions. With an impromptu and often humorous style of video making, Sweeney and the other artists associated with Electric Eye headed to both the street and their own living rooms to capture footage. The resulting works exist somewhere between documentary and parody, and often perfectly capture the multitude of communities that formed San Francisco’s unique counterculture. Electric Eye soon began working with another collaborator, Arthur Ginsberg, and the group renamed itself Video Free America (VFA) near the end of 1970. In addition to producing its own video works, VFA also came to function as both a post-production and exhibition space. Early VFA-organized exhibitions, such as *Tapes from All Tribes* (1971) at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, were among the first exhibitions in California to attempt a survey of the wide range of art-world and underground video occurring nationally.

Electric Eye developed an early form of video installation, used solely in the service of a new conception of theater. In *The Philo T. Farnsworth Video Obelisk* (1970), an obelisk-shaped tower of seven video monitors played a synchronized mishmash of two channels of video, presented as a weekly theatrical event. Mixing experimental documentary with abstract video feedback, found footage, a “video jockey” narrator, and just plain silliness, *The Philo T. Farnsworth Video*

Obelisk stands as one of the most genuinely creative early experiments with multichannel video display.¹² This approach was later refined in the wildly successful *The Continuing Story of Caryl & Ferd* (1970–75). Conceived by VFA cofounder Arthur Ginsberg, *Caryl & Ferd* presents what could be considered the first reality television. Following the lives of Caryl Rowe and Ferd Eggan, an addictively telegenic couple living an aggressively alternative lifestyle, *The Continuing Story of Caryl & Ferd* was presented theatrically on eight monitors showing two channels of synchronized video, which could be mixed live during each performance (see photo and articles in Arthur Ginsberg’s entry, pp. 98–101, and the interview with Skip Sweeney, pp. 226–29). Video cameras in the control booth allowed live footage of the audience, footage of machinery in the control booth, or zoomed-in sections from video monitors to be mixed in as well. *Caryl & Ferd* toured several cities as live video theater, received national and international press, and ran continuously for more than a year at VFA’s space in San Francisco before ultimately becoming all but forgotten.

As evidenced by organizations like NCET and VFA, video in the Bay Area was much more collaborative and more directly connected to the counterculture than was video in Southern California. While the Bay Area’s conceptual artists were building networks of support at museums and art galleries, groups like VFA and NCET were engaged in a different sort of cultural production that did not immediately have the larger art world in mind. Other collectives, such as Optic Nerve, Ant Farm, T.R. Uthco, and, later, Target Video, produced work that straddled the worlds of fine art and mass media. Overall, the eclectic, independent, and youthful nature of most Bay Area video lends the work an energy that seems to be bubbling up from society at large rather than from the rarefied world of conceptual art. Video slowly became accessible to students across the Bay Area in the early 1970s, although schools there were a bit slower to act, and there was no equivalent to the sudden influx of resources triggered by CalArts and other new programs in the south. At the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), Howard Fried successfully lobbied to acquire video equipment in April 1972, although it was a painful process for Fried and one that resulted in the type of passive-aggressive bureaucratic maneuvers deployed when generations clash within an institution—including a period when students choosing to work with video received almost no support elsewhere in the school. Fried’s efforts eventually led to the official creation—preceded by several years of its unacknowledged existence in Studio 9 at SFAI—of the performance/video department (later renamed New Genres) in fall 1979, which became known for its phenomenally creative faculty and students and as one of the centers of the developing San Francisco punk movement.¹³

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By the second half of the 1970s, the canon of techniques developed by the first generations of video artists was becoming tiresome to a new wave of students, who were beginning to take the lessons of early video in directions that never could have been imagined only a few years earlier. Young artists such as Tony Oursler in Los Angeles and Tony Labat in San Francisco took the prototypical video art form—the artist alone in the studio using his or her body or manipulating the image in front of the camera—and introduced cultural references specific to a new generation. In an early work by Labat produced while he was a student at SFAI, the artist dons dozens of T-shirts, one after another, until his body is made monstrously huge and mobility is impossible. While the action itself fits within the confines of typical body- and process-oriented performance from the period, the subtext lies within the T-shirts themselves, as the series of band names, logos, and messages telegraphs an altogether different meaning to those tuned-in enough to catch it. Artists like Tony Oursler used video as a space where painting, sculpture, and performance could all combine in the construction of cheap yet elaborate sets and props wherein suburban myths and childhood traumas could be played out by the most minimally anthropomorphic set of objects, with the artist using the opportunity to virtually reach inside the TV screen as a means to meaningfully manipulate culture at what, for many, is its source (fig. 4).

On the margins of this scene, Los Angeles artist Cynthia Maughan was creating some of the most under-recognized video works of the period, producing nearly three hundred short videos between 1973 and 1980 alone (see the list on p. 14).¹⁴ Producing feminist work despite an

inclination not to, Maughan undermined nearly every trope of feminist art while nonetheless producing subtly political work that borrows liberally from a multitude of genres—although it most directly follows the model, established by William Wegman several years earlier, of producing short, humorous vignettes. Drawing from a range of female stereotypes that spans Victorian fiction, horror-movie bloodbaths, trailer-park drama, true-crime narrative, and everyday reality, Maughan's characters deal with both their hardships and their boredoms on screen: they have encounters with aliens; they are the victims of sexualized violence; they use fashion to hide their wounds; they take medicine with gloves on, talk to Jesus, and commit suicide; they sing, cook, exact bloody revenge, and explain the concept of jail to their cats. In a typical work, *Tamale Pie* (1978), Maughan deflates a standard feminist art tactic of taking the kitchen as subject matter. Beginning with Maughan reading a fake newspaper headline: "Family of Four Murdered!! Poisoned Tamale Pie," the artist's narrative quickly devolves to her simply reading a recipe for tamale pie and suspecting every ingredient, then turning her suspicions on each member of the dead family before exclaiming "Jesus Christ!" throwing down the newspaper, and exiting the screen (see photo, p. 165). In simple works such as *The Way Underpants Really Are* (circa 1975), the artist hikes up a sundress and rotates 360 degrees, revealing a ridiculously ratty and tattered cotton undergarment (see photo, p. 162); in *Suicide* (1973), a razor blade falls into a tub full of water and then a stream of dark liquid slowly turns the screen black. In a series of works about scars, Maughan's characters stoically and with great care apply makeup, arrange scarves, and adjust veils to cover gaping fake scars on their faces. Maughan's characters don't suffer because of media power structures or the innate injustices of society—they suffer because life sucks and is unfair for everyone.

The video works by Maughan, Oursler, and Labat from this period are important in that they employ the tactics of an earlier generation of video artists while also channeling an underground, deflationary aesthetic that ran parallel to the ascendance of punk rock as a dominant countercultural form.¹⁵ By the end of the 1970s, the democratic potential of early video was seeming to become a larger reality, as the new generation of video and performance artists created an alternate system of exhibition and display based not only in the burgeoning world of the "alternative exhibition space" but also within an even more alternative network of night-clubs, after-hours clubs, and other performance venues. As Tony Labat describes:

Around this time, there were a lot of alternative spaces, a lot of artist-run spaces. But I remember having these talks with artists like Karen Finley that these spaces had






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AND THE FILM

MONDO CANE

AND A MONTAGE OF JAPANESE ANIMATION










become too established, and we started questioning “alternative to what?” At the same time, there was an amazing proliferation of punk clubs and what they called after-hours clubs in San Francisco, like Mabuhay Gardens, Club Foot—I couldn’t even begin to name them all. The mixing of music and bands with films and video and performance in these spaces was very common and very organic, and it also infiltrated into academia. In Howard Fried’s class in Studio 9 at the Art Institute, there was a lot of catharsis, transgressive behavior, a lot of razor blades, cutting, a lot of punk aesthetics going on, which was quite unbelievable.¹⁶

In California, as well as internationally, much of the raw energy of punk was emanating from art schools, and for a time the do-it-yourself immediacy and cut-and-paste aesthetic of punk seemed perfectly married to the humble production values of video art. In San Francisco, artist Joe Rees began videotaping the burgeoning punk scene, and by the end of the 1970s he had established Target Video, a group that captured video footage of punk, industrial, and New Wave bands, along with documentation of the larger social scene and many of the other performance activities that were associated as part of those same movements. Target’s videos combined performance footage, homemade graphics, found footage, and the occasional special effect to produce a mix between performance and music videos years before the arrival of MTV, and their video works were frequently shown in both galleries and nightclubs well into the 1980s.

In the curatorial realm of the nightclub, all distinctions between artistic media, popular culture, and kitsch could vanish in favor of the youthful energy and ironic sensibilities of the club-goer as a new breed of arts patron. Few documents illustrate this more clearly than the poster for the inaugural evening of “Assault Video” at the Anti-Club in Los Angeles in 1984 (fig. 5). Primarily featuring Target Video footage from the violent mechanized performance art of Survival Research Laboratories, this evening also included screenings of work by artists Paul McCarthy and Cynthia Maughan, performance artists Johanna Went and Frank Moore, German and British industrial music pioneers Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Dept., Italian “shockumentary” *Mondo Cane* (1962), “and a montage of Japanese animation.” By the 1980s, it was this environment, as opposed to museums and galleries, that many artists saw as more relevant and formative in their artistic careers.¹⁷

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Back above ground, a proliferation of technical advances gave artists access to a wider range of tools in the 1980s, including color video, better editing equipment, video projection, basic special effects, and much more sophisticated sound. This led to yet another explosion of activity, as artists set off in multiple directions, exploring new forms of performance, narrative, political activism, installation, and effects-driven presentation, with fewer of the formal and mechanical limitations of earlier periods. In many cases, the artists who had absorbed the mass media of the 1970s, rather than artists who grew up during the 1950s or 1960s, were best able to take full advantage of video’s newly accessible capabilities. In San Francisco, very young artists like Dale Hoyt (see pp. 106–9) innately synthesized every new video- and sound-editing tool, producing virtuosic, acid-colored works that look as if the pop culture of the 1980s has been vomited through the looking glass and then shot into outer space (fig. 6).

Indeed, by the mid-1980s, the concerns and aesthetics of video art had undergone such a thorough transformation from the experiments of the first generations that the technologically and theoretically sophisticated work of this period practically constitutes a new art form. While this book aims to present examples from the entire history of California video, several additional books would be needed to fully cover the developments of the last twenty-five years. However, many entries in the “Artists” section cover the period, and the essays in the “Histories” section are devoted almost exclusively to the changes that occurred as video moved from the 1970s into the 1980s and 1990s. Few organizations in California embodied these changes more than the Long Beach Museum of Art, and the collection of interviews comprising “Recollections: A Brief History of the Video Programs at the Long Beach Museum of Art” provides an excellent introduction to the massive shifts that occurred in media art from



Figure 6.
Dale Hoyt, still from *The Complete Anne Frank*, 1985. Single-channel video, color, sound; 34 min., 35 sec. Courtesy of the artist.

the mid-1970s through the 1990s. At a more personal scale, Steve Seid’s essay, “I Ain’t Cuba: The Early Video Works of Tony Labat,” describes the evolution from the punk provocations described above and in Labat’s interview (see pp. 150–53) to the highly sophisticated examination of language, culture, and media in Labat’s work of the 1980s. In “Everything’s Important: A Consideration of Feminist Video in the Woman’s Building Collection,” Meg Cranston examines both the founding and later development of the Feminist Studio Workshop and Los Angeles Women’s Video Center at the Woman’s Building, noting the prescient and almost immediate shift toward larger preoccupations with mass media that characterized the work produced there. Similarly, Kathy Rae Huffman traces ways in which television broadcast became both a goal and a subject matter for video artists in the 1980s in “Art, TV, and the Long Beach Museum of Art: A Short History.”

In “Concept, Art, and Media: Regarding California Video,” Robert R. Riley explores how the bodily presence of the artist, so common in 1970s video, shifts to more abstract assertions of artistic presence, as evidenced by technical virtuosity and sophisticated uses of language and form in more contemporary works. Bruce Yonemoto’s essay, “L.A. Video: Uncensored,” documents the heady collision of sex, drugs, and theory that led to a remarkable group of video works that found their homes in clubs and alternative art spaces in Los Angeles. Finally, turning to the recent history of the MFA programs that played such a crucial role in the development of video art in the 1970s, Rita Gonzalez, in her essay “I Am Teaching Video Art,” examines the tendency of today’s graduate programs to teach “professionalization” and “art politics.”

I hope this project will generate renewed interest in video art’s recent and distant past, inspiring new inquiries to commence where this one leaves off. California’s artists and their histories far exceed what has been documented here, and the true complexity of these accounts resides with the artists themselves—in their artworks, their archives, and their memories. For most of the last four decades, video art in California has been marked by its existence within an unfettered and somewhat provisional creative environment. California artists have had the luxury of feeling they could make up their own histories as they went along, without bearing the heavy weight of tradition or the pressures of a developed art market. Like Bruce Nauman bouncing in the corner, they often behaved as if no one else was watching—and that unchecked, unrevised energy best characterizes California video. But of course the video camera not only watches but also records, and now that those made-up histories have become real ones, a new task lies ahead: to go back and figure out what the histories really were.

t, Water || I Become a Mummy || My Lips Depart While Sleeping || Sitting at My Table Thinking || Ophelia I & II || Eating Cake || Two
Funeral || Suicide || Arteries & Veins || A Violent Death || Shooting at Balloons with Arrows All or Part of Which Are White || Scar/Scarf ||
of Infinite Patience from the Mind of the Universe || **1974–75 (approx.)** The Magician's Cabinet || Frozen & Buried Alive || Baskets from
How to Determine Death || Against a White Tile Wall with One Eye Closed || Reading Sympathy Cards || **1975 (approx.)** Coffin from
Unconsciousness Tabulated for Ready Reference || Shelly's Remains || The Haunted Mausoleum || Hand Reaching for Medicine || Eating Cake ||
Skull || Taking Medicine with Gloves On || Typing Suicide Note || Bug Collection || Pressing a Flower || In My Purse || Golden Altar ||
Ages || Rock of Ages I || A Picture of a Piano in a Parlor || Rock of Ages II || Diphtheria || Charlotte || Sitting on the Porch || Dorthea ||
e || Making Biscuits || A French Romance || The Hat Pin || All Our Quiet Violent Lives || Razor Necklace || Poisoned Fudge || Getting
es of Spain || French Girl || Hat with a Veil || Black Girl || Dancing with Black Stockings || Putting on Nail Polish || Drinking Tea || How
ad || A Pregnant Woman Stabs Herself While Her Cat Looks On || Drinking Blood || An Illustrated Story || A Song || Hands-Hands || Still
ing for Jesus || Short Term Lease On Love || The Way Underpants Really Are || Chart of the Solar System Showing God's Home on Venus ||
asket || Sinister "Oriental" Front || Chapter 1 of The Yellow Peacock || Francie's Mother Dies || Lily, Lily's Mother, Lily's Aunt || Ripple &
of Alabama || Opal, Valeri || Newspaper Trees || A Dish of White Rice || A Story about Working || Acorns & Rushes || **1975–76** Some
e & the Chair || Claw Hammer Murder || The Suicide of Mr. Buckley || Drawings Found in a Desk || Working || Lucy & the Outlaw || She
ture & Some Dialogue || The Word Pneumonia || About Going to Heaven || Trying Not to Breathe || 100 Fans || Countries of Space: Light
le in the Dark || Burn Masks (Potato Masks) || Circle of Twigs || UFOs in the Solar System || The Thought of You || The Fall of the House
Tales of the Pioneers || The Mortal Wound || The Forest Rushing || The Forest Rushing (cont.) || Smokey Joe & the Devil || Daughters
(Ghosts in the Corners of Rooms) || "It Was Silly to Be Caught in a Room of Mirrors" || Smokey Joe & the Devil (Tracks of My Tears) || **1976**
leeding from the Place between Your Legs || Eve Arden in the Garden of Eden || Alma & the Sailor || Desert Museum || Ida Painted Lilies ||
to a Friend || A Letter to a Friend (cont.) || A Victim's Song || Pig Mask || Snakes & Rafts || Emily's Poems & How I Miss Her || It's Sad
Poodle || The Black Valley || Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun || If the Sun Landed in My Corral || The Open Refrigerator (Photograph) ||
ican Hats || Mary & Lady Jane || A Plea for the Return of the Amazon Nation || Women of Religion at Bay || A Dream (Artist & Gooch) ||
zor Blades & Black Widows in Their Hair || Things on TV || Behind Closed Doors #1 || Behind Closed Doors #2 || Communist-Munto ||
Black Widow || Slum Life || Women's Peace Movement || **1977 (approx.)** The Riddle Song || Cow Mask || Beth, a Day Staying Inside ||
ra Joke || A Game of Checkers with Christ || African Makeup || Pixie Surgeons, Brain Operation || It Tastes to Me Like a Chub || The
elf I Will Bleed || **1977** Trailer Life || Trailer Forum: In Reply to Mr. Tatwell || A Heartening Experience || The Last Night || Huge Trailer
y || Cooking Cabbage Again? || Three Women on Television (Working Class Women) || La Contessa || The Invention of Suicide || Art &
Marzipan Pigs || My Trip to Japan || Poor Woman Goes Crazy || Decorative Table Accessories || Gloves & Glasses (Dance) || Someday
ra || Prisoner of Chastity || Self-Portrait || It's an Atomic Bomb || A Game of Cards || I'll Kill You for Talking || Snap Your Fingers to the
active Sand || First He Eats Bread Fruit || Polka Dots || Mask & Cards (Clubs) || **1977–78** Zebra Skin Clutch || Japanese Slippers & Black
I || Tsetse Fly || Going to Easter Island || Forever & Ever (Hula) || The Four Horsemen || Ma Chumba || On Being in Love || Aku Aku ||
epper Day'O || **1978** Sunglasses || Hong Kong Blues || Lotus Land || Sardine || Return to Paradise/Kidney-Shape || Knives, Thunder,
ffee || It's You or Me (Grabbing the Knife) || Help Me I Think I'm Falling (In Love, Strap) || The Man Who Dreamed of Mutilating Women ||
8–79 Picking Up the Scraps || Concrete and Clay || Object || Death in Telephoto || 3 Objects || The Silver Basket || Standing Object ||
ttle Holder & Cone || Laundromat Rape || Dreams about Women || Challengers || **1979** Knock Out Rape || No. 9 || Maggots ||
ve || Surfer 2002 || Sunset Blvd. War || Records in My Room || Cafe Au Lait || 3rd Stone from the Sun || **Interiors (1980–81)** The Kind
|| The Use of Patterns in Interior Decoration || The Buddha Is a Lamp || Exteriors || Someone Else's House || Defending the Home ||
us (Interior Decoration in Heaven and Hell) || **Undated (1974–75?)** 10 Min. || Cutting Wrist || My Eyes Are Bleeding || Cutting Off
n with Hand on Backwards || Eggs || Boiling Soup || **"Poetry" (undated, late 1970s to early 1980s?)** Heather and Staples (Little Pig
e Bride Is Burning || My Arms Around You (Hugging the Camera) || Lima Beans || Kitchen Things || Dreaming of Famines || I Dreamed
1 Poems 1. The Ground Is Weak || 2. The Whiter They Are || 3. Stick Bone Dinner || 4. Fan Over India

r:
Dramatic Devices || Sex Symbol || Stains || Calcium Pills || Browning Automatic || **8/5/78** The Object || **8/26/78** Objects || **10/20/78**
s
r:
her || **1986** Suicide Cont. || Before/After || Bavarian Barbecue || Necessary Evil || OVEN || Laughing Bats || **1987** Illustrated Stories
ner || Prey || California Volume 16: A Big 9 Inches || Imagine || My Crippled Mind & Heart

(Nancy Buchanan)

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Steve Seid, video curator at the Pacific Film Archive at UC Berkeley, for bringing this and other works from NCET to my attention. For more information on NCET, including descriptions of work by the many other artists working there, see *Videospace: The National Center for Experiments in Television, 1967–1975* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2001) as well as, in this volume, the interview with Stephen Beck (pp. 42–45) and the essay by Warner Jepson (pp. 114–15).
2. For more information on these projects, see Constance M. Lewallen, *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
3. The Sony Portapak was the first commercially available consumer-grade portable video camera. Portapaks were sold in the United States as early as 1965, but they were not widely available for purchase until around 1967.
4. All forty-three of the artists and curators interviewed for this catalogue were asked this question: "What was the first piece of video art you ever saw?" Of those old enough to be aware of art when Nauman came on the scene, nearly half referenced either Nauman's 1969 Wilder exhibition, the interviews with Nauman published in *Avalanche* magazine in 1970 and '71 (excerpted on pp. 182–85 of this volume), or Nauman's 1972 solo exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
5. For more on this early period at CalArts, see the interviews in this volume with Alan Ackoff (pp. 18–20), John Baldessari (pp. 34–37), Suzanne Lacy (pp. 155–57), and Susan Mogul (pp. 178–81).
6. CalArts also had an important and well-equipped school for film and animation, but this equipment was almost never made available to students and faculty in other departments.
7. Early works by artists such as Eleanor Antin, Paul McCarthy, Anthony Ramos, and Martha Rosler were all produced in this manner.
8. For more information on the video programs at the Woman's Building, see, in this volume, the essay by Meg Cranston (pp. 269–73) as well as the interviews with Suzanne Lacy (pp. 155–57) and Susan Mogul (pp. 178–81).
9. For more on the history of LBMA's experiments with cable broadcast, see "Art, TV, and the Long Beach Museum of Art: A Short History," pp. 279–84 of this volume.
10. For more information on the LBMA, see "Recollections: A Brief History of the Video Programs at the Long Beach Museum of Art," pp. 252–68 of this volume, and *Video: A Retrospective, 1974–1984* (Long Beach Museum of Art, 1984).
11. For more information on the de Saisset, see the interviews with Howard Fried (pp. 90–93), Paul Kos (pp. 142–45), and Bill Viola (pp. 238–41).
12. For more information on *The Philo T. Farnsworth Video Obelisk*, see the interview with Skip Sweeney (pp. 226–29).
13. For more information, see the interview with Tony Labat (pp. 150–53).
14. I would like to thank Nancy Buchanan for bringing Cynthia Maughan's work to my attention.
15. Maughan, Labat, and Oursler were all involved with various punk, noise, or "art" bands during this early part of their careers, including the Poetics (Oursler); Primitive State, Auto-da-fé, the Nihils, and the Shrews (Maughan); and the Assholes and the Puds (Labat).
16. Tony Labat, interview by Glenn Phillips, March 23, 2007. Video and transcript available at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
17. See, for instance, the interviews in this volume with Skip Arnold (pp. 26–29), Ante Bozanich (pp. 50–53), and Branda Miller (pp. 174–77), as well as the essay by Bruce Yonemoto (pp. 285–90).

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RECOLLECTIONS:

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

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 2005, 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. This text has been synthesized from interviews with former LBMA staff to compose a brief history of the museum's video programs.*

Interviewees:

DAVID A. ROSS

Deputy Director and Curator, 1974–76

PETER KIRBY

Technical Director, 1976–77

Project Director for the Open Channels Television Production Grant Program, 1986–88

Interim Video Curator, 1988

KATHY RAE HUFFMAN

Intern, 1976–77

Video Coordinator, 1978–79

Curator, 1980–84

JOE LEONARDI

Video Annex Manager, 1981–96

KIRA PEROV

Curatorial Assistant/Video, 1983

Assistant Curator, 1984

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES

Media Arts Curator, 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, former director at LBMA, 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 (fig. 1). The Everson Museum of Art [in Syracuse, New York], where I was video curator, was designed by Pei. Jan came to the Everson and saw the video program that Jim Harithas and I 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 were Bill Wegman and 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 to conventional mass 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 equally 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 work with it—now that we can; now that these tools are available."

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: How did you set up the program at LBMA?

DAVID ROSS: My first year's LBMA 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, it immediately 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 of his earlier tapes. It was his first exposure in Southern California. He'd never had an exhibition in California, even though he taught at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts] in 1970 and '71, and even though he and Shuya Abe built the second Paik-Abe synthesizer there. But, you know, even though this is a big 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 the really dominant 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 facility. 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

*Interviews were between Carole Ann Klonarides and Kathy Rae Huffman at the Long Beach Museum of Art on January 9, 2007; between Glenn Phillips and Peter Kirby at Peter Kirby's studio in Los Angeles on July 16, 2007; between Glenn Phillips and Carole Ann Klonarides at Peter Kirby's home in Los Angeles on July 16, 2007; between Susan Mogul and Joe Leonardi at Joe Leonardi's home in Sisters, Oregon, on July 13, 2007; between Glenn Phillips and Kira Perov at Bill Viola's studio in Signal Hill, California, on June 22, 2007; and between Carole Ann Klonarides and David Ross at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, California on January 25, 2007.

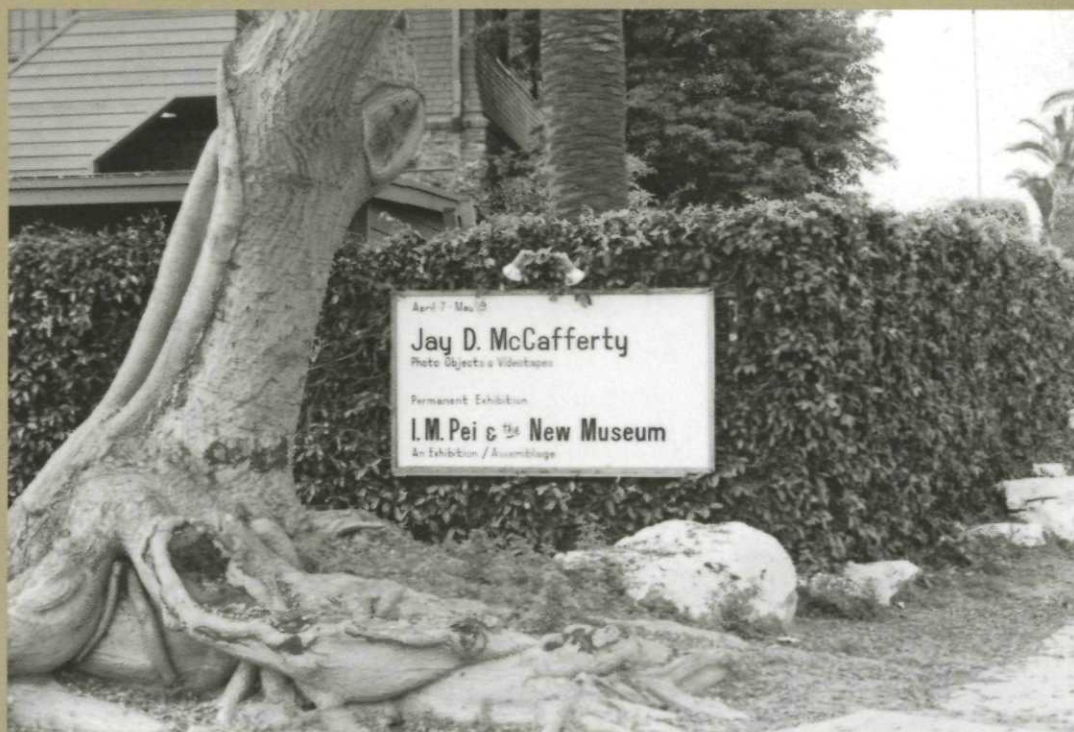
the arts program there, said, "Okay, we'll do something for Northern California and something for Southern California, and we'll give you each \$50,000." In Northern California, the Bay Area Video Coalition [BAVC] sent in an enormously complex proposal—all these studies about what they were going to 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. Access was free. Artists would just get their work done, and stay as long as they needed to stay. Artists didn't get chased out at midnight—it wasn't that kind of museum. It was in 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 edit controller with two three-quarter-inch decks, and two reel-to-reel decks with a manual edit button. 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 eaves and a little window and cabinets.

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: What was your title?

PETER KIRBY: "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.

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 is a beautiful old Craftsman-style house, and because of its low ceilings, it was perfect for video (fig. 2). It has many different-sized rooms and you didn't have to do a huge amount of building to create isolated spaces for installation pieces. Thus, we were able to mount quality exhibitions with minimum funding. With every new change of exhibition, there was always a new video program.

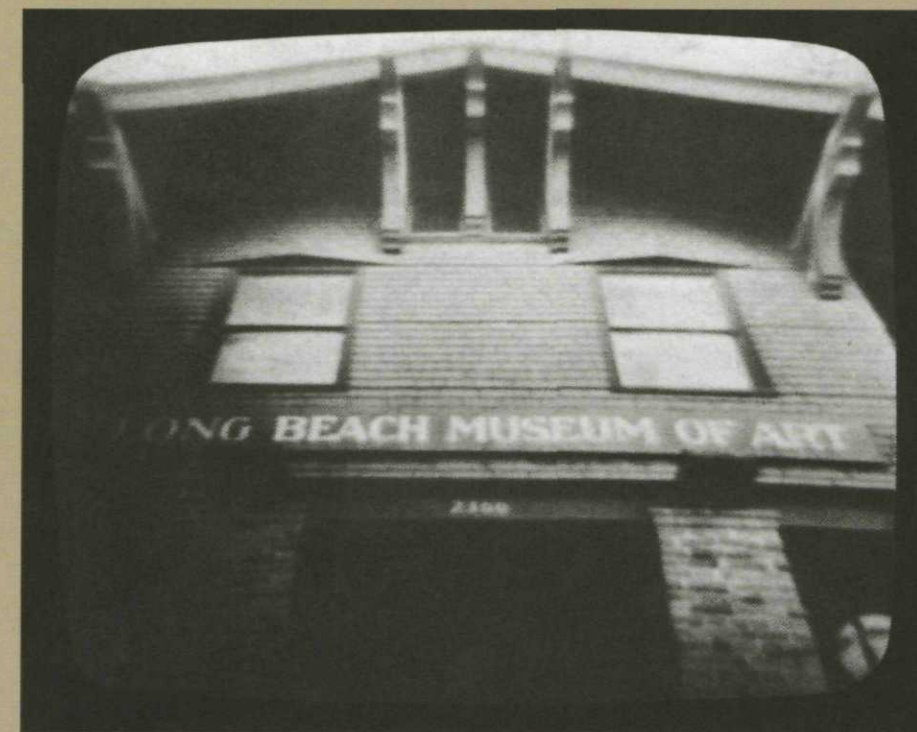
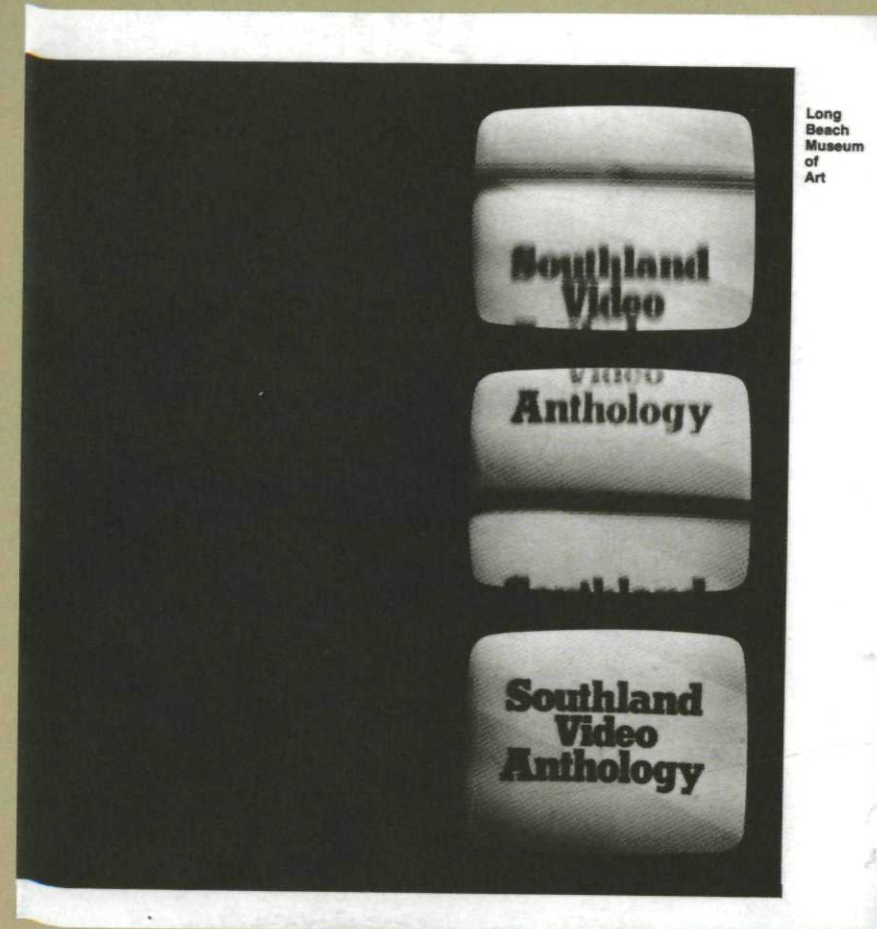


Figure 2.
Exterior view of the Long Beach
Museum of Art, California, circa 1975.
LBMA/GRI (2006.M.7).



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, which 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 time, we were just stone sober, because the work was grueling and hard, and when you're editing, it's really not possible to be high. But there are some artists who only work that way, and since the museum was becoming an active co-conspirator with the artists here, we tried to be as open as we could. 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 little relationship to the city per se, and outside of basic operating expenses, 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 was no formal board, as such. There were some people who gave us encouragement, but no money. Our money came from the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], and the Rockefeller Foundation continued to back up 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 conflicted interests that money often carries in the art world—meant that we could do whatever we wanted. That gave us fantastic license to explore and experiment and allow artists to fail. Because, in my opinion, 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 they support. They don't insist on everything being a predetermined home run. 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, then they'd leave a copy for us. 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 grateful to us for being a place that would take care of artists who wanted to play around with video. That was his attitude. It wasn't negative, but it was rather paternalistic, like "maybe it'll go away, or maybe it will be important, and will last."

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 leave 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 four-by-five-inch cards and put in file indexes.

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: David, what was the concept behind creating the *Southland Video Anthology* exhibitions [1975; 1976–77] (fig. 3)?

DAVID ROSS: The idea of the *Southland Video Anthology* was just to have a simple structure where we could explore and expose the explosion of amazing 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 few critical standards yet, and I wasn't all that interested in the establishment of premature critical standards in the first place. I was more interested in a space 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. 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 an important shared moment for everybody involved, because we shared a sense of “We don’t understand this,” and we were all trying to understand what video could mean. It was very important at the time to try to understand the potential and the reality of this medium. 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 with its own channel. It was originally Nam June Paik’s idea—one that he planted in my little, very empty, fertile mind at that time. The idea was that the museum of the future has to be a television channel, among other things; that the museum needs to be a catalyst; it needs to be a participant in a structured community; it needed to push boundaries 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 museum 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: 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 the 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 a great teacher and an amazing guy. He loved what I was doing, and he wanted to see the museum and its 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 fully 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 who 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 [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art], 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 programs that were guest curated. 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.

KIRAPEROV: There was always communication between the Long Beach Museum and the other media centers across the country and internationally. I remember many times, for example, we would show the Ithaca Video Festival program, which came already edited and “packaged.” Or we showcased international exhibitions on tour from places like Finland and Japan that stimulated the public and the artistic community alike. I think the Long Beach Museum may have been the first institution on the West Coast to purchase European-standard PAL video equipment, and this was important both for bringing international programs here and for allowing our programs to be seen abroad.

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: Were you also commissioning new works?

KATHY RAE HUFFMAN: Commissioning was something that we didn’t do too much. We had almost no budget. But around 1978 or ’79, we got money from the Rockefeller Foundation to open up an annex next to 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 use it as 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.

JOE LEONARDI: The Video Annex was primarily a post-production facility to help artists edit their video works. The residency program allowed artists to actually live in the Annex while they worked on projects, and, of course local artists used the facility as well. We were grant funded, so we had inexpensive rates, and for the time, we had some fairly sophisticated equipment for artists to use. I started there in 1981, and stayed through 1996. Originally, the museum had asked the city if they could use the fire station as a storage facility, but the museum wound up using only a small fraction of the building for storage, and the rest of the building became available for video production and post-production. We had climate control in the space, and we installed shelving to house the archive. We applied for countless grants over the years and got some funding that way, and then the annex went through a period where it became a viable, serious form of income. Video artists always had priority for booking the studio, but when the studio wasn’t being used by artists, I opened it up to other people who wanted to rent editing time at

commercial rates. We actually had two editing studios there, Studio A and Studio B. Studio B was more of an off-line room, and Studio A was our online editing room. Originally, we had old flatbed three-quarter-inch decks that were modified, although the modifications didn't work very well and a lot of tapes got stripped back in the old days. Then, I was able to upgrade to broadcast three-quarter-inch A/B roll, and then we moved up to one-inch and Betacam. We also still had some of the old half-inch reel-to-reel machines, and that was another service we provided for artists. A lot of the original video artists worked with half-inch Portapaks, and they had all their works on that format. We used the half-inch reel-to-reel decks to transfer a lot of old works up to three-quarter-inch, and then, toward the end, we started the process of transferring the old three-quarter-inch stuff to Betacam. We also did a lot of camera work for artists, and did a lot of support to fulfill all the technical requirements for artists when they were doing exhibitions at the museum.

KATHY RAE HUFFMAN: 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. Especially when we started a cable series with a local station, and we started producing a weekly program called *Video Art* in 1977. The first program we did was from The Kitchen in New York. It started off with 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 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. 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 on Halloween night, with video projections going on in all corners of the museum grounds. The Sisters of Survival were dressed as 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. Lyn Blumenthal and I did a video program, "Roles, Relations, and Sexuality," 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, we had people coming in 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 predates the things that are happening today through the Internet. One of the projects that was very exciting for me was the *Picturephone Performance* series by Nam June Paik in 1979. Nancy Drew made the connection for us, and we met Nam June in L.A., when he was artist-in-residence at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. He'd already spent maybe six months in Los Angeles at that time, working with professor Mitsuru Kataoka, who ran a very innovative telecommunications program at UCLA. He'd booked time at a Picturephone business meeting room at AT&T. These were early videoconferencing boardrooms, which cost about \$400 an hour to rent. UCLA didn't have the money, so we said, "Sure, let's do it! The museum will pay the time, we'll edit the tape, and make an exhibition out of it." We took all our equipment there to document the performance. It was quite exciting for me to convince Shigeo Kubota to be part of this, as well as Al Robbins, Joan Logue, Shirley and Wendy Clarke, William Wegman, and many others. We had animal exchanges as well. In Los Angeles we had Gary Lloyd with his "microwave receiver" dog, and in New York, we had Bill Wegman and his dog Man Ray, and they did performances together with their animals. This was fun. It was also one of those projects where you only had one shot at the whole thing. You didn't have a chance to rehearse or explore the equipment. It was one of many one-offs at this time. Another was *Hole in Space: A Public Communications Sculpture* (1980) by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, which was extremely successful. They set up a live satellite 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 by these video projection windows 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 in our studio, and we had a very nice reception and exhibition of the work afterwards. It went on to become one of the most pivotal works in telecommunications art. It got huge attention internationally, and they went on to create a whole organization, The Electronic Cafe in Los Angeles, which influenced an Internet generation in later years.

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 II Plus computer with a graphics pad and a lot of software. He came and gave workshops at our studio to artists from around 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 our video production studio, mostly for credits and certain video graphics. It got me interested in artists who were using computers. I started to find more and more, and I started to organize an exhibition called *The Artist and the Computer* in 1982. 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 hugely important programs with Silicon Graphics. Ed Emshwiller at CalArts was very helpful. He was already using computers in his video work. The show ultimately 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

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 talked about the work. We had film screenings. We went all around the city of L.A. with our program, as well as Long Beach. It was a very exciting time, and we were rewarded with huge audience numbers, all interested to know more about computers and art. Some of the events needed to be repeated to accommodate a second audience.

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 catalogue. But around this time, we started up a new cable television series, called *Shared Realities: A Cultural Arts 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 really knew how to make television. But looking at the series twenty-five years later, we were really trying to come 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. Joe Leonardi was the video studio manager, and he really drove the program. The weekly segments were very short, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, but they repeated several times a day, because there wasn't a lot of independent or public access programming produced at the time. We did video interviews with artists, and sometimes we showed excerpts of their work. Whenever anybody came to town, we would grab them and interview them. For the broadcast of 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.

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 and producer for the CAT Fund. This was a project with WGBH-TV and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, where David Ross was the director, to produce artists' works for broadcast and eventual sales to international television. We achieved coproductions, broadcasts abroad, and awards; we did relatively well, but we never got to the point where sales actually funded new production.

GLENN PHILLIPS: Kira, when did you start working at the museum?

KIRA PEROV: I worked 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 in 1981, I continued to work with Bill and on my own photography, and also gradually became more involved with the video program at the Long Beach Museum when I saw how much work was being done there and with such little resources. In Melbourne [Australia], I had directed the entire cultural arts program for La Trobe University, and in New York, I assisted MoMA's video curator, Barbara London. I was happy to be using those skills again. First, I became a member of 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 our main missions was to help secure grants. Since the museum was administered by the City of Long Beach, it needed an outside group to apply for government and private funding. The museum was considered regional, and because of this, it had a fairly high success rate with media grants; it helped that the production facility was also generating a little revenue. I think that the main reason why this avant-garde program was allowed to exist for so long in quiet Long Beach was that it was more or less self-sufficient. In addition to my work on the Video Council, Kathy brought me on to assist her, project-by-project, with exhibitions and publications.

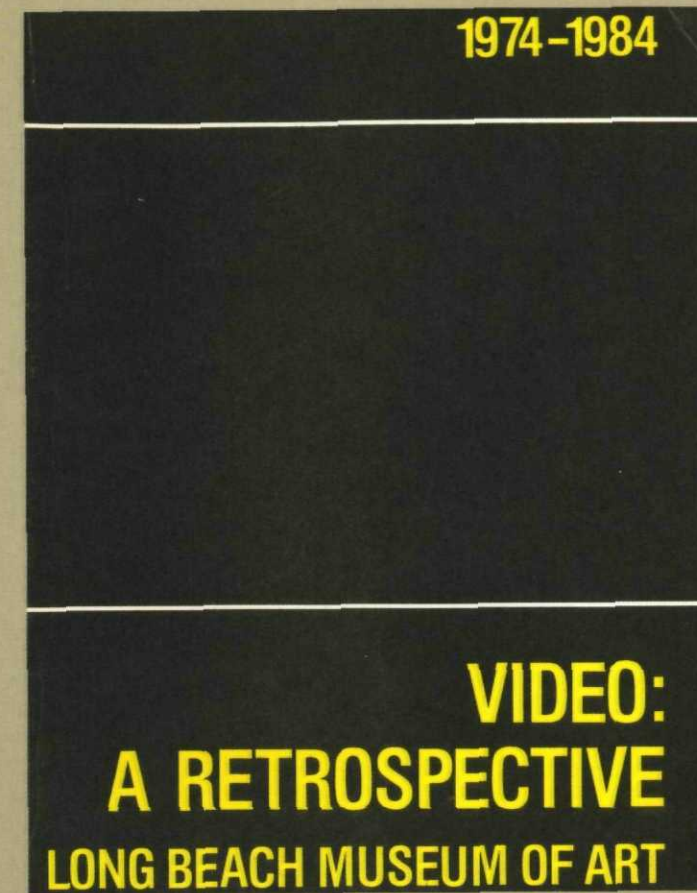


Figure 4. Cover of exhibition catalogue, *Video: A Retrospective* (Long Beach Museum of Art, 1984). © Long Beach Museum of Art.

GLENN PHILLIPS: What were some of the projects you worked on?

KIRA PEROV: The largest one that I was involved in was the exhibition and publication of the same name, *Video: A Retrospective, 1974-1984*, which took a whole year to plan and document [1984] (fig. 4). When Kathy and I realized that it was coming up on ten years of video programming and production in Long Beach, we decided that it was time to summarize the achievements of this unique program, and to catalogue and assess the video collection itself. I was hired to work a few days a week—but in the end, I put in full-time hours, practically day and night, to get the programs organized and to produce a book on time for the exhibition. I had the great pleasure of going through every single file that had been created in the video program, looking at letters, making sense of the photographs, and seeing how all of the exhibitions had been constructed and who had curated them, and finally writing a chronological history. I also took many new stills from the works in the collection for the book, which also documents the holdings of the museum's video library/collection at that time.

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 it 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: It was really fascinating. The most unique aspect of the program at the Long Beach Museum was that it provided a production facility for artists, and this completely changed the nature of video on the West Coast. This stimulated a large number of artists to use this medium who normally would not have had access or who would not have thought of using video to create works. Some artists only used video once and then never used it again, but that experience of working with a time-based art certainly informed their other types of work, whether it was sculpture or painting. In the area of performance art, I noticed in particular, video became a critical tool. It allowed artists to create an extension of themselves that was not just a record documenting their performance. They used video to create actions that their own body would be incapable of doing, either through editing, or through simple acts like turning the camera

upside down, or by using slow motion. Not enough has been done to really study West Coast performance art in video.

By the time that we were actually creating this book in 1984, we really felt video had come a long way, and to celebrate this, we decided to develop a five-month-long program, a kind of summary of the most prominent and influential work that had been shown at the Long Beach Museum. Since Kathy had already moved to Boston, Connie Fitzsimons (assistant curator at the museum) and myself organized and curated two exhibitions each to show the diversity of the video program. Connie did a survey of videotapes by individual artists who were important in the field, then moved into work that dealt with media and communications, including cable TV projects. I made a selection featuring West Coast artists' videotapes and installations, opening with a special event that included performance. An exhibition followed, with works by international artists and cross-cultural works. It is great that the video program was able to continue for over a decade longer, each curator expanding its scope and focus.

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 (fig. 5). 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: Working with Bill [Viola] allowed me to develop a knowledge of video, and together with my photography experience and access to equipment I was able to catch the image that I wanted and to coax tapes to pause cleanly on that frame. I learned to adjust the contrast, brightness, and color of the monitor and to work with the film stock and filters for



the best results. So I just got the knack of it. What interested me most in the process, however, was how to represent a moving video artwork as a still image, to find just the right frame that would work well graphically in print, while also conveying the essence of the piece. Occasionally, I would come across a tape where this frame did not exist—frustrating, but very interesting. I still do stills of the work with Bill, but now they are digital grabs, with their own set of technical issues. I have nostalgia for the scan lines of the television monitor, and sometimes I like to use those first photos of the older works in publications in order to create a sense of history.

GLENN PHILLIPS: Peter, you stopped working as technical director at the museum's 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 Baker and I, with Paul Challacombe, started a company called Video Transitions, with broadcast-quality equipment for commercial editing work. Paul had found a financial backer, we hired real engineers, and very quickly there were eighteen, twenty people working there. John and Paul dropped out after the design phase, but I continued working there as executive vice president 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 cable 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 Fitzsimons 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, and Paul McCarthy to Doug Hall, Shirley Clarke, Paul Kos, Jim Shaw, and many others.

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 remember what the grant was, but it wasn't much.

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 Fitzsimons 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 seminal *Art of Music Video: Ten Years After* in 1991. He made catalogues for every exhibition, and recognized the importance of archiving and preserving the video collection, and he 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. I was familiar with LBMA from the work I had done with the Artists' 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 laser-disc 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 1991.

GLENN PHILLIPS: What were some of the exhibitions you organized at the museum in the 1990s?

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: Being a curator of media art offered me wonderful opportunities for travel and exposure to different histories and cultures. In 1995, I received a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest grant with artist Bruce Yonemoto to travel to five cities in Brazil, resulting in the exhibition *Dentro Brasil*, which introduced for the first time on the West Coast videos by Brazilian artists. That was the final show I presented at the museum, so it was fascinating to me that one of the first historical video programs you presented at the Getty, before the LBMA archive had been acquired, looked at Brazilian video from an even earlier period.¹

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*, which was a collaboration with the Long Beach Opera and the Persian artist Y.Z. Kami. It included 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, together with the artist and Joe Leonardi, created the catalogue in video format, which also included some of Hill's 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 newcomer 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—and this was before reality television! I also worked with the LBMA collection a lot and brought in historical programs like *The First Generation: Women and Video, 1970–75*, by guest curator JoAnn Hanley [1994].

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: I don't think people in L.A. really recognized that at the time. The art market crash really affected Los Angeles too. A lot of 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 in 1992 called *Relocations and Revisions: The Japanese American Internment Reconsidered*, and the L.A. riots happened during the installation. The artworks were mostly created by *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 L.A. 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 catalogue with performances, remembrances, and testimonials by the artists. That was the first time, as far as I know, that the museum had produced a video for sale. AT&T sponsored the exhibition and gave the museum enough funding to purchase its first video installation, Bruce and Norman Yonemoto's *Framed* (1989). 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 from 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 this 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 [College of Design, Pasadena], Otis [College of Art and Design, Los Angeles], UCLA, University of California, Santa Barbara, and University of California, 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-1990s, 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 was the state of the collection?

CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES: I was surprised, actually, at what good condition a lot of the tapes were in; the collection reflected the entire history of video art. It was almost orgasmic 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 and very few permissions 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. The entire

video archive of the Woman's Building was sitting there in boxes! 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 for preservation and one had to be established. Around this time, the Bay Area Video Coalition [BAVC] in San Francisco applied to the Getty for a grant to help it take 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 over time there was 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, but it was still a very sad ending—isn't it ironic how certain museums decided to abandon video art right at the moment it was receiving serious attention by galleries and gaining commercial value? I was twenty-one when I got involved with video. I embraced a medium that I began to fear would become extinct within my lifetime, so I got very passionate about its preservation and history and turned to teaching. I spent the last ten years thinking the LBMA video collection had just been stored away forever without any foresight of its historical importance. California artists played a very important part in this history and I'm happy the Getty Research Institute is now preserving the collection and its ephemera, making it accessible to scholars and the public. Video art now is much more a part of the lexicon of art, and there is a new generation of artists who grew up using it. The tradition has been passed to a new generation, and it seems to be in good hands.

NOTE

1. *Pioneers of Brazilian Video Art, 1973–83*, presented at the Getty Center on October 6, 2004.

EVERYTHING'S IMPORTANT: A Consideration of Feminist Video in the Woman's Building Collection

Meg Cranston

WHEN I ASKED ARTIST JERRI ALLYN what she thought might be in the Woman's Building video collection, she paused, momentarily puzzled. Allyn has a long history of engagement with the Woman's Building in Los Angeles; she was active in the Feminist Studio Workshop as a student, then later became a member of the Los Angeles Women's Video Center. Allyn soon hit upon an excellent answer. What constitutes the Woman's Building video collection? "It's everything!" she said, and then her hubris made her laugh. She explained:

It sounds strange now, but then . . . everything was important. That was part of the feminist ethos. Everything was political and everything was important. So that's what got put into the collection—everything. It is the student work from the Feminist Studio Workshop, art video by all sorts of people who worked or had shows at the Woman's Building. It's the public service announcements we did, plus all the documentation of the events—the performances, the readings. There is probably a lot of unedited footage, because we documented everything—even things like moving in and painting the walls, because that was important, too.¹

Viewing the Woman's Building video catalogue confirms Allyn's estimate. Women were using video as part of an ongoing sociological, aesthetic, and technological experiment. Like many other artists, women were exploring how art and history could be made with the newly available technology of the portable video camera and via the new outlet of public access television. However, unlike other artists and countercultural video producers who used video technology in the service of art or activism, the Woman's Building video makers always worked toward both. They considered video to be an artistic, journalistic, therapeutic, documentary, and, above all, consciousness-raising tool, a means of collectively defining and advancing the far-reaching goals of feminism. The ambition was global, and the results were just as wide-ranging.

The Los Angeles Woman's Building took its name from a construction bearing the same title at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, held in 1893. While the first Woman's Building focused on women's abilities to produce by the means important in the late nineteenth century, the Los Angeles Woman's Building of the 1970s and '80s focused on women's use of forms central to late-twentieth-century life. In its updated version, the Woman's Building emphasized the feminist reconsideration of art and media production. This direction came, in part, from the building's founders—art historian Arlene Raven, graphic designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, and artist Judy Chicago all came from creative fields. More important, however, was the understanding that the production of imagery and the representation of women in art, and in the popular media in particular, were central to the formation of women's identity. By the 1970s, popular media (print, film, and television) had replaced faith and family as the hegemonic force that used phallogocentric ideology to form and deform women's self-image. Many of the tapes in the collection can be seen as an attempt to alter that image by gaining control of its means of production.

The Woman's Building encompassed a number of programs, two of which are especially important to the video archives: the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) and the Los Angeles Women's Video Center (LAWVC). Most of the videotapes in the archive were produced by the students and faculty at FSW and by the artists who ran LAWVC—a professional video production company based at the Woman's Building that offered video production education to Woman's Building members and the community. Most of the women who worked at LAWVC



What Is Social Art?

had gone to school at FSW. Although the two programs were interrelated, they had different aims and functions.

FSW began when de Bretteville, Raven, and Chicago, discouraged about the potential for feminist education at existing schools, left their teaching positions at CalArts and started the workshop. FSW subsequently founded, and moved into, the Woman's Building. Performance artist and CalArts alumnus Suzanne Lacy ran the workshop's performance component. Between thirty-five and fifty students attended the workshop, including the artists Susan Mogul, Nancy Angelo, Candace Compton, Jerri Allyn, Annette Hunt, Cheri Gaulke, and Sue Maberry. The tapes FSW produced were primarily video artworks and documents that show the workshop functioning as an alternative art school (figs. 1, 2).

LAWVC was both a place for women to make video art and an employer. The center was funded by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), a federal works project that provided unemployed or underemployed workers with a usable skill. The women at LAWVC received training and were paid a weekly salary for their work. The tapes produced by LAWVC were considered works of "social art" by its members, defined as "art that addresses, articulates and makes public issues and perspectives that affect groups of people or the culture as a whole."² To that end, the center's collection includes work by individual artists, public service announcements produced by the group, and documentaries of collaborative events with other artists.

Included with the documentary work is *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* (1977), a performance staged for the media by Leslie Labowitz, in collaboration with Women Against Violence Against Women, at Tower Records on Sunset Boulevard. *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* was designed to draw media attention to the relationship between images of violence (in this case on a KISS album cover) and the brutal treatment of actual women. The center made and used the tape as a way to educate the public about violence against women. The video collection also includes documentation of early performances and exhibitions at the Woman's Building by now-prominent artists such as Judith Barry, Rachel Rosenthal, and Cheri Gaulke.



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What Is Social Art?

Social art is a movement by artists to use their skills and creativity to address, articulate and make public various social and community issues and perspectives. While art in every form makes tangible some experience of the artist, social art focuses on those experiences which affect groups of people or the culture as a whole. Educational in nature, it offers the audience information which will enable people to take action. In this respect, social art often includes and is done in collaboration with public interest groups that concern themselves with specific social issues. It is directed at the community and may involve individuals from the community, not just artists, in the art work or performance itself, closing the gap between

artists and community, artists and real life people and issues. Social art takes many forms including visual art, performance and media art.

The performances documented in *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* and *In Mourning and Rage*, and the video tapes themselves, present social art done by groups and individuals which address the issue of violence against women. These performances, made public through television newscasts, inform the public about the issue of violence against women and encourage people to examine their own attitudes and information, and to take action.



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Lectures and readings by feminist writers and theorists were also recorded and include poets Deena Metzger, Diane DiPalma, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde, critic Lucy Lippard, writer/activist and sculptor Kate Millett, and feminist theologian Mary Daly.

The student videos in the collection show a range of socially motivated investigations. *My Friends Imitating Their Favorite Animals* (1979) is a joyful work, in which student artists at the FSW perform "animal" acts for the camera. Nancy Angelo plays a dog that barks and pants and is alternately funny and quite convincingly mean. The video is an early demonstration of Angelo's interest in the seemingly inescapable duplicity of being a socially minded feminist and an ambitiously self-interested artist.

Angelo had worked with Candace Compton to make the video *Nun and Deviant* (1976), in which Angelo plays the disgruntled deviant to Compton's virtuous but despairing nun. The nun explains, "My work is about transformation, about moving away from self-obsession." The deviant, in contrast, is mired in the muck of egocentric art making. She worries that collaborating with another artist (Compton) will require compromise and admits to being impatient with the process. The nun also confesses dissatisfaction. She is fed up with waiting around for God's grace and complains of "the trips" God is laying on her. The deviant admits to misgivings about her collaborator's talent and confesses to shoplifting bikini underwear. The dichotomy between the vice and virtue of the two characters grows increasingly murky. We are left thinking both positions are untenable—there must be another way.

Arlene Raven's notion of that other way and how it might be achieved is outlined in a recorded interview from 1979 by established video makers Kate Horsfield and Lyn Blumenthal.³ In the video, Raven traces her own intellectual development, from her early activism as a member of Students for a Democratic Society, to her training as an artist and art historian, and her eventual cofounding of FSW at the Woman's Building. Recorded six years after the workshop was founded, Raven describes herself as restless, impatient with what she defines as the limits of FSW. To achieve long-range goals, Raven explains, FSW will need a comprehensive "Sapphic" education—one that includes a positive understanding of separatism as courageous self-

sufficiency. Raven also calls for a greatly expanded conception of lesbianism that includes overcoming proscribed behaviors to become a truly independent female creator. The tape is remarkable for its historical value—as a key document in American feminism and as a persuasive conversation evincing remarkable clarity, energy, and verve. In later years, artistic feminism would become associated with a narrow field of activity and with unflattering caricatures of the practitioner, making it difficult at times to imagine the original appeal. Raven's interview instantly dispels the constraints and stereotypes, revealing them to be complete distortions of history.

As in *Nun and Deviant* and other tapes in the collection, including Raven's *Drink and Typewriter* (n.d.), many of the women portrayed in the Woman's Building tapes struggle to make choices from a limited menu of unsuitable options. Many works reflect on limits, revealing them to be false barriers—fictions constructed to maintain the status quo. The artists reveal a collective belief—that obstacles constructed through discourse can be revealed and overcome through the same means. Through conversation, women create another discourse, another reality. Talking becomes a hermeneutical tool, a procedure capable of unveiling hidden truths.

The stereotype of the talkative female is counterbalanced in Sheila Ruth's *Constructive Feminism* (1975), a documentary about the transformation of the Woman's Building on Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles to suit the goals of the organization. Women are shown literally building the walls, and it is important work. As de Bretteville explains in the video, "Part of feminist education is not only to create one's own artwork but to create the wall where the art will later hang." Involving women in the construction of the space was central to the Woman's Building's mission. Physical labor created a sense of ownership and helped, as de Bretteville states, "heal the separation between different kinds of work." The concept of openness, as de Bretteville explains, is used throughout the building and is epitomized by the entrance—a bright, open space where there was always a woman at the door. The design met an urgent social and political need—it helped women meet and engage in creative work. Visitors immediately found what they came for.

Performance artist Suzanne Lacy was a central figure at the Woman's Building. Her work in the collection includes performances for the camera as well as video documentation of performances staged as media events produced by LAWVC. Notable among these is the well-known *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977), created with artist Leslie Labowitz to draw media attention to the plight of female victims of domestic violence and rape. The lesser-known *Learn Where the Meat Comes From* (1976) engages the dominant media by parodying a television cooking show. That tape dramatizes the relationship between butchering and consuming animal flesh and other forms of violence.

Like Lacy, Nancy Buchanan mimics existing forms of media as a strategy for critique in *Primary and Secondary Specters* (1979). Buchanan uses a stock television format as a frame for radical content. The video is comprised of six monochromatic scenes and colored primary or secondary hues, and is narrated by a generic TV voice. The work reframes television to make viewers aware of its construction, coloring it in such a way that its organization becomes transparent. Buchanan weds modernist strategy to postmodern critique; in the process, she reveals television to be like the color wheel—a never-ending circular reality divided into predictable units.

A similar strategy is used in one of the thirty-second public service announcements produced by LAWVC, in which Jerri Allyn and her cousin Ricky Kamen appear, looking like two fresh-faced lovable American youths. They are so cheerful and benign they could be on a network TV show. The only difference is that they are talking about lesbianism—a preference that Allyn's male cousin describes as "all right with me." The piece decodes and reuses one of television's most pernicious qualities—unbridled enthusiasm. The actors are so wide-eyed and unabashedly cheerful that only a real meanie would condemn them.

Antoinette de Jong also uses acting for the camera as a metaphor for the roles we play in real life in *Jealousy* (1976). The video begins with an acting exercise. A seated woman swings her foot back and forth as she practices various ways to say "I am not jealous." She explains that because she is not jealous she doesn't cry. She doesn't scream. She doesn't freak out or aimlessly wash dishes. She doesn't get sick at the thought of her boyfriend having sex with another

woman, or stay home crying and blowing her nose. Indeed, de Jong does none of these things. She is not crying or blowing her nose. She is not in hysterics or watching too much television. What she is doing is making a videotape. She is making a recording of herself talking and swinging her foot. For eight minutes she describes, but does not act out, the clichés of feminine jealousy. Instead she swings her foot. Not, as she explains, because she has to, but because she wants to. The sensibility of de Jong's work is similar to that of many videos in the Woman's Building collection. The video is straightforward, unadorned, and deliberately self-conscious. Like the majority of work in the collection, it was made to tell a story that had previously been relegated to silence. The innocuous neutrality of black-and-white video serves the artists best when it contrasts with stories that are just the opposite.

Chris Wong's creepily titled work *Tuna Salad* (1978) is one of the strangest and most darkly poetic works in the collection. The video begins with an image of a speculum and a leg. There are peculiar sounds. A woman puts on a bra and then stuffs it with socks. Static takes over, and then the video breaks up completely. It tunes in and tunes out—an effect reminiscent of bad, outdated TV. We hear the sound of a vacuum, and a hand moves in and out of view. The tape goes black. Lights up, and then the slowly panning image of a medicine chest. We see a diaphragm, alcohol, and a container of Ajax. The camera pauses on the Ajax. Is that the killer? The piece is chilling, as much for its deliberate use of ambiguity as for the stark insertion of poison and violence into a clinical setting. The story seems to be about abortion—about an ordinary abortion. Wong's tape reminds us of the unspoken and often tragic circumstances by which many women came to the Woman's Building and to feminism itself. We are reminded that many of the women were working or living in high-risk situations; some were literally compelled to fight their way out. The stakes were life or death.

The idea that women sought out the Woman's Building to escape hostile circumstances is the subtext of *The Woman's Building: FSW Video Letter* (1974). Susan Mogul, then a student at FSW, leads a tour of the space as other artists celebrate International Women's Day. As Mogul guides us through the building, she brings us to Judy Chicago, who is surrounded by other women congratulating her on her new book. Soon after, she finds Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, who describes an exhibition she curated that is currently on view—the work of the largely forgotten Irish modernist architect Eileen Grey. We are introduced to Pam McDonald, a young woman who came to Los Angeles from Nebraska after seeing an ad in *Ms.* magazine. McDonald, it seems, is representative of the courage feminism requires. Like her, women must be willing to leave home. For students, this may mean leaving the familial home, while faculty had to reject their institutional homes in order to form FSW. Everywhere, numbers are important. In the opening scene, women with suitcases head for the door of the Woman's Building, and throughout the video we see women working, traveling, teaching, and building.

In the halls and archives of the Woman's Building, women—as artists and subjects, as students and instructors, as employees and volunteers—are taking action in the belief that all work is important, and that creative construction can produce social change. This conviction is the basis of the feminism that constructed the Woman's Building, and the video collection is a testament to that view.

NOTES

1. Conversation between Meg Cranston and Jerri Allyn, May 3, 2007.
2. "What Is Social Art?" a brochure published by the Video Community Resource Project at the Woman's Building, Los Angeles, California, 1979.
3. Kate Horsfield and Lyn Blumenthal, video makers and founders of the seminal video lending collection Video Data Bank, taught a video workshop at FSW.

CONCEPT, ART, AND MEDIA: Regarding California Video

Robert R. Riley

IN THE 1960S AND '70S, an emerging group of video artists used the cultural currency of television to test established boundaries around creative expression. Video artists expanded the reach of the visual arts by moving beyond representations of the human figure as a still portrait. Instead, they considered the expressive potential of the body as a site of information. Bodies were treated as more than forms; the figure became a sentient, subjective actor, hybridizing multiple artistic disciplines within video culture. Sculptors moved away from empathetic, three-dimensional representations of the figure and began using space, time, light, and sound fluidly, in four dimensions. As cinematic techniques were adapted to video, filmmakers recognized that the immediate replay of recorded images, in-camera edits, and frame sequencing all affected narrative and figural conventions. In California, artists from diverse fields used electronic media to explore the experiential possibilities offered by the human figure. Through video, artists expanded the praxis of contemporary art, making especially significant contributions to conceptual art and performance.

Howard Fried played an early and critical role in the development of both video and Bay Area conceptual art. In the late 1970s, Fried developed a curriculum and studio practice for the video department at the San Francisco Art Institute, which, under his direction, established a visiting artists program and teaching residency. Vito Acconci, Linda Montano, Chris Burden, and the Kipper Kids were among the artists invited as inaugural faculty. Their concentration on process and interaction subsequently influenced the nascent fields of video and performance art.

Fried considered video both an intimate recording space and a medium that would yield to artistic control. *Fuck You Purdue* (1971) demonstrates this dialectic between video's spatial and material capabilities. The piece takes its subject from the artist's relationship with his brother and draws the title from a brutal invective. Fried's brother had joined the Marines and was sent to basic training in anticipation of deployment to Vietnam. As a soldier, he was ordered by an officer of high rank to deliver the titular insult to Purdue—a drill instructor at Parris Island. Purdue responded by ordering the soldier to return the message to its source. As a result, Fried's brother was serially punished for insubordination. In *Fuck You Purdue*, Fried explores the limits of fraternal agency. Acting as surrogate for a brother who is elsewhere, trapped in a cycle of mistreatment, he uses the video camera to confront humiliation and despair. Through performance, Fried invokes the misdeeds of malevolent officers. His sympathetic reimagining of the abuses inflicted on enlisted men creates a kind of theater for videotape.

In *Making a Paid Political Announcement* (1982), Fried rigorously pursues the same standards for video art production demonstrated in his earlier work. The video visually articulates Fried's belief that television constructs culture, which in turn constructs audiences—turning them into endless reflections of each other. Fried's physical presence is removed from the screen and replaced with data he collected through interviews with a number of "citizen subjects." Voice-over narration recounts the opinions, wishes, and dreams of these subjects. Images shift in vignettes from scenes of the workplace to public locations as a ground for Fried's narration, promising grand solutions to problems, affirming the subjects' concerns, and sympathizing with their troubled states of mind. As Fried emphasizes, television provides its audiences with direct connections to the world via technology and ubiquity. In his announcements, he promises rescue and remedy to its discontents. By reflecting social discontent, labor issues, antiwar activism, and various inequities, *Making a Paid Political Announcement* demonstrates an alternative role for artists' video. Fried casts the artist as an independent voice in the media; at the same time, the video excludes representation of the figure, allowing the mechanisms of the medium to speak for themselves.

Art historian Anne-Marie Duguet argues that strong, deliberative gestures and speech in 1970s performance video drew from postwar avant-garde theatrical forms, 1960s demonstrations, and street theater.¹ In *The Arts for Television*, a landmark exhibition produced in 1987, Duguet connects artists' videos to the theatrical innovations of German playwright Bertolt Brecht and the French playwright and poet Antonin Artaud. Postwar and avant-garde theater used struggle and abjection to confound viewer perception—often employing discordant dialogue and extant corporality on stage. Duguet observes parallels between such theatrical strategies and the psychological depth and permutations of spoken language in conceptual video. Fried's video work resists association with "cool media," a passive condition of information media as distraction proposed by theorist Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. Duguet's observations provide critical insight, as Fried instead uses syntactical complexity and dissonant speech to incite active states of reception in the viewer. He shouts from a wooden set constructed in the studio and changes scenes through in-camera edits and clothing variations. Ultimately, Fried succeeds in materializing a concept and in creating a work of enduring value in the field of video performance.

Martin von Haselberg and Brian Routh met in 1970 in London, where they created a performance team named the Kipper Kids. Evocative of medieval carnival and the burlesque of comics Laurel and Hardy,² the Kipper Kids functioned powerfully in performance art as a symbol of the struggle between independence and conformity. The duo defined the location of performance through activity rather than geography; a site came into existence whenever and wherever performative tension was established and released—or deflated. The two rowdy characters used choreographed movements in mirror image to enact messy, masculine conflicts. *Up Yer Bum with a Bengal Lancer* (1976), one of the few performances staged by the Kipper Kids for video, is economical in its production and a marvel of ingenuity and precision. Through effective use of props and the locomotion of figures within the frame, the two media—video and performance—map closely together. A portion of the performance features the expressive face of Harry Kipper (Martin von Haselberg) framed by a magnifying lens that expands his head in the foreground, while making the rest of his body appear diminished. Long before the erotic potential of hefty, beefy men was commodified through sports and visual culture, the Kipper Kids' theater used unwarranted hostility and affectionate compatibility to determinedly subvert gender norms. Their physicality, deliberately executed performances, and considered attention to representations of male stereotypes all influenced a generation of artists.

Among the Kipper Kids' students, Karen Finley is significant for using similar themes—gender, the body, and society—to point out, and confound, viewer expectations. Finley con-

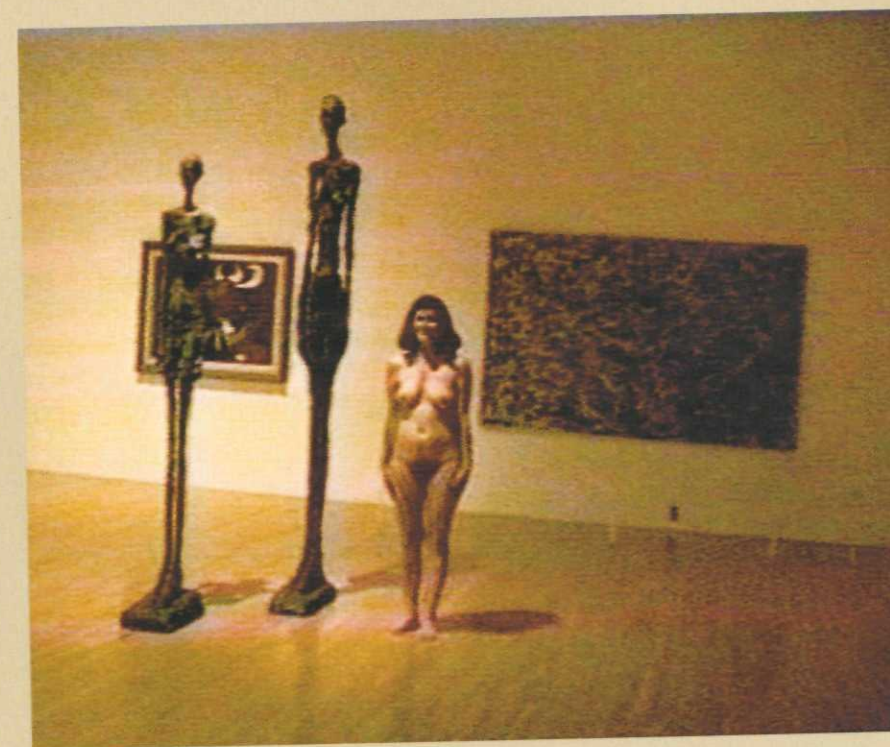


Figure 1.
Karen Finley, *Nude in the Museum*,
1992. Single-channel video, color,
sound; 1 min. 6 sec. Photo courtesy of
Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

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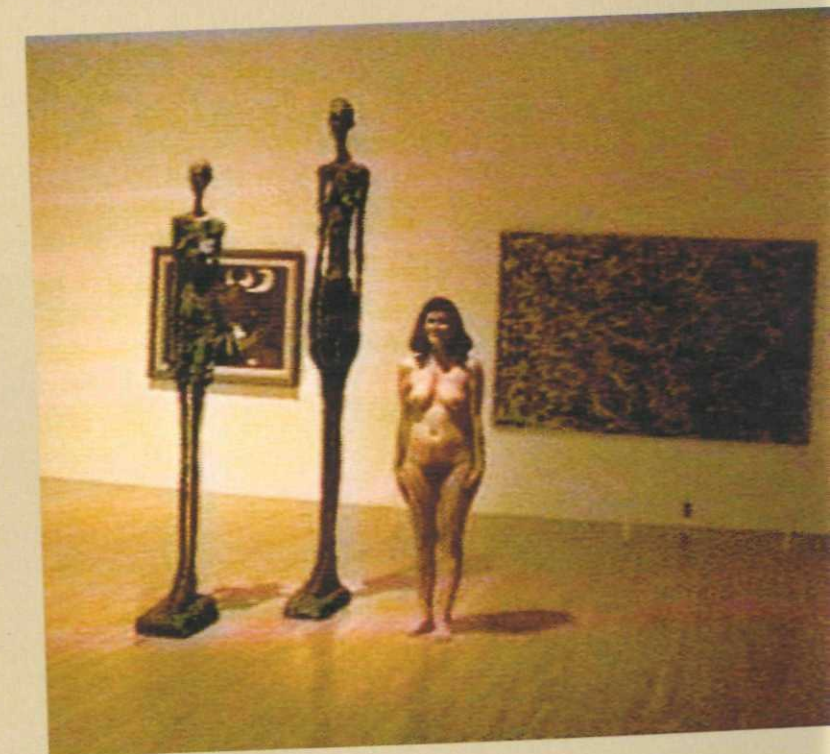
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structed the cornerstones of her distinguished approach to performance and theater during her studies at the San Francisco Art Institute. Later, she developed a frightening and singularly forceful presence in art as the figure of an unsocialized woman.³ *Nude in the Museum* (1992) (fig. 1) features a series of videotaped images depicting modern sculpture in various galleries at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Scenes of the galleries become stages for Finley's performative transgression as she leaps into the frames of the video images, positioning herself next to idealized or expressive forms of the female nude. In a context constructed from modern art, Finley juxtaposes the real against the represented, posing compelling questions about objectivity in art and authority in museums.

Bill Viola's video environment is a cognitive space in which the mechanisms of video symbolize human presence and perception. In the artist's production notes for the videotape *Ancient of Days* (1979–81), a work that addresses the passage of time, he writes that there is "No beginning/No end/No direction/No duration." He sees video operating like the mind in its form and function.⁴ And he conceives of video, like the mind, as imposing structure on perception. Viola's *Ancient of Days* and Doug Hall's videotape *Through the Room* (1983) (fig. 2) share a common episodic structure. Both works engage video philosophically, stressing the medium's technological potential to inscribe the artist's thought process directly onto the image. Both projects skillfully deploy scenes of landscapes and interiors, figuration and apparition, to contrast the scale of geologic time against the fleeting life span of humankind. Both pieces construct an impressionistic viewing experience through video edits and image manipulation

techniques. For Viola and Hall, the body and biography of the artist disappear from view, implying that technical mastery of the medium—not physical representation—indicates artistic presence.

Technical innovations in the medium supported the evolution of electronic effects into a language for new media productions throughout the 1980s. Hall and Viola were among a group of artists who eloquently engaged the tools and post-production process to express a multiplicity of temporal and spatial perceptions that they believed formed a true representation of the self in synthetic form. In her perceptive essay "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of a History" (1989), art critic and historian Marita Sturken investigates complexities in the historical origins of video as an artists' medium. Sturken defines three separate fields of artistic exploration—camera-interpreted actions and performances, electronic and experimental image projects, and socially concerned documentary—all of which, while dissimilar in origin and intent, came to be recognized under a single designation as video art.⁵ As the independent media movement gained momentum, Sturken argues, creative communities were compulsively aware that a history of the medium was under construction. While divergent in subject matter, artists had tools and television technology in common and used video to explore the conflict that followed from challenging media conventions.

In the 1980s and '90s, Bay Area artists Jeanne C. Finley and Marlon Riggs embedded cultural difference in their artistic production and explored the potent expressive potential of image and text. Finley's *Involuntary Conversion* (1991) incorporates a form of rhetoric known as "media-speak"—a technique employed by television newscasts in which disturbing information is conveyed through language that expressly, and misleadingly, neutralizes negative content. The phrase *involuntary conversion* uses media-speak to transform the violence and injustice of accidental death into euphemism. As a warplane moves in slow motion across the video image, Finley's spoken text, drawn from an automatic voice program, likewise floats on her soundtrack and hovers in obfuscation. The narration exemplifies the dissociative power of media-speak, but Finley's video superimposes common-speech translations as subtitles, making the gap between lived experience and neutralized language explicit. "Service the target" (kill) and other wartime phrases such as "permanent prehostility" (peace) are among the many terms that Finley questions and corrects. In *Involuntary Conversion*, she reinterprets mass media by imposing her own language and images; her video demonstrates how language constructs historical significance and shows viewers precisely what is at stake.

In an era of restricted independent media and reduced public funding for provocative art, Marlon Riggs nevertheless produced many videotapes before his death in 1997 at age thirty-

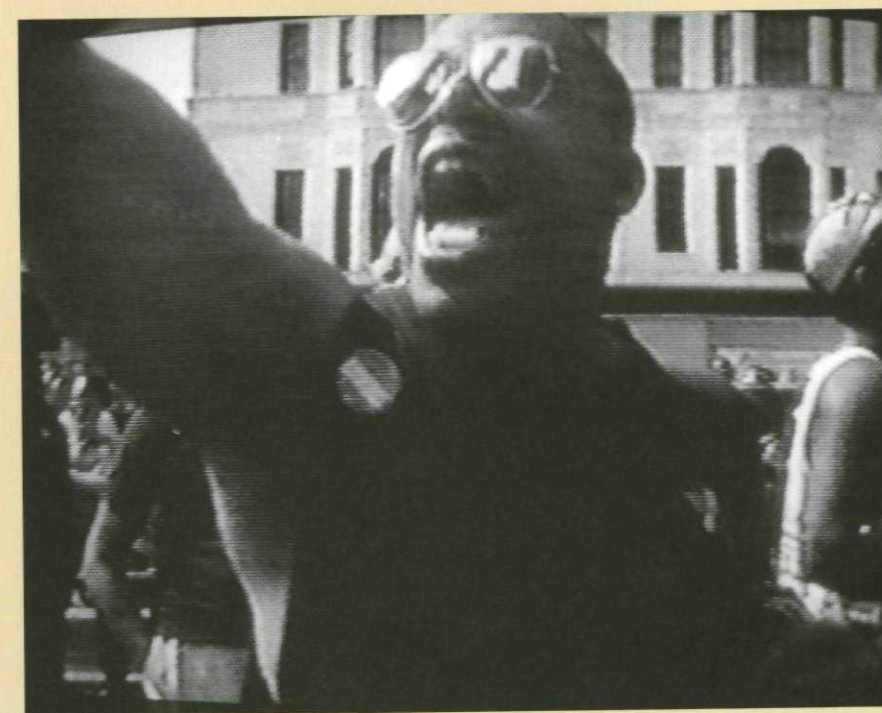


Figure 3. Marlon Riggs, still from *Affirmations*, 1990. Single-channel video, color, sound; 10 min. Photo courtesy of Signifyin' Works.

seven. In *Anthem* (1991) and *Affirmations* (1990) (fig. 3), Riggs's ties to the black and gay communities are evident in his representations of sexual and artistic identities. Riggs, a media artist and journalist, achieved persuasive effects by combining image, spoken word, and text in his videotapes and by using techniques such as television's direct address and the linguistic present indicative. Riggs's commitment to democratizing the medium through the presentation of diverse points of view is evident in each of his projects for video, most notably *Tongues Untied* (1989). In Howard Fried's *Making a Paid Political Announcement* and Jeanne C. Finley's *Involuntary Conversion*, semantic devices vivify the presence of the artist by excluding their figures from the image. Similarly, Riggs's imbeds the artist's creative identity and temperament within his video content by concentrating on personal sources of information as material.

NOTES

1. Anne-Marie Duguet, "Video and Theatre," *The Arts for Television*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), pp. 30–40. A series of related TV programs accompanied the exhibition and explained areas of artistic ambition and video innovation for television viewers and museum audiences. The programs included titles such as *Dance for Television*, *Theatre for Television*, *Literature*, *Music*, and *Image*, among others. *The Arts for Television* concentrated on technical virtuosity in *Theatre for Video*, outlining ways in which artists' use of the video medium corresponds with experimental theater.
2. Cynthia Carr, "The Kipper Kids in Middle Age," in *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), pp. 148–53.
3. Cynthia Carr, "Unspeakable Practice, Unnatural Acts: The Taboo Art of Karen Finley," in Carr (see note 2, above), pp. 122–31.
4. Bill Viola, "Ancient of Days," in *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973–1994* (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1995), pp. 73–79.
5. Marita Sturken, "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of a History," in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1989), pp. 101–21.

ART, TV, AND THE LONG BEACH MUSEUM OF ART: A Short History

Kathy Rae Huffman

THROUGHOUT THE 1970S AND '80S, the hope of achieving a television presence underpinned many video artists' ambitions. In 1974, the Long Beach Museum of Art (LBMA), as a matter of institutional policy, determined to support this goal. In addition to producing and presenting video art in a supportive gallery environment, LBMA also resolved to help broadcast the work of video artists—many of whom believed that better television could change the world. This belief was not far-fetched, as television was then—and remains now—an undeniably powerful mass-media presence. Amazing live broadcasts brought significant historical moments into ordinary viewers' lives and homes, likely sowing the seeds of nascent artistic interrogation of the medium. The Apollo 11 moon landing in 1963 assembled the world in front of TV sets to collectively witness a single significant event. Footage of the Vietnam War, recorded by independent cameramen in the early 1970s and broadcast on the networks, turned public opinion against American military efforts. In witnessing these wartime horrors on television, American audiences were initiated into reality TV. By the middle of the decade, television was criticized as a "potentially" dangerous influence on children, with frequent reports citing statistics and giving cautions. The dominant broadcast medium had lost its 1950s innocence. Even so, television continued to inform social norms and set trends through powerful advertising campaigns.

In the mid-1970s, museum-goers in Long Beach were intimately familiar with television, and they knew what they liked. For many, however, video art created a difficult viewing experience, as it didn't follow television's formula or style. I first visited LBMA as a graduate student in September 1974, encouraged by my advisor, who had read about "something called video." My knowledge of video art grew from research, to excursions to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to stimulating but uninformed discussions with classmates.¹ My first visit to my local community art museum was very surprising. I found the expected video—what appeared to be television but didn't really look like television—in the museum's upstairs gallery.² Embedded in the wall, the TV screen looked like an animated photograph. The video was a photomontage, a sequence of still images concerned with ecology, showing how smart architecture could reduce human impact. It was visionary for the time. The experience impressed me, even though I questioned whether what I saw was art.

I wasn't alone. The theoretical implications of video as art were widely debated in the 1970s, primarily in critical art journals, between filmmakers and artists, and in academic discourse. The first video exhibitions had taken place on the East Coast and in Europe in the mid-1960s, but West Coast audiences had to wait until the early 1970s, and the work of a growing number of experimental California video artists was excluded from museums and contemporary galleries. Even the word *video* was not generally understood.

Viewers and scholars weren't the only ones negotiating the differences between art and television. Video art was constantly compared with television in the 1970s, and the situation was made more complex because video artists themselves often referred to their work as television. At the time, we assumed that video offered at least a viable alternative to its commercial big brother. When artists referred to their video artwork as television, they meant that it was an experimental alternative to the mainstream, not a commercial program. Nevertheless, the terms *video* and *television* were often intertwined—the result of sharing the same production technology and presentation device. As programmers, we also regularly used TV to mean *video*. In our understanding, video was a practice that allowed live one-to-one and one-to-many performance actions, and personal reflections. It initially proposed and ultimately established a new standard of seeing information on the TV set.

DO DA VINCI

REMBRANDT

PABLO PICASSO

CHRIS BURDEN

Figure 1.
Chris Burden, stills from *Chris Burden
Promo*, 1976. Single-channel video,
color, sound; 30 sec. LBMA/GRI
(2006.M.7).

The newly established LBMA video program approached challenges in terminology, education, and video display by creating a center, a destination for artists and audiences who were drawn to the medium. Southern Californians respected the LBMA program for its radical content and risk-taking exhibitions. In retrospect, LBMA's activity in the first ten years of the history of video art accomplished essential conceptual work—the positioning of video art in relation to television.

LBMA's publicized plans for a new museum building that would include an internal cable TV station created vital discussions around TV and art, TV and video, and the role of the museum as a producer. It also established links and generated important collaborations with Southern California artists and educational institutions. These partnerships—which often involved producing new work—made LBMA essential within the growing video art community. Artists and students at California State University Long Beach, Otis College of Art and Design, California Institute for the Arts, and the University of California—in particular, art departments at the Los Angeles, San Diego, and Irvine campuses—were regularly supporting artists who made provocative and political video art. The work of well-known artists such as John Baldessari, Allan Kaprow, Chris Burden, Nam June Paik, William Wegman, and Eleanor Antin challenged television's aesthetics and formed the core of the museum's early video collection. They also informed a second generation of artists who would pursue video art with another agenda: integrating video art into mainstream, broadcast television.

The first video exhibition David A. Ross curated for LBMA was *Nam June Paik: TV and Paper TV*, in December 1974. Ross brought together a selection of Paik's television productions, including the classic *Global Groove* (1973) and *Experiments at WNET* (1972). Paik created these works while in residence at the Television Laboratory at WNET-13, New York, and the New Television Workshop at WGBH-TV, Boston's public television channel. The exhibition also included a selection of drawings on paper of TV screens that created frames for dense musical notations. Paik's influential crossover work demonstrated that video was not limited to visual artists; it was also an important consideration for musicians, choreographers, and performers. Southern California did not have an experimental TV studio, but Paik's work predicted the need for one. For Ross and LBMA, the dream of establishing a video production facility became a reality in 1975.

The LBMA production facility was destined to play a major role in the development of West Coast video history. The production studio was a humble setup, especially when compared to East Coast experimental TV labs; the equipment was simply arranged on a large table in the attic of the museum. But for most artists, this service—offered in exchange for a collection-building copy of their work—was a great deal. The museum's Artists' Post Production Studio (APPS) was the only one of its kind within a museum, anywhere. APPS was responsible for hundreds of works produced in California from the mid-1970s through the late 1980s. These early

video productions were not “broadcast quality,” but not all artists were interested in tailoring their work for TV broadcast. Most were critical of such practices. Richard Serra and Carlotta Fay Schoolman, for example, collaborated on an important early work that explicitly critiqued the pervasive power of network television. *Television Delivers People* (1973), part of LBMA's contribution to the Filmex International Film Exposition in March 1977, depicted television as a mechanism for delivering audiences to advertisers. The video served as a wake-up call for all artists working with video.³

Video artists' motivation and methodology often mimicked how artists saw themselves in relation to television standards. In this way, video provided a mirror for artists. As a communicative tool, it offered a platform for live performance, action, and intervention. The resulting documentation became original source material. One of the early TV events supported by LBMA, in collaboration with California State University, Long Beach, was Douglas Davis's performance of *Two Cities, A Text, Flesh and the Devil* (1977). Davis performed “live” at both Santa Monica's (then) Theta Cable TV Studio and Viacom Cablevision in San Francisco. This TV event, like several of Davis's previous live broadcast activities in New York and Paris, projected a futuristic scenario of real-time connectivity. His ultimate goal was to join a performing partner by appearing to travel through the airwaves. As part of the California performance, a quick flight from Los Angeles to San Francisco succeeded in connecting the Santa Monica and San Francisco cable TV studios. This conceptually based interactive event was an important step in the process that considered television's live performance potential.

Some artists found their way onto TV independently—a huge achievement at the time. The already infamous Chris Burden, who had previously hijacked a live TV interview, successfully aired his *TV Tapes* (1973–76) on KCET, Los Angeles public television, in 1976. This work, a simple series of graphics, presented a complex advertisement for Burden, who associated himself, by proximity, with the “greatest” artists of all time (fig. 1). Their names appeared on screen: Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and, finally, Chris Burden. This spot set a strong precedent for future TV interventions. A few years later, another young Los Angeles filmmaker, Mitchell Syrop, purchased advertising time on KCOP, Channel 13 Los Angeles, an independent TV station. His thirty-second TV spot *Watch It, Think It* (1978) (fig. 2) was broadcast during *NewsScene 13*. Produced on 16mm film to bypass the normal technical issue of “broadcast quality,” Syrop's spot challenged the viewer to catch the symbolic visual devices, perceived as optical wipes, that signified voyeurism and imprisonment—the results of TV advertising.⁴

The City of Long Beach withdrew support for the new Long Beach Museum building project in 1978, a decision that provoked the swift departures of the director and of David A. Ross, then deputy director. With no director and with plans for a museum-based cable TV station squelched, the video program found itself at a crossroads. But momentum continued, increas-

ing with the appointment of curator Nancy Drew, who brought internationally acclaimed photographic exhibitions of work by Robert Frank and Manuel Alvarez Bravo to LBMA. She used her New York contacts to attract video exhibitions from the Museum of Modern Art, work by Laurie Anderson, and, in 1979, a project with Nam June Paik, then in residence at UCLA. The museum joined with UCLA to connect Paik with artists in New York and Los Angeles in a series of live *Picturephone Performance* events, using AT&T corporate communication services. I was fortunate to work as Drew's assistant and the museum's video coordinator on this and other projects before becoming curator in late 1979.

During this transitional phase, the video program expanded. In 1979, the City of Long Beach gave the museum access to an abandoned police precinct building, located in the nearby Belmont Shore neighborhood, next door to a functioning fire station. There, LBMA established its long-awaited broadcast-quality video post-production facility. APPS became LBMA Video. This annex also housed the growing video archive and the museum's collection of California art. Spaces were designated for performance, production, and exhibition, though open public access was restricted due to fire regulations. The LBMA Video Annex became a magnet for the Southern California artistic community. With a Rockefeller Foundation/National Endowment for the Arts Treasury Grant, the new facility upgraded to broadcast-quality production and post-production, and offered services to the entire Southland, as well as national and international artists who were accommodated in-residence. One of the Video Annex's first activities was to commission artists. The new studio supported the production of *30/60 TV Spots* (1979), a project that invited ten artists to use the studio to create a series of short works for broadcast.⁵ This project kick-started the new production services, and the studio was soon buzzing with people, props, and pizzas.

In 1980, three significant events brought Long Beach and its community of video artists into international focus. *California Video* (1980) presented the work of seventeen artists and served as the official U.S. submission to the 11th Paris Biennial.⁶ The exhibition introduced an international audience to the new California video aesthetic and played a crucial role in bringing international attention to video art throughout the 1980s. *The Amarillo News Tapes* (1980), an installation by Doug Hall, Chip Lord, and Jody Procter, grew from the artists' TV residency at News KVII-TV in Amarillo, Texas. The work was an attempt to "dissect... what makes news in a small, Midwestern television market."⁷ The artists succeeded in broadcasting their intervention, live, at the end of their news segment. The creation process and the broadcast experience were critically reflected in the exhibition. *Hole in Space: A Public Communications Sculpture* (1980), was realized by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz of Mobile Image. Working independently as cultural partners with LBMA, the artists received corporate sponsorship that



Figure 3. Chip Lord and Mickey McGowan, still from *Easy Living*, 1984. Single-channel video, color, sound; 19 min. LBMA/GRI (2006.M.7).

supported three successful two-hour evenings of open communication between New York and Los Angeles. Intentionally unannounced yet open to everyone, *Hole in Space* was the first experience of its kind created for the general public. The museum's new video studio served as the project's post-production facility, and the museum exhibited the work in its main galleries.

Newly positioned from these achievements, LBMA Video invited Jaime Davidovich, founder and director of New York's *Soho TV*, to spend time in-residence in Long Beach. Davidovich presented programs from the Artists' Television Network and the weekly *Soho TV*. He also mentored local artists and produced *The Gap* (1981), which was later cablecast. Davidovich was a primary organizer for *The Artist and Television* (1982), a three-city live satellite teleconference between Iowa State University, UCLA, and *Soho TV* that was supported by the Learning Channel, a nationwide educational cable channel. The program, coproduced by LBMA, consisted of discussions, debates, presentations, and live interactive performances among artists in each city. The connection of artists in real time via satellite was unrehearsed; it tested the potential of live three-way TV performance. In the end—and over the program credits—Chris Burden successfully started a small campfire by rubbing two sticks together. The sparks ignited just before the program sign-off. In 1983, LBMA was selected to cohost the statewide arts and television conference at the Queen Mary Conference Center. It brought essential information and networking contacts to more than three hundred artists, cultural representatives, and industry producers. At the conference LBMA introduced *Shared Realities: A Cultural Arts Cable Series*, a museum-produced cable TV program featuring interviews, artists' works, music, and live events.

With LBMA Video available and fully functional, artists still faced a significant challenge—locating financial support. Although subsidized, the studio needed income from users. In search of new sources of support, the museum expanded its training and educational program for video production. About this time, the Contemporary Art Television (CAT) Fund was founded—the result of a partnership between WGBH-TV's New Television Workshop and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. This project was designed to fund, coproduce, and distribute video works by artists with, and for, television. I joined the team in Boston as a curator and producer, and the Long Beach Museum of Art entered another phase. The CAT Fund produced a number of significant commissions. Two of the first projects reflected the California style. Chip Lord and Mickey McGowan's *Easy Living* (1984) (fig. 3) and Ilene Segalove's *More TV Stories* (1984) brought a bit of California's free spirit and humor to the serious business of television in Boston. The CAT Fund helped bring artists' work to television internationally, and it could boast that all of its commissions were broadcast.

In the mid-1980s, the worlds of art and funding changed radically. The National Endowment for the Arts was forced by conservative political forces to exercise outrageous censorship, derailing many artists who were interested in television. The AIDS epidemic galvanized art-

ists, activists, and intellectuals to join forces and raise public awareness. Simultaneously, digital camcorders appeared on the scene, creating alternative systems of information sharing. Artists around the world turned their attention to serious political and cultural efforts, and marched together by the hundreds of thousands to gain political support. From Tiananmen Square, China, to Tompkins Square, New York City, to the barrios of East L.A., artists recorded demonstrations, and their opinions were subsequently broadcast and cablecast around the world. The revolution was political and personal. Access to the airwaves was suddenly a possibility and financially within everyone's reach. The search for large-scale, institutional, network support—so important in the previous decade—was history. Instead, a revitalized generation of artists moved forward to combat the information age armed with new weapons: digital computers and cameras.

NOTES

1. I saw the exhibition *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972* at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in 1972, but its sculptural presence was overwhelmingly different from the presence of a TV set in an otherwise normal gallery.
2. This exhibition, *Sottsass and Superstudio: Mindscapes*, included drawings, photographs, and objects. See *Video: A Retrospective, 1974–1984* (Long Beach Museum of Art, 1984), pp. 26–27.
3. The Filmex International Film Exposition was held in 1977 at the ABC Entertainment Center in Los Angeles, California.
4. Mitchell Syrop, *Watch It, Think It*, descriptive text by Kathy Huffman, in *Video: A Retrospective* (see note 2, above), p. 55.
5. Ante Bozanich, Nancy Buchanan, Alba Cane, Hildegard Duane, John Duncan, Peter Ivers, Ilene Segalove, Mitchell Syrop, and Bruce and Norman Yonemoto.
6. *California Video*, curated by the author, included work by Max Almy, Dan Boord, Ante Bozanich, John Caldwell, Alba Cane, Helen DeMichiel, Tony Labat, Pier Marton, Tony Oursler, Jan Peacock, Patti Podesta, Joe Rees/Target Video 77, Nina Salerno, Starr Steven Sutherland/"Captain" Bruce E. Walker, and Bruce and Norman Yonemoto.
7. Doug Hall, Chip Lord, and Jody Procter, artists' statement, in *Video: A Retrospective* (note 2, above), p. 60.

L.A. VIDEO: Uncensored

Bruce Yonemoto

THE GENESIS OF L.A. VIDEO: UNCENSORED occurred somewhere in Venice, California, in the mid-1970s. It might have been at the Lafayette Café, where I was reintroduced to ex-Cockette Goldie Glitters while Ruby the waitress served my favorite *huevos rancheros*. I was working in the video facility at Santa Monica City College, where Goldie happened to be running for Homecoming Queen. While documenting Goldie's successful run, my brother Norman and I decided to create an assemblage of the various subcultures then coexisting in Los Angeles. We were fascinated by the gay porno leather scene, Bob Opel of *Finger Magazine*, and various fringe art-world types. Goldie's coronation, intercut with her fictional sunburned divorce from a blonde Adonis named Hero, provided the center of a loose narrative. A tour of underground L.A. was interspersed, seeping through fractures in the story. This midnight movie entry was the beginning of my art production outside the margins, and the beginning of *L.A. Video: Uncensored*, a lively collection of video art whose production lies beyond the television/film discourse of the early 1980s.

Many of the videos from this collection premiered at a yearly Valentine's Day fundraising event organized by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) and have since been included in other festivals. These works, however, had no place in the regular video art venues of the time, and LACE was formative in gathering audiences and creating community for a number of artists. Dedicated to love, the fund-raiser screened erotic pre-AIDS experimental work by local artists—many of whom created videos with the annual event in mind. Each year, new works were added to the past year's program, gradually creating an audience that waited expectantly for their favorite videos. The prevailing 1980s culture of pre-AIDS sex, drugs, cultural theory, and rock and roll was evident in the Valentine's Day video program. Showing work in club venues rather than more traditional art institutions gave artists a sense of freedom; they felt liberated from the restrictions imposed by television and film content, and the ever-present museum/gallery curatorial complex.

In the following pages, I will situate *L.A. Video: Uncensored* within the nascent contemporary art scene of 1980s Los Angeles, using several issues that informed artists' thinking and production: television, technology, movie stars, and the link between creativity and experimentation as described by Walter Benjamin. I hope, through description, to reflect the context in which this work was conceived by artists, and in which it was viewed by their audiences.

LACE AND THE DOWNTOWN CLUB SCENE

Working from a loft on Broadway and Second Street in downtown Los Angeles, surrounded by bridal shops and sweatshops, Patti Podesta and I established a video program in 1980. It was the only showcase outside of Long Beach dedicated to video art and installation. The first LACE Valentine's Day fund-raiser soon followed and achieved instant infamy for being among the edgiest of art events.¹ The spectacle of tranny bands, erotic videos, and overflowing toilets truly mirrored the L.A. art world of the late 1970s and early '80s.

The Video LACE committee began when Patti Podesta and I received a grant in support of exhibition development from the National Endowment for the Arts Media Arts Program. We invited submissions from many prominent video artists of the time, including Bill Viola, John Sanborn, Shigeko Kubota, Mike Smith, Muntadas, Peter d'Agostino, Steve Fagin, and Mary Lucier. In 1986, Podesta and the Video LACE committee organized an influential symposium, exhibition, and publication entitled *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*. Edited by Podesta, the publication brought together critical essays on video written by artists and theorists; it is the source for many of the quotations in this article. Later, the Video LACE committee expanded to

include other important artists and scholars working in the field, including Bill Horrigan, Peter Kirby, Anne Bray, Branda Miller, Erika Suderburg, Nancy Buchanan, and Adrienne Jenik.

Nightlife in the adjacent Hollywood neighborhood consisted mostly of clubs and music venues. The nouvelle California cuisine craze had yet to hit Los Angeles, and sushi was still the strange ethnic cuisine of Japanese Americans. Classic, slightly outdated restaurants such as Scandia, Perino's, Le Dome, and Chasen's still catered to the Hollywood elite. Mostly priced out of these "wrinkle restaurants" (so named for their clientele), many of the artists featured in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* could be found smoking cigarettes in the dark corners of the Starwood, Club Lingerie, the Zero, Cathay de Grande, Hong Kong Cafe, Madame Wong's, and of course at the LACE Valentine's Day Ball (fig. 1). At many of these establishments, after-hours art habitués such as Tomata du Plenty, John Baldessari, Mike Kelley, Raymond Pettibon, and Mary Woronov could be found far into the night holding up the walls. The sounds of punk, new romantic, and metal melded into one long endless set.

EAST COAST/WEST COAST

New York City, however, was the art club center of the world. Clubs like Area, the Peppermint Lounge, Limelight, and the World commanded huge audiences. Danceteria was like the Disneyland of music and dance clubs, with everything from a postmodern video viewing room to three floors of bars, music, and dancing. I remember running into Prince in one of the many stairwells. When Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn asked Kathy Huffman and me to curate a show for Jim Fouratt, we decided to feature the best of the Valentine's Day show. Thinking this would be a fun evening of drinking, dancing, and video screening, I was shocked to see video curators from all of the major exhibition venues in the audience, sitting on the uncomfortable Memphis-style furniture. Reps from MOMA, the Whitney, Artist Space, and E.A.I. (Electronic Arts Intermix) were all there. Uncannily, most of these people have no memory of attending this event. One of the curators, Carole Ann Klonarides of Soho TV and later the curator at the Long Beach Museum of Art, only vaguely remembers seeing the videos but clearly recalls a late-night after-dinner discussion of Puerto Rico with Mike Smith and Douglas Crimp. I guess we all have our priorities. Then my priority was to differentiate my "serious" video artwork from my work in L.A. *Video: Uncensored*.² At the time, X-rated material was still limited to specialty movie houses and private 8mm collections. I know now that I undervalued some of my most transgressive work.

In the 1960s, the auteur theory helped establish film as a fine art in America. Television, however, remained commercial entertainment produced by soap companies. Video artists



couldn't hope for a critical reception or review of their work. Even experimental filmmakers pointed disdainfully to my narrative video work, claiming that it suffered the corrupting influences of television. In this climate, Jean Luc Godard's equation of video with cinema and television was both astounding and revolutionary.

"CINEMA = CINEMA + TELEVISION = VIDEO"

When Godard developed this formula in the late 1970s and early '80s, European television was state run and noncommercial. State-supported programming on ZDF (Germany) and Arte (France/Germany) actively produced works by video artists and experimental filmmakers. ZDF's weekly program *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel*, for example, produced for broadcast short video works by European and American artists—the latter including Bill Viola, Sadie Benning, Lynn Herschman, and the Yonemoto Brothers.³

In the United States, early 1980s television was a completely different story. Commercial television deemed video a second-class medium, an evaluation based on production quality. The standards requisite for broadcast production drove up the costs of making video art, while at the same time censoring video work, *ex post facto*, for inappropriate content. At the time VHS was overtaking Betamax, and laser discs were considered high end; this was long before the Internet, cell phones, even before digital. Video art was just emerging from what many in the art world at the time considered its boring, 1970s, reel-to-reel, black-and-white stage. Sixteen-millimeter independent art films had all but disappeared, and commercial television dominated the media landscape. Had Godard been describing the United States, his equation might have read more like this:

Cinema = Cinema + Television = Television.

To media theorists and critics, television would always remain television. The tired debate over whether video could ever compete with film—in technical quality let alone as an art form—would rage well into the 1990s. Some theorists argued that the content of video art, no matter how innovative, could never overcome its mainstream technology:

The contradiction is present at the center of the notion of video art and in all the registers of its operation. Since it depends on advanced technology and on technological systems integrated at the corporate level, it is always possessed by the corporation, always besieged by its values. Its dependence is on the one hand logistical, a matter of maintaining access to (always developing) technology, and on the other formal, the pressure to internalize that technology as production values, special effects and the like which fetishize its operations. The soft erotic sheen of theta display becomes a pure defamiliarization, in which content as such is transcended and all that can be narrated is love for the apparatus.⁴

Meanwhile, Marshall McLuhan's well-known argument that media's formal qualities, rather than content, determined meaning, remained a popular critique of video art.

While many artists used allegorical references to television as their primary content, experimental film structures were also uniformly incorporated in the most visible video artworks of the period. Works in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* play with commercial television formats in mind-blowing ways. *Warhol/Neiman, Private Reception Party* by Branda Miller and Norman Yonemoto (1980) documents the joint show of two of America's premiere commercial artists painting famous sports figures in Los Angeles, giving them an early "televised" red-carpet treatment. *The Enema Bandit* by Chuck Roche and Black Randy (1976) is a rock-and-roll fairy tale of sin and ultimate retribution. Black Randy of the punk group the Metro Squad plays a politically incorrect punker who gets it in the end. *Garage Sale II* (1980) continues the Yonemotos' search for something good to watch on TV but finds that fetishes may get in the way of programming (fig. 2). Wenden Baldwin and Mark Trezise's *Emotive Prosthesis* (1982) probes the depths of anguish, pleasure, happiness, and pain at a late-night club.

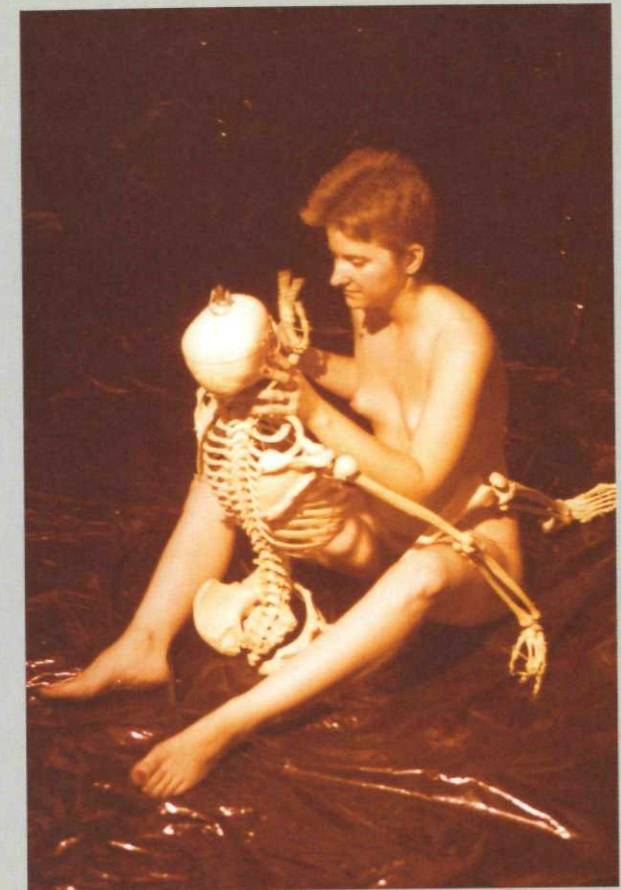


Figure 2. Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, still from *Garage Sale II*, 1980. Single-channel video, color, sound; 30 min. Courtesy of Bruce Yonemoto.

ON HASHISH

"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (first published in 1936) by Walter Benjamin was, perhaps, the most influential media text of the early 1980s. In retrospect, its emphasis on the transference from one medium, painting, to another medium, photography/film, resonated within the discourse surrounding the move from film to video. Artists were especially interested in the language Benjamin used to address experimental media. Phrases such as "extreme close shot," "slow motion," and, of course, the loss of "aura" in mechanically produced imagery were widely integrated into experimental media theory and practice.

What is not widely known is that Benjamin first articulated structural observations concerning the perception of film and photography while experiencing cannabinoid consciousness—a drug-induced state characterized by heightened awareness. Benjamin's hashish, mescaline, and opium experimentation opened doorways to new aesthetic, philosophical, and potentially political experiences. Benjamin writes:

Space can expand, the ground tilt steeply, atmospheric sensations occur: vapor, an opaque heaviness of the air. Colors grow brighter, more luminous; objects more beautiful, or else lumpy and threatening. . . . All this does not occur in a continuous development; rather, it is typified by a continual alternation of dreaming and waking states, a constant and finally exhausting oscillation between totally different worlds of consciousness.⁵

The concept of an "aura," which Benjamin defined as the authenticating materials of historical context that surround a work of art, developed after he began his experiments with hashish.⁶ In present-day art practice, Benjamin's drug experimentations would be considered beyond acceptable behavior—illegal, or at least antisocial.

Narcosis and revelation represent the risks and rewards of drug-induced aesthetic practice. Either way, it is certain that experimentation in the arts has a long association with self-induced altered states of consciousness. Many works in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* are examples of Benjamin's "profane illumination." For me, entering the dark recesses of Branda Miller and Jeff Isaak's Fifth and Wall skid-row loft in Gary Cowvein (1981), the scary S & M scene of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose in *Autopsy* (1994), or the emptied spaces of Ante Bozanic's *Soft Pain* (1982) marked the discovery of a consciousness outside the norms of conventional television production—whether dictated by Hollywood or middle-class values. Early 1980s Los Angeles psychotopia was the prodigy of Benjamin's mind-altering practices. The punk-romantic conception of love as a drug permeated the lifestyle and focus of the early downtown arts scene.

CULT OF THE STAR

Living in a one-industry town, we in Los Angeles best understand the materiality of images. As Benjamin explains, "[The] film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the 'personality' outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the

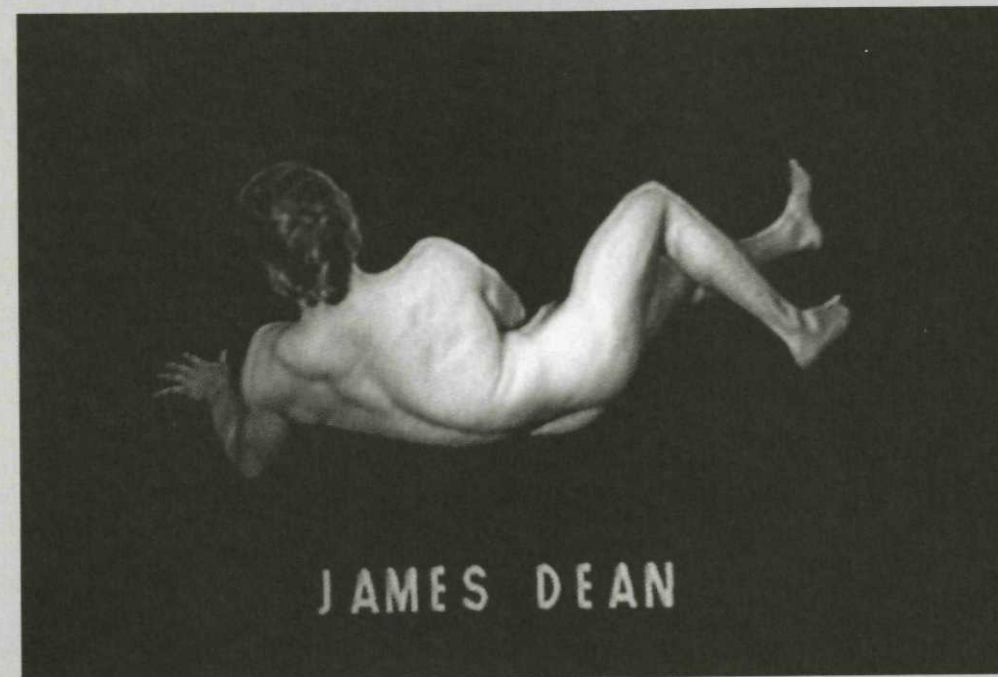


Figure 4. Ben Chase, still from *Untitled Tape Intended for Bars/Disco*, 1983. Single-channel video, color, sound; 8 min. LBMA/GRI (2006.M.7). Courtesy of the artist.

film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity."⁷

Images are produced, altered, distributed, and sold just like any other commodity. Our business is to materially produce images that resonate as memory, experience, even libido. With movies and television regularly manufacturing new stars, and a growing industry based on off-screen star sightings, Benjamin's writing is as relevant as ever.

In work by Nina Salerno, Ben Chase, and Patti Podesta, the seduction and repulsion of Hollywood's products—stars—occupies a central role. Nina Salerno's *Model X* (1980) (fig. 3) plays with cheesecake photography while editing out any possibility of seduction. Ben Chase uses shots of male nudes to underscore the value of uncovered male "commodities" in *Untitled Tape Intended for Bars/Disco* (1983) (fig. 4). Patti Podesta's *American Plague* (1981) combines fear with compulsion to create a suspenseful existential loop around an oncoming tragedy. Jean Baudrillard observes the yearning that is apparent within, and elicited by, images: "[movie stars] make us dream, but dreaming is something other than being fascinated by images. Yet, screen idols are inherent to the unrolling of life in images. They are a luxurious pre-fabrication system, shining syntheses of the stereotypes of life and love. *They are a single passion (incarnate): the passion for Image*, and the immanence of desire within the Image."⁸

In exploring the cult of the star, Salerno, Chase, and Podesta play with another kind of passion—the urge to create the images that elicit and reveal viewers' desire.

Late in his essay, Benjamin sours on the media. His bitter Marxist critique focuses on the film industry's influence on a relatively naive 1930s audience. Hitler's rise as a media star was still fresh in his mind, and the nightmare ahead was just beginning. I am not speculating that television of the 1980s compares to *Triumph of the Will*. However, television's stranglehold over information-filtering is politically relevant and tangible today. It is difficult to imagine a world without a Net—without the computer-driven access to information we all enjoy today. However, access also means distraction, which is at once our salvation and our demise. Distraction breeds ignorance of media's structures and languages that, together, mount a daily assault against public consciousness. Perhaps Benjamin was wise in experimenting with drugs to focus on altered perceptions—he slowed down the frames and saw what is normally invisible.

EPILOGUE

Benjamin's drug experimentation crossed a line of intellectual integrity, and he was abandoned by many of his Frankfurt School colleagues. He committed suicide with an overdose of morphine while escaping the Nazis. Perhaps some of the works in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* have crossed the same line, but I believe that artists must break boundaries to expand our percep-

tions and, like Benjamin, to reveal that which is normally unseen or even invisible. I find in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* a certain abandonment of convention, an active disregard of authority with a flare for having fun and letting loose. I believe that the works in *L.A. Video: Uncensored* could not have been made after the AIDS crisis brought the “Summer of Love” to an abrupt and tragic end.⁹ Yet, as I look at contemporary video works such as Dave Burns’s *Asswax* 2005, Nguyen Tan Hoang’s *Forever Bottom!* (1999), and Joe Sola’s *Saint Henry Composition* (2001), I see the glimmer of a past without condoms, a past where artists were free to make work without fear of death or the specter of responsibility. These artists bring our youthful indiscretions up to date, and this program is “addended” for their inclusion. Let’s relish our past activism, and a time when sex, drugs, and rock and roll meant everything.

NOTES

1. LACE directors Marc Pally and Joy Silverman heroically orchestrated this giant downtown loft party. I remember Joy keeping the party going with the help of Lin Hixson, Jim Isermann, and a mop.
2. My brother Norman and I had just premiered our Long Beach Museum of Art-produced video art feature *Green Card: An American Romance* at LACE. Sumie Nobuhara and I were married at the premiere, attended by leading performers Jay Struthers and Gary Lloyd.
3. German television station ZDF produced *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel* (The Short Television Play). This studio for independent film and video production has been headed by Eckart Stein since 1975. In 1995, Stein received the Siemens Media Art Prize for his efforts as mediator and fosterer. In the 1980s, video projects were largely produced by the editor Carl-Ludwig Rettinger.
4. David James, “in TerVention: the contexts of negation for video and its criticism,” in *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*, ed. Patti Podesta (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1986), p. 87.
5. Walter Benjamin, “Hashish in Marseilles,” in *On Hashish* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2006), p. 117.
6. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility (Third Version),” trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 253–56. On “aura,” see *Protocol* 5, note 2.
7. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 229.
8. Jean Baudrillard, “Beyond Right and Wrong, or the Mischievous Genius of Image,” in *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*, ed. Patti Podesta (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1986), p. 10.
9. In the late 1970s and early ’80s, after-hours sex clubs such as the Anvil in New York featured fisting, gay sex acts, and nude dancing for audiences that included the New York illuminati. I remember seeing Jacqueline Kennedy’s sister Lee Radziwill in the crowd.

I AIN’T CUBA: The Early Video Works of Tony Labat

Steve Seid

AS THE PLANE TIPPED DOWN onto the tarmac, an audible screech could be heard, soon joined by others, like nervous maracas but less shrill now as the ground speed lessened and the plane slowed down to taxi. It was just minutes after midnight, January 1; a new day in a new year, 1966. The birth of the new year gave way to a second birth—the birth of passengers delivered to a new land, as Freedom Flights from Cuba dropped through swaddled darkness into a future bright with uncertainty.

Tony Labat walks the walk of fierce apprehension. He’s in his early teens, probably clutching his mother’s arm and thinking of the father who stayed behind. The smell of Cuba lingers in his clothes, his friends’ farewells a cloud about his head, and his first few words of English uttered fitfully, like they are drawn from a lexicon of gravel.

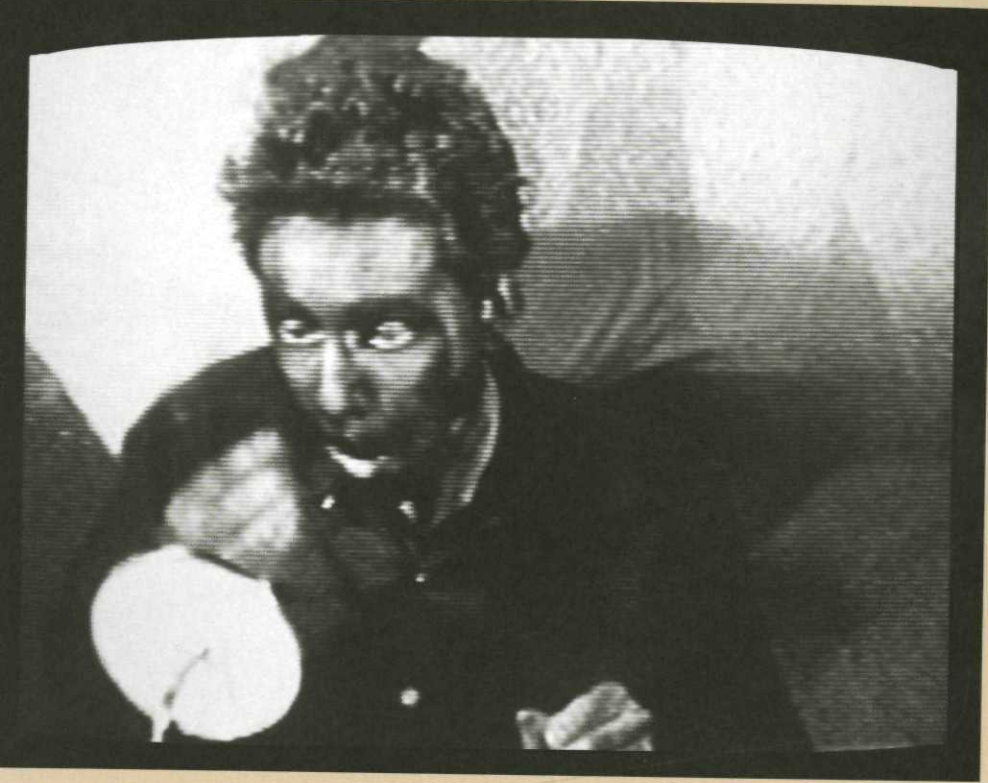
“Listen, so you just got here. So what.”

And the process begins—an amalgamation of cultures, rice and beans mixed to Super Size, Arsenio Rodriguez mashed with Bowie. Labat grows up in Miami in the late 1960s and early ’70s, before the *Vice* of versa. Not *Cubano puro*—more glam and glitter. The boutique Rubber Sole is an early art venture, a footwear folly of Labat’s design. Platform shoes for the upwardly mobile, and Labat as shodder to the stars—at least those in the Miami firmament. (And where is Fidel in all of this? Lost in a pall of cigar smoke, embargoes, and exiles on Calle Ocho.)

After a decade of this mishmashed *cultura*, Labat heads for the Coast, west-side of course. Now in his early manhood, he finds San Francisco to be a felicitous ferment of endemic iconoclasm, ethnic scramble, and art school sacrilege. And this is where he (really) ends up—the Art Institute, S.F.-style. Once ensconced on the hill, Labat finds that the school is slowly unraveling. The rogue artists of the sculpture department—those who had jettisoned the object in favor of concept, and retrieved temporality in the form of time-based performance and media—are in determined secession, lobbying through Howard Fried and Paul Kos to form a new department, Performance/Video, which years later would be retooled as New Genres. No matter to Labat. He, too, was an identity in shape-shift, a piratical pastiche of cultural plunder. (So why not the art around him?) In the 1990s, Labat would deploy descriptors like “mutt” and “mongrel” in his self-derisive discourse. Not that he wanted to be our dog, as Iggy Pop would say, but the mangy mélange was preferable to some puritanical notion of ID, some iconic 100 percent this or that.

To fly in the face of all, Labat’s first video works do have a certain purity of cultural intent. A compilation of short performative tableaux, *Solo Flight* (1977) was a stirring contradiction.¹ Was this a first time out, unaccompanied, with the training pilot waving good-bye from the looming door of the hangar? Or was it an ironic getaway, stealing off into the night of identity, alone? A flight to where?

The dozen or so vignettes in *Solo Flight* are purposefully low-tech. A camera in close-up renders a series of simple deeds, but each is as spicy as a habanero. In one, Labat is banging a Latin rhythm on a coffee can with a slender stick; in another, we see old school shoes, protruding from baggy trousers, insistently tapping out an Afro-Cuban beat. In yet another, a sacred altar bearing candles and offerings is flooded with darkness, then illuminated, like the comings and goings of Santería. Here, we also see Labat clip a lengthened dooper’s fingernail, denoting, perhaps, his abstinence from coke culture or at least the curt refusal of its stereotypes. In a more ironically pedagogical moment, he stands before a blackboard (a prop that will return) translating vulgar Spanish words into their U.S. street equivalents like coarse lessons for the transitional citizen.



In one of Labat's more striking *Solo Flight* works, he sits on a chair facing the camera, holding a small TV in his lap. The monitor displays a second Labat, a smaller version speaking in Spanish. The two converse like ventriloquist and dummy, the language muddled and inadequate. Is this lesser Labat a homunculus, a lesser self, the repressed *Cubano* of root identity? Or does it represent the diminishing presence of formative memories, that island in the sun receding on the horizon?

Central to *Solo Flight* is one sustained work, a performance of some ten or twelve minutes in length. Again, Labat sits in a chair facing the camera, but now he has a suitcase, well-traveled and worn, at his feet. The luggage is stuffed to overflowing with logoed, ragged, and ill-fitting T-shirts. The artist begins to slip the tees on, one after the other, the bulk of his body increasing as he struggles with each new constricting addition. The shirts themselves are pop relics—tees advertising rock bands, products, even Rubber Sole (if you look closely enough). As if he's adding layers of identity, Labat grows to grotesque proportions. In the midst of this strenuous exercise, we can see him overheating, the many layers of cotton (and polyester) turning him positively tropical.

In the final vignette, Labat faces front, relaxed but intense, and then utters a deep, slightly horrific, and cleansing scream—the summation of a *Solo Flight* but the beginning of a journey.

"It was blocking what I wanted to see."

In Cuban Santería, the orisha Babalu-Aye is rewritten as San Lazaro, healer of physical as well as spiritual pain. He's a powerful, wild, and feared orisha, capable of restoring health or spreading disease. In the U.S., Babalu is rewritten as Ricky Ricardo's theme song in the CBS sitcom *I Love Lucy*. He's the mock Latin lover; more frazzled than phallic, more comic than concupiscent. No wonder, then, that Labat would begin a complex cycle of works about displacement, cultural myth, and narrativity with the intentionally brazen *Babalu* (1980) (fig. 1).

Babalu finds Labat applying theatrical makeup in blues and reds to his face, while behind him a second person rolls paint on a wall like a ritual erasure. Labat begins chanting an indecipherable prayer, presumably to the Afro-Cuban god. Is this gibberish? Or an authentic Santerian prayer? No matter, because *Babalu* seems more a sardonic compendium of Cuban clichés—maracas, cigars, macho posturing, the cesta basket from jai alai—to be raised and ridiculed. Nevertheless, Labat's parodic transformation through face-paint and wig is also a masquer-

ade, a way of co-opting the spiritual power of this orisha. This critique of representation runs both ways—it is simultaneously a chastisement of pop appropriation and a sly empowerment. A redressing and an undressing, *Babalu* is Santería in drag—as pale malady and sultry beneficence.

"Great Babalu! I'm so lost and forsaken. Ah, great Babalu."

—Ricky's refrain

Room Service (1980) uses the same stagey, static delivery as *Babalu*, but Labat is more trickster than god, playing both the disoriented immigrant and the stand-up comic. The FOB² appears in a motel room of astoundingly kitschy decor, wearing a sports jacket, bow tie, and porkpie hat. "So you just got here. So what?" says his comic alter ego. And then the joke: the old saw about a perplexed newbie with one English phrase to his name, ordering a meal at a diner. "Apple pie and coffee, please" repeated ad nauseum, but here in once-remove as the jokester stumbles over the phrasing, then backtracks. Labat's multiple "takes" echo the immigrant's own rote retrievals. The process of acculturation is shown to be a rehearsal, a role that one repeats and refines. And language is its main conduit, forcing new cadences, nuances, and taxonomies upon the vulnerable speaker. But language also has its punitive side, doling out access to the text of culture. When the immigrant's ambitions grow, when he desires a "ham sandwich, please," he is quickly confronted by his own limitations. "White or rye?" the waiter replies. "White or rye?" Incapable of answering, he retreats: "Apple pie and coffee, please."

All the off-kilter frustration of *Room Service* is captured in a final, physical act. One of the Labats, the bewildered émigre, the waggish wit, or perhaps Labat himself, the artist unvarnished, begins jumping on the motel bed, unmaking it in a sustained and exhausting outburst. Referencing the final scream of *Solo Flight*, this moment is both confounding and cathartic. In this act of purgation there is an undoing; the bed absorbs the bodily tirade but is now rumpled and messy—no longer a comforting place to lie down.

"Life can be a bad joke, told in a foreign language."

Ñ (enn-yay) (1982), like *Room Service*, takes up the construction of cultural identity through language and story, but this time with the complexity and pleasure of an aged Cohiba. On its turbulent surface, *Ñ (enn-yay)* is about cultural loss and misrepresentation, stirred in a terrifying melting pot of American making. This "making" is really a remaking—Columbus's discovery reduced to conquest and capital, as told by an arch-historian. This reinforces an earlier declaration by a thug (Labat) wearing a stocking over his face. "I give you something," he boldly states. "You pay. This is business."

Welcome to America, where the only value is exchange value.

Using a briskly disjunctive style, Labat composes a mongrel narrative made up of half-told tales, illustrative and iconic images, and performative tableaux. The veracity of *Ñ (enn-yay)* is suspect, as stories sometimes collide. A *Marielito*³ tells of his journey across the sea, his tone one of mesmerizing sincerity. But this spell is quickly shattered by a woman describing an elusive event, her words intermittently censored, and by Labat's own frantic and incomplete recitation before a map of the U.S. To confirm this suspect veracity, a breathless Labat appears in a forest, with the sea presumably just beyond. With microphone in hand, he feigns a TV anchor's style, addressing viewers directly. "Hello and welcome. Here, there are a wide range of circumstances and views." That's it. Interpretations aplenty. Possibilities abound. The forest lost for the trees, or vice versa. Later, Labat will issue a plaintive "follow me," leading us to a rise overlooking the ocean. He wants to confirm the existence of this aqueous obstacle and thus confirm that Cuba, no phantom landmass, lies just beyond.

Labat's preoccupation with language as a cultural construct is perfectly summarized in his pithy phrase "Ñ, a victim of circumstances," spoken before a blackboard like a classroom lesson. Here, the tilde is just so much excess baggage, discarded upon departure from one's alleged homeland. But it is not merely a question of what is left behind—in this case, the "enn-yay" and its elegant softness. Replaced by Anglicized pronunciation, the Spanish is mocked and degraded, serving as a workaday reminder of a scorned culture. Finally, the tongue is tied and humiliated.

"I don't remember the sea. I only had the Coast in my head."

The cycle continues. In 1983, Labat returns to Cuba for the first time since his middle-of-the-night flight in 1966. It is not a good trip; he is beset by an ailing father, and the alienating presence of the Soviet military. We see the artifacts of this visit in *Kikiriki* (1983) (fig. 2) with its handheld Super-8 footage of street scenes in Havana. Again, stories are conveyed as fragments, in half-tellings and interruptions. But the staccato rhythms are reinforced through the aggressive use of split frames; the stories, often retellings of media events, are jammed against images of nature: a horse, steer, rooster, or an occasional hand-painted set like his pal Tony Oursler might build.

In one instance, a disheveled bum insists on his innocence in an event that led to his beating. "I did not throw an orange through his window," he asserts. The reenactment shows a real orange plummeting through a colorful playhouse window, cartoonlike in its intrusion. In another instance, Labat throws a message-in-a-bottle out to sea. The trajectory is interrupted, then completed as it plunges into a whimsical, prop-filled aquarium. Each story, each effort to communicate, must suffer a mediation that renders it vacuous, distorted, and caricatured. Is this the media at work, contorting culture and experience at will? Or something more fundamental—is narrative itself rendering truth parodic and ideological?

Atop this deliberation of delivery, *Kikiriki* also concerns itself with romanticized visions of the Carib, of a fantasized home. Sitting at sea's edge, Labat breaks a coconut on a rock. This is not *Survivor* but an idealized image of the primitive. The beautiful sea laps; nature's bounty is



available to those who can unlock it. But this idyll is soon broken by a cacophonous montage of street kids in Havana (or is it Miami?). Politics trump paradise... every time. Later, Labat appears blingin' on the beach with sunglasses and a nose guard, more the Miami import than the indigenous sunbather. And in yet another iteration Labat and then-wife Anastasia Hagerstrom tumble into the emerald-blue brine like a set shot from *Barefoot Adventures*.

In Labat's Caribbean, the picture postcards are always stamped "return to sender."

"Louie, Louie, me got to go."

In the next two works Cuba—and all it evokes—recedes. Both *Lost in the Translation* (1984) and *La Jungla* (*Between Light and Shadow*) (1985) are obscure investigations of identity and displacement, buoyed atop chock-a-block narratives. *Lost in the Translation*'s introductory image, a burning Trojan horse, is nothing if not a warning—trust not what you see here. And then we get a mix of musical sources, a man who swallows fire, TV sound bites, a film noir voice-over, a woman posed like Ingres's odalisque, and talking heads whose faces are obscured by handheld black strips. If the Trojan horse contains (hidden) meaning, unexpected and destructive though it may be, then what has been loosed upon us?

La Jungla (*Between Light and Shadow*) also begins rife with images: a performing saxophonist shown in close-up is replaced by a fumerole, while puffs of steam waft upward from a crevice. Both images summon a sense of passion or desire, one expresses passion sonorously and directly, the other intimates desire from some subterranean depth. This is counterposed by a staid soap opera of sorts, starring Labat and his wife Anastasia. Domestic activities such as making a bed and preparing a meal are captured in black-and-white by a surveillance camera that pans constantly. The promise of rising desire, of passion, is snuffed by these numb, robotic sequences. But tension rises as the "space between objects" is imbued with unspoken conflict and lurking danger. In *La Jungla*, the play of memory and emotion is told through gaps that are never well lighted, that exist only in stark, gray relief.

"Mice like cheese, cats eat mice, dogs hate cats."

Labat returns full force to his earlier preoccupations with *Mayami: Between Cut and Action* (1986) (fig. 3), which marks the convergence of a fancified version of communications theory with the plight of cultural representation. There is autobiography here, too, felt as a frustrated undercurrent coursing through an episode of *Miami Vice*, backdrop to this singular tape. Labat's cousin had been killed in a drug deal gone bad. His murder was first sensationalized by the *Miami Herald*, then turned into a publicity spectacle—the meat for *Miami Vice*'s media meat wagon.

Snippets of this episode are blue-screened in the TV studio where *Mayami* unfolds. This is self-reflexivity at its most unabashed as we see the apparatus disgorged, directorial cues exposed, rehearsals and redoes, prompts and playback. Early on, Labat announces his intentions with a statement about "telephone," the child's game of recounting a story. Each successive repetition of the story adds noise to the substance of the narrative, until finally we no longer trust the content of such a well-circulated artifact.

Playing a quirky character in *Mayami*, artist Tony Oursler awkwardly delivers an anecdote about the increase of disorder as "a natural and irreversible process." Entropy, it seems, is a key feature of any closed system, from the distribution of molecules to the arrangement of news items on CNN. Near the video's conclusion, Oursler appears again, this time as an uncertain witness recalling a shooting. During this segment, he is slowly turning, rotating. As Oursler's speed increases, his voice rises in pitch, distorting the clarity of his recall. Intelligibility becomes a factor in mediation. These illustrations of disorder are not presented in isolation. All the while, fragments from *Miami Vice* seep into the foreground, reminding us of the distorted drug dealers and thugs that were staples of this trendy TV show. The Cubano hustlers, the Colombian psychos, the Mexican smugglers—it was a veritable cartel of caricatures.

And then there was Brian De Palma's *Scarface*, released in 1983, with Tony Montana and his *montaña* of cocaine. Bay Area performance artist and puppeteer Winston Tong restages this iconic image for *Mayami* as a slo-mo snortfest. Only in Tong's case, the faceful of coke turns him minstrelsy white, denying his ethnicity. No surprise: earlier in *Mayami* he had effaced his gender by applying feminine makeup and performed a similar feat with an eyelid prosthetic, eradicating his almond eyes. Tong also makes elegant use of his puppets, which are really mute miniatures of



himself—expressive but submissive in their presence. Labat plays with these shifts in scale and agency. Tong becomes the master puppeteer, looming over his supple mini-Other, determining behavior as the media apparatus might determine representation. That space “between cut and action” is the space of construction, social or otherwise. In Labat’s hands this is a space of utter instability, where all constructs—gender, ethnicity, or the arrangement of pixels—are tottering near collapse. In this shaky spectacle, artifice and reality are on equal footing, and concepts such as cultural identity and integrity of tongue are just provisional states lunging toward disorder. In a final act of defiance, Tong tears through the blue-screen fabric, rending the image from *Miami Vice*. But the first-order image, *Mayami* itself, is rendered with the quickening perfection of a tropical sunset.

“Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow.”

Tony Labat says “trust me.”⁴ The irony drips like a sweaty piña colada. This cycle of tapes, begun in 1977, is a foraging expedition into *la jungla* of the untrustworthy. Whether the subject is cultural representation, the reliability of the master narrative, or the tangle of deceitful media, Labat looks on with suspicion, always ready to pull that stocking over his head—“You pay. This is business.” These tapes are also relics of resistance, dating to the nascent days of identity politics. Labat went his separate way, not beholdin’ to some south-of-the-border art brigade. He broke ranks with PC use-value, preferring punk provocation to high fidelity. Yet the coloration

of Cuba can be found everywhere—in the aching sense of displacement, in the longing for a trustworthy tongue, in the presence of a tarnished paradise.

Through the double-paned window of the descending plane, Tony Labat sees the city of Havana looming nearer. The year is 2005, or 2006, or 2007. Wrapped in heat, the white-bleached buildings appear ever larger in this smooth descent through waves of updraft and aroma. The plane’s tires touch the tarmac, ringing clear in the bright Caribbean dawn.

“Listen, so you just got here. So what.”

NOTES

1. This essay follows—in an unstated manner—a cycle of video works made between 1977 and 1986. Concentrating on these tapes alone made it necessary to exclude or overlook other significant works of Labat’s early career, such as *The Gong Show* (1978) and *Challenge: POV* (1981), as well as the startling performance *Black Beans ‘n Rice* (1980).
2. Fresh off the boat.
3. In 1980, approximately 125,000 Cubans left from the port town of Mariel and were boat-lifted to the United States. The immigrants in that exodus were known as Marielitos.
4. This is the title of a retrospective exhibition of Labat’s work, held at New Langton Arts, San Francisco, 2005.

AM TEACHING VIDEO ART”

TA GONZALEZ

IN 1995, NAM JUNE PAIK wrote “Teaching Video Art,” a short essay reflecting on his life as a pedagogue. Paik observed:

At this point, it is not so important to make “art.” Art cannot be taught. Anybody who wants to can make art. But how to make your money back after making video art? ... I want my students to be well prepared to make video art. I will just teach about art politics.”¹

Although Paik begins his essay with the noble assertion “I am teaching video art,” he concludes on a somewhat more pragmatic note. Reflecting on Paik’s words, I began to think about video art, art school, and art politics through the lens of my own college and graduate years in California. Considering the history of video art in California from the perspective of university art departments and art schools seems appropriate, given the institutional and archival motivations behind this anthology. After all, students of video art and production courses sustain the educational rental market for experimental and documentary videotapes; they also create the need for a repository of historical media art.

As the 1990s drew to a close, video experienced a surge in popularity at the highest levels of the art world—from major biennial exhibitions to museum collections. At the same time, the teaching of video art seemed to follow Paik’s pivot, away from theory and toward “art politics.” As I considered these concurrent developments, several questions arose: what has changed in video art since the 1980s and ’90s? Is this change reflective of current art-world interest, which seems to prefer early-period video art over more recent and more intensely theoretical video modes? And what of Paik’s “art politics”? Was there a noticeable pedagogical shift away from critical theory and toward professional development—the teaching of art politics? California has a wealth of art schools and Master of Fine Arts departments in public and private universities, so I brought my questions to the intergenerational membership of the “video age”—artists who studied video in California and/or are currently teaching in the state.²

As Michael Nash observed in 1995, “It was said a decade ago that video art may have been the only art form to have a history before it had a history, and now its history is *history* before we had a chance to mourn its passing.”³ Now that video art *is* history, art students and emerging video and film artists seem most attracted to early video, and to the present moment. And while there has been a rise in scholarship and exhibitions about experimental filmmakers and early video artists—in shows on Joan Jonas, Jonas Mekas, Robert Whitman, Anthony McCall, and others—there has not yet been an equal resurgence of attention on video art in the late 1980s and ’90s. Perhaps the more recent past is still faintly present. Or, perhaps the challenging fusion of theory and form that characterized that moment fits awkwardly into the present, where theory in art courses is intensely scrutinized.

As artist Ming-Yuen S. Ma notes, “Interestingly, the late nineties marks the beginning of the withdrawal of the art world from an identity/politics-infused period (late 80s/early 90s) when nongallery-based practices (like video art then), artists of color, women artists, and queer artists enjoyed a brief period when there was interest in and support of their work.” Even as these theory-laden practices started to fold, however, academia searched for the perfect pedagogical package—an artist who could teach theory and production. As Ma explains, “Ironically, I believe it was my education and interest in critical theory that got me where I am today—a tenured professor in a private liberal arts college.”

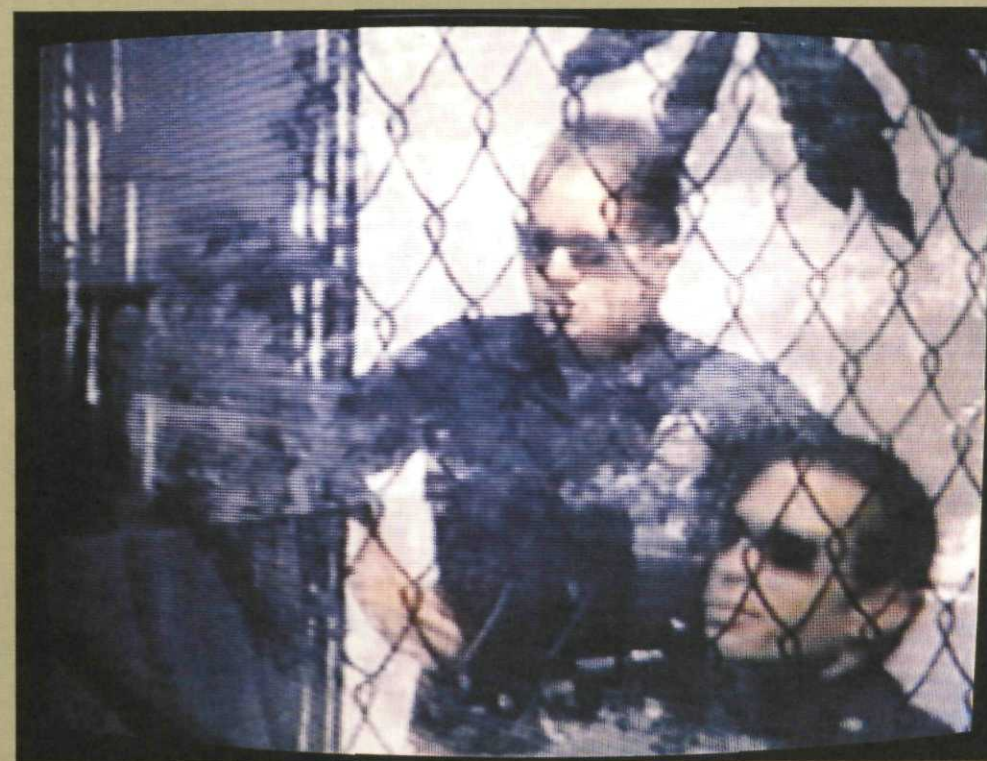


Figure 1.
Tran T. Kim-Trang, still from *Ocularis: Eye Surrogates*, 1997. Single-channel video, color, sound; 20 min. LBMA/GRI (2006.M.7). Courtesy of the artist.

The development of video as a distinctive medium has been instrumental in shaping Californian art school landscapes. Ernest Larsen once commented that “video was born a bastard, rejected by television ... it began as an orphan born both of the art world and sixties activism.”⁴ Video did find a home in art and communications departments and sustained itself through the institutionalization of its practitioners in somewhat stable positions.⁵ New models of teaching and practice emerged as video and video/film hybrids brought critical languages and documentary orientations together. In California, Steve Fagin, Jeanne C. Finley, Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, and a younger generation, including Tran T. Kim-Trang (fig. 1), Ming-Yuen S. Ma (fig. 2), Erika Suderburg (fig. 3), Lawrence Andrews, Rea Tajiri, Julia Meltzer, brought video art from 1960s counterculture into the academy. Although of different generations, these artists shared two distinguishing characteristics: abiding interests in the role of critical theory and in the aestheticization of intertextuality. The videos produced by these artists are, in Laura U. Marks’s words, “not waiting to have theory ‘done to’ them ... but [are] theoretical essays in their own right.”⁶

Steve Fagin’s complex work grew from his cohort’s support of “formalism with strong content.” Although distant from the formalism and structuralism of the 1960s and ’70s, Fagin and his colleagues contributed their own version of formalist experimental filmmaking to a broader, metamedia approach. Fagin discusses the impetus for his media distribution collective Drift, a collaboration with Peggy Ahwesh, Leslie Thornton, and Gregg Bordowitz among others, as part of a moment of intense interaction among alternative art spaces, critical journals, and the burgeoning field of media studies. As media studies departments popped up across the country and more media-based artists acquired teaching positions to instruct artists in video, film, and ultimately new media, they brought new theoretical models into play. Many of the strategies used in 1980s and ’90s video were ultimately pedagogical and took new forms that Nash has described as “critical television,” “metacritical media,” and “activist advocacy.”⁷

I began teaching in the MFA program at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) in the mid-1990s with students from distinct orientations, including experimental filmmakers, community-based activists, postconceptualists coming from intense theory-laden programs,

and a few painters. Professionalization was not prioritized, although students who entered the program as media artists already had connections to independent production networks. With so many artists engaged with theory, teaching art politics meant teaching alternative distribution, media ecology, and criticism. Video artists and avant-garde filmmakers represented the majority in our department, and this determined the personality of our program at the time.

When I asked artists for their own thoughts on teaching video art, I received varying responses. Liza Johnson, who attended the Visual Arts program at UCSD and now teaches in the art department at Williams College, replied, "I teach much more video art than I do art politics." Chip Lord does not consider his work to be the teaching of video art; instead, he takes a different approach, dictated by the production-heavy orientation of his media studies department. Undergraduate students enter the program expecting a professional track into the film industry rather than preparation for careers as video artists. As Lord notes, the climate has changed significantly since the days when Ant Farm came to CalArts as visiting artists and transformed the campus into a "playback environment." Now, the parents of Lord's undergraduate students inquire about film industry internships for their daughters and sons. Media studies are viewed as a fast track to a professional network or as a launching pad into the industry and not as an immersive playback environment.

By the mid-1990s, video artists and experimental filmmakers were experimenting with feature-length forms. Briefly, there was hope of an ongoing relationship between artists and supporters of experimental film and video at the Sundance Directors' Lab. A number of artists took up the challenge of working in feature-film format. Lynn Hersman Leeson succeeded in producing feature-length works; and recently, Miranda July received acclaim for a digital film that brought stylistic and conceptual elements from her short experimental work into an independent film. However, now that the hope of a more fluid dynamic between video and independent film has evaporated, artists are more attentive to the boundaries. As Johnson comments, "I think about this sometimes as an artist, because I keep making work that is somehow positioned in between being art and being movies. Intellectually, I'm OK with this, but I don't think it is very useful 'art politics.'"

As a colleague noted, a course on video art is now, actually, a course on the history of video art. We live in a "You Tubian" moment years past the supposedly utopian moment of early video art that thinkers like Martha Rosler and Marita Sturken attempted to deconstruct in their criticism of early histories of the medium.⁸ Critical theory is still blended with media practice in classrooms led by teachers who believe in this practice themselves. But I wonder if issues of historicism and the role of theory and praxis have given way to a new kind of MFA



Figure 3. Lynne Kirby and Erika Suderburg, still from *Memory Inversion* (Los Angeles), 1988. Single-channel video, color, sound; 16 min., 30 sec. LBMA/GRI (2006.M.7). Courtesy of Erika Suderburg.

that is characterized by a new art politics—professionalization. Nancy Buchanan, who has produced videos for three decades and held a position at CalArts for many years, has also grappled with the notion of video as a historical relic. In a recent course cotaught with her colleague Sam Durant, she used Martha Rosler's *A Simple Case for Torture, or How to Sleep at Night* (1983) as a case study for a seminar on art and politics. "Sam and I invited the students to re-visit the idea today . . . THESE are the politics that concern me."

NOTES

1. Nam June Paik, "Teaching Video Art," *Performing Arts Journal*, no. 50/51 (1995): 42.
2. Artists' quotations not otherwise attributed are taken from e-mail and phone conversations between the author and the following artists: Nancy Buchanan, Steve Fagin, Liza Johnson, Chip Lord, and Ming-Yuen S. Ma.
3. Michael Nash, "Vision after Television: Technocultural Convergence, Hypermedia, and the New Media Arts Field," in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practice*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 382.
4. Ernest Larsen, "When the Crowd Rustles the Tiger Roars," *Art Journal* (Winter 1995): 73.
5. Tenured positions at public and private colleges and universities offer stability, while art schools require less research and more time (ideally) for an art career.
6. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xiv.
7. Nash (see note 3, above), p. 383.
8. See Marita Sturken's "Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of a History," and Martha Rosler's "Shedding the Utopian Moment," both in *Illuminating Video* (San Francisco: Aperture/Bay Area Video Coalition, 1991), pp. 101–21 and 31–50.

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California Video: Artists and Histories

Edited by Glenn Phillips

Since the late 1960s, California artists have been at the forefront of an international movement that has made video a central new medium in contemporary art.

This illustrated volume—the first comprehensive survey of California video art—focuses on fifty-eight dynamic, provocative artists and collaboratives who have embraced video technology and expanded its possibilities. Whether designing complex sculptures and installations, devising lush projections, experimenting with electronic psychedelia, generating guerilla video, or producing vanguard works that engage with feminism and other social issues, artists from Northern and Southern California have used video to express revolutionary ideas.

Through dozens of interviews with pioneers and luminaries such as John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Mike Kelley, Martha Rosler, Diana Thater, Bill Viola, and William Wegman, *California Video* sheds new light on well-known artists and brings long-overdue recognition to others. The volume's commissioned essays, rare reprints, unpublished video transcripts, and hundreds of photographs reveal a distinctly West Coast aesthetic within the broader history of video art.

Glenn Phillips is senior project specialist and consulting curator in the Department of Contemporary Programs and Research at the Getty Research Institute.

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