

Henriette Huldish

Before
Projection:
Video
Sculpture
1974–1995

HIRMER



MIT List Visual Arts Center

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Director's Foreword

It is not news that today screens occupy a vast amount of our time. Nor is it news that screens have not always been so pervasive. Some readers will remember a time when screens did not accompany our every move, while others were literally greeted with the flash of a digital camera at the moment they were born. *Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995* showcases a generation of artists who engaged with monitors as sculptural objects before they were replaced by video projectors in the gallery and long before we carried them in our pockets. Curator Henriette Huldish has brought together works by Dara Birnbaum, Ernst Caramelle, Takahiko Iimura, Shigeko Kubota, Mary Lucier, Muntadas, Tony Oursler, Nam June Paik, Friederike Pezold, Adrian Piper, Diana Thater, and Maria Vedder to consider the ways in which artists have used the monitor conceptually and aesthetically.

Despite their innovative experimentation and persistent relevance, many of the sculptures in this exhibition have not been seen for some time—take, for example, Shigeko Kubota's *River* (1979–81), which was part of the 1983 Whitney Biennial but has been in storage for decades. The medium of video sculpture has been largely overlooked by critics, curators, and historians, who have tended to focus instead on large-scale, immersive installations that use projectors. Such installations, however, are deeply indebted to these preceding explorations—as well as to the technological developments that made video projection accessible. Not only has Huldish shined a spotlight on a most deserving selection of video sculptures at the List Center, she has also turned the lights on

in the gallery, creating a space not for the projected image of the black box but instead for the video sculptures of the white cube. We are so pleased to illuminate these seldom-seen works for our audience in Cambridge.

MIT's long-standing commitment to the intersection of art, critical thinking, and technology plays no small role in this exhibition. We are pleased to showcase sculptures by several former fellows from MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS), including Ernst Caramelle, Muntadas, and Nam June Paik. In fact, Caramelle's *Video Ping-Pong* (1974) was created while he was a CAVS fellow, and was first displayed in 1975 in MIT's Hayden Gallery—the predecessor of the List Center. It's a joy to welcome back his playful work, and to display it among that of a group of artists who share an experimental spirit and a critical take on technology.

This catalogue documents the exhibition at the List Visual Arts Center, on view from February 8 to April 15, 2018. The curator's discerning essay provides a critical reassessment of the medium of video sculpture. Edith Decker-Phillips's essay from the groundbreaking 1989 exhibition *Video-Skulptur, retrospektiv und aktuell 1963–1989*, a traveling exhibition that originated at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Germany, provides essential historical context. The List Center's curatorial research assistant Emily Watlington authored insightful entries for each artist and work featured in the show, including several on pieces not previously written about. In addition to new scholarship, this publication also features archival materials, many published for the first time.

We are enormously grateful to the ardent backers of this exhibition; their generosity has given our audience in

Boston the opportunity to experience an ingenious selection of works in a new light. I am so pleased to be supported by them and all involved in the mounting of this exhibition. Their advocacy, paired with Huldisch's deft organization, carries forward the List's aim of sharing canon-expanding and forward-thinking works of art.

Paul C. Ha
Director

Acknowledgments

My own start in the art world in the early 2000s coincided with the ascendancy of the projected image in the museum. Large, cinematic, often multiscreen installations were our bread and butter when I worked as a curatorial coordinator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and later as a curator overseeing time-based art at the Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin. Over the years I became increasingly intrigued by those collection works that nobody seemed to be paying attention to: installations, mostly dating from the mid to late 1970s to the early '90s, which used multiple monitors in ways that were inventive, elegant, and occasionally even a bit goofy. The idea of organizing an exhibition that would bring together—in some cases after decades in storage—a group of monitor sculptures originated years ago, but didn't take concrete shape until recently, when numerous institutions in Boston came together under a shared thematic umbrella highlighting the intersections between art and technology. It has been my great privilege and pleasure to be part of this collaboration, and to work with Dara Birnbaum, Ernst Caramelle, Takahiko Iimura, the Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation, Mary Lucier, Muntadas, Tony Oursler, Adrian Piper, Diana Thater, and Maria Vedder, as well as the lenders of the works by Nam June Paik and Friederike Pezold, in the making of *Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995*.

My deepest thanks go to the lenders who generously shared their works with audiences in Cambridge and beyond: David Zwirner, New York/London; Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; Generali Foundation, Vienna;

Hamburger Kunsthalle; Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong; Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., New York; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/London; Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn; the Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, New York; the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and several of the artists themselves.

This exhibition would not have been possible without our generous supporters: Fotene Demoulas and Tom Coté, Audrey and James Foster, Jane and Neil Pappalardo, Cynthia and John Reed, and Terry and Rick Stone. Additional support for the exhibition was provided by Lévy Gorvy and SPAIN arts & culture. I thank the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the Council for the Arts at MIT; Philip S. Khoury, associate provost at MIT; the MIT School of Architecture + Planning; the Mass Cultural Council; and many generous individual donors for providing general operating support to the List Center. Our Advisory Committee members are, as always, most gratefully acknowledged.

I owe huge thanks to Caroline A. Jones and Gloria Sutton for their razor-sharp comments on the original draft of the catalogue essay; their insights have made this a much better text. Emily Watlington contributed the insightful artist entries to the book. I thank Edith Decker-Phillips for giving permission to present for the first time in English her astute 1989 essay on video sculpture and Bram Opstelten for its expert translation from German. Many thanks to Elisabeth Rochau-Shalem at Hirmer Verlag for partnering with the List Center as publishers on this project, thereby ensuring its greater visibility. Chad Kloepper's superb design perfectly captures the historical era surveyed in the book while

bringing it into the present, and Claire Lehmann provided eminently capable editorial oversight.

My thanks go to Eva Respini and Jill Medvedow at the ICA/Boston for spearheading the citywide institutional collaboration around art and technology, which served as the perfect framework to finally mount this exhibition. I am grateful to Rebecca Cleman, George Fifield, Wulf Herzogenrath, Chrissie Iles, Kathy Rae Huffman, David A. Ross, and Lori Zippay for their input at various stages of the project.

This exhibition would not be possible without the resolute support and indefatigable commitment of director Paul C. Ha. I am grateful once again to curatorial research assistant extraordinaire Emily Watlington, whose diligence and diplomacy ensured that the exhibition stayed on track at all times. Curatorial fellow Jamin An ably stepped in during installation and helped to bring the show across the finish line. Exhibition manager Tim Lloyd, preparator John Osorio-Buck, and registrar Ariana Webber deftly juggled the intricate installation, conservation, and transportation requirements of dozens of vintage monitors and other outmoded equipment. For their help and support throughout, I wish to thank my List Center colleagues Susie Allen, Lisa DeLong, Karen S. Fegley, Magda Fernandez, Emily A. Garner, Kristin Johnson, Mark Linga, Tricia Murray, Amy Sideris, Kevin Smith, Yuri Stone, Suara Welitoff, and Betsy Willett.

Finally, I want to thank the artists, whose passion, imagination, and originality never cease to inspire and illuminate.

Henriette Huldisch
Director of Exhibitions and Curator

Before and Besides Projection:
Notes on Video Sculpture, 1974–1995

Henriette Huldish

Our contemporary surroundings and social interactions are defined by the ubiquity of screens, ranging from smartphones, computer displays, signage, and service announcements to television monitors in the home as well as in bars and airports. In galleries and museums, recent works by artists such as Haroon Mirza, Sonda Perry, Martine Syms, and others have featured ingenious sculptural arrangements composed of large flat-screen monitors and tiny cell-phone displays. Outside the white cube on small portable devices, dislodged from any stationary structure, the moving image has become completely mobile. We can watch films, television, and videos of our family and friends anytime, anywhere (or at least anywhere a cellular network is available). In addition, television has all but dethroned cinema as prime producer of sophisticated dramatic storytelling—to say that TV is going through a new golden age is by now a commonplace—and streaming services have fully transformed viewing conventions.¹ In this world of glossy black screens, it is hard to remember that not so long ago watching television meant sitting in front of a boxy set on an appointed day and at a specific time. The cubic monitor was also used extensively in video installations throughout the 1970s and '80s, a body of work that was largely consigned to oblivion—or at least the storage warehouse—before the flat-screen replaced the boob tube in our homes.

Yet for a time in the 2000s the projected image was everywhere. The preponderance of moving-image

1. See, for example, Ian Leslie, "Watch It While It Lasts: Our Golden Age of Television," *Financial Times*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/68309b3a-1f02-11e7-a454-ab04428977f9>.

installations (including gallery presentations of films originally made for the cinema) in Documenta 11, curated by Okwui Enwezor and mounted in the summer of 2002, was widely noted at the time.² The show was only one indication of a broader cinematic turn in contemporary art. In a round-table discussion hosted by the journal *October* in the fall of the same year, art historian Hal Foster called the projected image the "default category" of contemporary art.³ Maeve Connolly's 2009 book *The Place of Artists' Cinema* discusses how "contemporary art practitioners have claimed the narrative techniques and modes of production associated with cinema, as well as the history of memory and experience of cinema as a cultural form."⁴ Fifteen years and two Documentas later, black-box spaces and video projection are still a fixture in contemporary art exhibitions, albeit no longer worthy of particular note, thus signaling that the form is now comfortably established in contemporary art alongside painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, and so forth. While the moving image as such is no less of a *Leitmedium*, this development indicates that the cinematic paradigm has waned vis-à-vis long-form narrative television, computer-generated imagery and virtual space, and social media platforms (all facilitated by digital

2. See, for example, Gregor Stemmrich, "White Cube, Black Box, and Grey Areas: Venues and Values," in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 430–43.

3. Malcolm Turvey, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Anthony McCall, "Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October*, no. 104 (Spring 2003): 93.

4. Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009), 9. Erika Balsom also historicizes this development in *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

convergence). The resurgent preeminence of the small screen—both metaphorically as cultural bellwether and literally as carried in our pockets—provides an apt framework for this exhibition, which revisits an earlier moment in technology-based art. *Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995* shines a spotlight on an underappreciated body of work in video: shown on monitors and to a great extent defined by and in opposition to television and cinema alike.

The show, which brings together artists Dara Birnbaum, Ernst Caramelle, Takahiko Iimura, Shigeko Kubota, Mary Lucier, Muntadas, Tony Oursler, Nam June Paik, Friederike Pezold, Adrian Piper, Diana Thater, and Maria Vedder, reevaluates monitor-based sculpture made during a roughly twenty-year period, i.e., after very early experimentation in video and before the arrival of projection in the gallery. This is, of course, a rather small window and a focused group of works. Numerous other artists could have been included in the exhibition. However, one of the goals was to place some canonical figures next to artists whose work has rarely been seen in the United States, which, especially given the spatial constraints of the List Center's galleries, means that other well-known works are omitted. Rather than aspiring to comprehensiveness, this show aims to make a pointed proposition—more art-historical footnote than grand narrative. The titular “before projection” itself is a strategic conceit: projected art was made well before the advent of video projectors, and not just in filmmaking “proper,” as in for the cinema. The 2002 exhibition *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964–1977*, curated by Chrissie Iles at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, eloquently asserted

how slide, Super 8, and 16-mm projective installations formed an integral part of post-Minimal art practices as a whole. Moreover, monitor works developed in concert with, rather than in isolation from, single-screen tapes and projection. CRT (cathode ray tube) projectors were in sporadic use in the museum as early as the 1970s, notably in pioneering works by Peter Campus and Keith Sonnier, and the Whitney Museum organized the exhibition *Video Projection*, utilizing an early Advent projection system, in 1975.⁵ But projectors then were large, cumbersome, and expensive. As a result, presentations of video on monitors were the norm into the 1990s, a fact that has received little critical attention since. For *Before Projection*, I resurrected the somewhat outdated term *video sculpture* to clearly distinguish, for hermeneutic purposes, projective installation from multichannel works that employ the monitor or television set. The exhibition purposefully homes in on works that engage with the sculptural properties of the cubic monitor. It also deliberately excludes closed-circuit installations, as the show is only peripherally interested in the discourse around what were once considered the “essential properties” of video, i.e., instantaneity and liveness. Limiting the parameters of the project served a couple of objectives. It provided the opportunity to highlight certain technological developments and the availability of equipment in relation to the articulation of specific formal and thematic concerns. The other aim was to counter somewhat monotonous narratives, written mostly after

5. The exhibition was curated by John G. Hanhardt. Erika Balsom traces the history of early video projection in detail in “Before the Cinematic Turn: Video Projection in the 1970s,” in *Exhibiting the Moving Image: History Revisited*, ed. François Bovier and Adeena Mey (Zurich: JRP Ringer; Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2015), 58–73.

projective installation became standard, that either tend to describe the use of the monitor throughout the 1980s as a not-quite-there-yet solution rendered redundant with the rise of projection or to omit these works altogether and pole-vault from the 1970s straight into the '90s. In place of offering a similar teleological account, this exhibition instead proposes certain aesthetic claims these works might make in their own right.

The earliest work in the show is Ernst Caramelle's *Video Ping-Pong* from 1974, made when he was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) at MIT. The work premiered in the List Center's predecessor, the Hayden Gallery, the following year. Two monitors display footage of two Ping-Pong players in medium close-up, positioned on AV carts and in front of a "real" Ping-Pong table, in a playful juxtaposition of recorded game and live match, monitor and human figure. Nam June Paik's *Charlotte Moorman II* from 1995 forms the show's chronological, if not conceptual, conclusion. This video robot, part of a series of such works Paik began in the mid-1980s, is a portrait of his longtime collaborator Charlotte Moorman, replete with wire "hair," and two cellos. The boxy monitors and vintage consoles, already decidedly quaint at the time of the work's making, are the material used to construct an offbeat yet conventionally scaled figurative sculpture. Monitor sculptures produced between these two works, through the 1980s and into the '90s, pursued a range of thematic concerns that included the medium of television but also the still and the moving image, seriality, figuration, landscape, identity, and more. But although these artists thus participated in the various discourses of their time

articulated across mediums, their work was relatively slow to be shown next to painting and sculpture, and its reception remained dogged by the monitor's intractable association with broadcast TV.

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The history of time-based art is also a history of technology. More precisely, developments in video as an art form can be tracked alongside moments when recording, display, or editing equipment became accessible for individual artists (and institutions), which may variously mean more affordable, easier to use, or available in consumer markets and outside specialized industry applications. The lack of critical interest in historical monitor works can be seen as part of this "progress in technology" account; it can also be read as a product of the ideological discursive frameworks of contemporaneous cinema and network television. The decisive role of the Sony Portapak camera to the mythologized beginnings of video art in the United States is, to say the least, well chronicled.⁶ Smaller than preceding professional television cameras, portable, and comparatively cheap, the device spurred an extraordinarily fertile period of artistic experimentation with the new medium in the following years. Much of this early work—and a flurry of writing that accompanied it—engaged the properties that set video apart from film: liveness (or real-time transmission), instantaneous replay (unlike motion-picture film, which had to be developed before playback), and duration

6. See Tom Sherman, "The Premature Birth of Video Art," Experimental Television Center, accessed January 18, 2018, http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/sites/default/files/history/pdf/ShermanThePrematureBirthofVideoArt_2561.pdf.

(as video could record much longer intervals than those dictated by the length of a film reel). As William Kaizen points out, “in the midst of video’s emergence . . . immediacy was the one distinguishing characteristic claimed more frequently than any other.”⁷ The potential of liveness was widely explored in both single-channel videotapes and multimonitor works. In the tape *Left Side Right Side* (1972), for example, Joan Jonas draws attention to the disconnect between her physical self and the reflected image presented to her by a mirror and in closed-circuit video. Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider’s influential *Wipe Cycle* from 1968, by contrast, comprised nine monitors configured into a video wall and positioned on a pedestal. Viewers were confronted with their own images, appearing in real time, interspersed with a program of prerecorded and off-air broadcast footage. *Wipe Cycle* is most often discussed in relationship to instant replay, integration of the viewer, and transmission of information. However, described by Gillette as a “television mural,” this early work also functions as a gridded wall formation and asserts the material heft of the cubic monitor anchored in three-dimensional space.⁸ Gillette’s description makes the leap from the work’s liveness to its material presence, and indeed one of the exhibition’s aims is to demonstrate that the sculptural use of the monitor, its engagement with the architecture of the gallery, and the possibilities afforded by combining two or more moving images on cubic monitors installed next to or on top of each other were among the

7. William Kaizen, “Live on Tape, Video, Liveness, and the Immediate,” in *Art and the Moving Image*, 261.

8. Quoted in Howard Wise, ed., *TV as a Creative Medium*, exh. cat. (New York: Howard Wise Gallery, 1969), n.p.

issues explored by artists from the beginning, whether implicitly or explicitly.⁹

I do not mean to suggest that what would now be called “video installation” was necessarily a distinct, or even clearly delineated, category in the medium’s infancy. As has been widely discussed, the young field of video art was large and heterogeneous.¹⁰ It included politically engaged work by video collectives such as Videofreex and TVTV, as well as tapes produced for public broadcast, like those created by Allan Kaprow, Otto Piene, Aldo Tambellini, and others for the WGBH Boston commission *The Medium Is the Medium* in 1969. Many video artists were making single-screen tapes while also experimenting with sculptural modes. In fact, the history of video is, as art historian Gloria Sutton has observed, also a “history of marginality.”¹¹ However unruly an arena, early video practices were somewhat united by a sense of opposition—as well as, for a while, a sense of utopian possibility—to broadcast television. The institutions of television developed very differently in Europe, the United

9. In fact, curator John G. Hanhardt has argued that the television set as sculptural material actually entered the art gallery several years before videotape, in Wolf Vostell’s and Nam June Paik’s respective television-set manipulations of 1961 and 1963. John G. Hanhardt, “Dé-collage/Collage: Notes toward a Reexamination of the Origins of Video Art,” in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. Sally Jo Fifer and Doug Hall (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1991), 71–79.

10. In the introduction to their anthology, Sally Jo Fifer and Doug Hall write: “Conceived from a promiscuous mix of disciplines in the great optimism of post–World War II culture, its stock of early practitioners includes a jumble of musicians, poets, documentarians, sculptors, painters, dancers, and technology freaks. Its lineage can be traced to the discourses of art, science, linguistics, technology, mass media, and politics. Cutting across such diverse fields, early video displays a broad range of concerns, often linked by nothing more than the tools themselves.” ed. Hall and Fifer, *Illuminating Video*, 14.

11. Email message to the author, December 13, 2017.

States, and elsewhere (a history that far exceeds the scope of this essay), but the general gist of the arguments was similar: mainstream television functioned as a one-sided stream of entertainment in the service of hegemonic ideology. Media studies scholar Marita Sturken describes the sense of anxiety around what was once dubbed the “idiot box” in the early writing of video art history:

The intense self-consciousness that pervaded this medium can be seen in many ways as . . . one that came out of the perception of video as marginalized—on the fringes of the art world, straddling the fence between art and information, defining itself against and in spite of the overwhelming presence of television.¹²

The sentiment of simultaneous challenge and promise extended to the field of art as a whole. Video art was uncharted territory, still outside established frameworks for the visual arts, which was in part why so many female artists—including Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, Birnbaum, VALIE EXPORT, Nancy Holt, Nan Hoover, Jonas, Beryl Korot, Kubota, Lucier, Pezold, Ulrike Rosenbach, Martha Rosler, Lisa Steele, Hannah Wilke, and others—were drawn to the young medium. “Video was as close to a ‘master-free zone’ as one could get,” writes artist Vanalyne Green.¹³ The decisive role played by women in the history

12. Marita Sturken, “Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of a History,” in *Illuminating Video*, 102.

13. Vanalyne Green, “Vertical Hold: A History of Women’s Video Art,” in *Feedback: The Video Data Bank Catalog of Video Art and Artist Interviews*, ed. Kate Horsfield and Lucas Hilderbrand (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 23.

of video informed the selection of artists and works in *Before Projection*, which opts to eschew a paternalistic lineage of iconic “firsts” and highlight some lesser-known figures instead.

The dynamic Sturken outlines is at first glance somewhat at odds with the fact that video was embraced rather quickly by some art institutions, especially in the United States. In 1971 the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, established the first video art series in the United States, curated by David A. Ross. He went on to found a video program at the Long Beach Museum of Art in 1974 (later led by curator Kathy Rae Huffman), which became a major conduit not only for West Coast video artists but also for European practitioners. Significantly, the Long Beach Museum established a production facility giving artists access to recording and editing equipment, which put the museum in proximity to other early champions and producing venues of video such as Electronic Arts Intermix in New York or Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco.¹⁴ The Museum of Modern Art, New York, launched an ongoing video program as part of its *Projects* series in 1974, helmed by curator Barbara London, and began to acquire artists’ video the following year. Also in 1974, John G. Hanhardt was appointed curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, where work was exhibited in the dedicated Film and Video Gallery for the following two decades. Despite the trailblazing curatorial work of these institutions, however, it is crucial to

14. See Gloria Sutton, “Playback: Reconsidering the Long Beach Museum of Art as Media Center,” in *Exchange and Evolution: Worldwide Video Long Beach 1971–1999*, ed. Kathy Rae Huffman and Nancy Buchanan, exh. cat. (Long Beach, CA: Long Beach Museum of Art with the Getty Foundation, 2011), 120–29. The museum also intended to launch its own television station, a plan that was never realized.

note that video art throughout the 1970s was by and large shown in discrete spaces, isolated from the traditional mediums—and most museums didn’t exhibit it much at all.

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The benchmark for the works included in *Before Projection* is that they were made specifically *for* the gallery or museum. This criterion obviously involves an excision that removes video sculpture from the much larger and messier video landscape that included grassroots and political work, albeit one not intended to gloss over the importance of that context.¹⁵ Rather, the two-pronged objective was to parse video sculpture in relation to “traditional” contemporaneous sculpture on the one hand, and to projective, often large-scale and multiscreen video installation on the other. The question, then, is when video sculpture started to shed its outsider status and began to be shown “on the gallery floor,” on par with painting and sculpture. Large national and international recurring exhibitions, such as the Whitney Biennial in New York or Documenta in Kassel, Germany, serve as a good barometer. The Whitney Biennial, widely esteemed as being at the vanguard of developments in American art, included a selection of video artists as early as 1975, just two years after the museum had merged painting and sculpture and transformed from an annual into a

15. Marita Sturken and Martha Rosler have at different points criticized the institutional mechanisms that legitimized video art while largely ignoring the broader practices emerging the same time. See Marita Sturken, “Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form,” and Martha Rosler, “Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment,” in *Illuminating Video*, 31–50.

16. The film and video section in this installment, as well as each one following up to 1995, was organized by Hanhardt.

biannual event.¹⁶ The next three installments all included a video section, organized as a series of screenings shown on monitors in the Film and Video Gallery or other ancillary galleries rather than on the “main” floors dedicated to painting and sculpture. The 1981 Biennial, heralding a changing terrain, was the first to present two video sculptures, Frank Gillette’s *Aransas, Axis of Observation* (1979) and Buky Schwartz’s *In Real Time* (1980), a closed-circuit work with two video cameras and four monitors.¹⁷ In 1983, two monitor sculptures were included under the “Painting, Sculpture, Installation” rubric: Kubota’s *River* (1979–81), displayed in the museum’s Lower Lobby (and on view in *Before Projection*), and Lucier’s *Ohio at Giverny* (1983), which critic and art historian Shelley Rice called the “popular and critical” hit of the exhibition. The 1985 edition again included two installations, Birnbaum’s *Damnation of Faust* (1984) and Bill Viola’s *The Theater of Memory* (1985); the latter was the first projective installation shown in a Whitney Biennial. In 1987 four installations were included on the main floors: *First and Third* (1986) by Judith Barry, a projection; two monitor sculptures from the *Family of Robot* (1986) series by Nam June Paik; Bruce Nauman’s *Krefeld Piece* (1985), comprising monitors and flashing neon; and Grahame Weinbren and Roberta Friedman’s *The Erl King* (1986), an interactive, computer-controlled piece with monitors. The 1989 Whitney Biennial featured two moving-image installations (Julia Scher, *Security by Julia IV* [1989], with multiple monitors; and Francesc Torres, *Oikonomos* [1989], combining projection with installation elements),

17. The show also included two film installations, by Benni Efrat and Paul Sharits respectively. Information on the works presented in these exhibitions throughout is drawn from the Whitney Biennial exhibition catalogues.

and in 1991 there were four (Nayland Blake, *Still Life* [1990], a small camcorder with a display window; Gary Hill, *Between Cinema and Hard Place* [1991], a multimonitor installation; Nauman's *Raw Material—MMM* [1990], comprising two monitors and a projection; and Alan Rath, *Voyeur II* [1989] and *Hound* [1990], incorporating cathode ray tubes stripped of their cases). Each iteration also had a video program shown in a separate space at scheduled times. The 1993 edition of the Biennial marked a turning point with respect to its inclusion of video, particularly in projective form.¹⁸ The show included half a dozen installations or room environments incorporating the moving image, by Matthew Barney, Shu Lea Cheang, Renée Green, Hill, Pepón Osorio, and the collaborative team of Bruce Yonemoto, Norman Yonemoto, and Timothy Martin. It also dispensed with separating the film and video section from painting and sculpture in the catalogue. However, given that there were only a couple more installations than there had been in previous years, most of which still employed monitors, it seems as though the change was not primarily due to numbers but perceived parity via occupied real estate. Notably, the show presented Hill's monumental *Tall Ships* (1992), an interactive installation in which twelve moving images were projected onto the walls of a corridor. The work had premiered at Documenta 9 in Germany the year before in an even larger version with sixteen projections. In fact, the 1992 quinquennial in Kassel has been described as an international milestone marking the full arrival of video by film scholars

18. The 1993 Biennial, bringing identity politics and issues of representation to the fore, is also widely considered one of the most influential shows of the decade in general.

Erika Balsom and Lucas Hilderbrand.¹⁹ Again, the salient issue here is not so much the figures themselves: out of 187 artists, twelve presented video installations. Rather, it was evident that video was put “on an equal footing with painting and sculpture throughout the many pavilions,” as curator London has noted.²⁰ By contrast, art historian Caroline A. Jones identifies the decisive shift as occurring in 1995, when Viola presented a group of crowd-pleasing video installations in the US pavilion at the Venice Biennale (Jones also points to the connection between the rise of spectacular, immersive projection and the inherent pageantry of biennial culture).²¹

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This short chronology indicates that over the course of the 1980s, video installation incrementally entered the gallery space proper. This development was surveyed in two major exhibitions mounted in Europe. In 1984 the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam presented *Het Lumineuze Beeld/The Luminous Image*, pairing practitioners like Brian Eno and Robert Wilson, better known for their respective work in music and theater, with video artists such as Max Almy, Hoover, Marcel Odenbach, Oursler, and others. In the

19. See Erika Balsom, “Before the Cinematic Turn,” and Lucas Hilderbrand, “Moving Images: On Video Art Markets and Distribution,” in *Resolutions 3: Global Networks of Video*, ed. Erika Suderburg and Ming-Yuen S. Ma (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 1–17.

20. Barbara London, “Video Spaces: Eight Installations,” in *Video Spaces: Eight Installations*, ed. London, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), 18.

21. Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 241.

catalogue, exhibition curator Dorine Mignot asserts that video art was here to stay and needed to be accommodated: "Video has come to be recognized as one medium alongside many others and we have gradually become accustomed to it as such."²² Wulf Herzogenrath's comprehensive *Video-Skulptur, retrospektiv und aktuell, 1963–1989* (Video Sculpture: Retrospective and Current, 1963–1989) traveled from Cologne to Berlin and Zurich in 1989. The show included eighty international artists and charted video sculpture's course from its beginnings. The catalogue essay by Edith Decker-Phillips (reproduced in this publication in English for the first time) sums up the state of the art at the end of the decade. Nonetheless, even as video installation was being brought into the fold of the gallery, the use of the monitor, and much of the discourse around it, was haunted by what David Antin, in 1975, had dubbed "video's frightful parent": television.²³ What's more, video sculpture was rarely installed or considered in relation to sculpture writ large. In 1982 art historian René Berger declared flatly that all video artists were "consciously breaking with the topos of television."²⁴ And in the catalogue for *The Luminous Image*, museum director Wim Beeren, perhaps involuntarily, reveals a certain amount of antipathy toward his subject:

22. Dorine Mignot, "Introduction," in *Het Lumineuze Beeld/The Luminous Image*, ed. Mignot, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1984), 10.

23. David Antin, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent," *Artforum*, December 1975, 36–45.

24. René Berger, "Videokunst oder Die künstlerische Herausforderung der Elektronik" (Video Art or The Artistic Challenge of Electronics), in *Kunst und Video: Internationale Entwicklung und Künstler* (Art and Video: International Development and Artists), ed. Bettina Gruber and Maria Vedder (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1983), 57. My translation.

The cliché-like aspect of the practically uniform, constant presentation of video images is accentuated by the format and design of the monitor. You can't expect much more of a mass product, but it does mean that you have a piece of furniture before you have a screen, and that you have a screen with a particular system before you have a video work.²⁵

In the same catalogue, Hanhardt, discussing what he termed "expanded forms" of video, describes the formal strategies employed in monitor-based pieces to transcend associations with television's domestic setting, unwieldy physical apparatus, and content: "Both the screen and its container are taken as integral elements in a whole: that whole reshapes video into a plastic form that suggests the full experience of the medium."²⁶ Artists themselves went to some length to minimize or conceal the ideological overdetermination of the domestic appliance. Hanhardt references Korot's seminal *Dachau 1974*, one of the earliest multichannel video sculptures, which placed four synchronized sequences of footage taken at the titular German concentration camp next to each other. Significantly, Korot set the monitors directly into the gallery wall so that case and buttons were hidden and the images appeared without a frame. The original display structure of Lucier's *Equinox* from 1979, included in *Before Projection*, concealed each of the seven monitors inside a wooden box, positioned on tall pedestals resting on trapezoidal stands. Besides

25. Wim Beeren, "Video and the Visual Arts," in *The Luminous Image*, 31.

26. John G. Hanhardt, "Video Art: Expanded Forms, Notes towards a History," in *The Luminous Image*, 57.

eliminating the plastic frame around her images of the sunrise, the screens towered above the viewer's heads, underlining the sculptural quality of the structure. Made eight years later, Oursler's *Psychomimetiscape II* (1987) makes the two miniature televisions it integrates almost completely disappear. This tabletop landscape comprises a cooling tower and castle tower, hiding one monitor in the latter and another one in the rocky terrain that forms the base, so that the sculpture effectively functions as model set for the abstruse dystopian story unfolding on the screens.

Media scholar Margaret Morse provides one of the few sustained analyses of (largely) monitor-based installation on its own terms, apart from television. Writing in 1989, she argues that two defining properties of this type of work are the occupation of three-dimensional space and, to varying degrees, sensitivity to the site of installation. She also mentions different categories she calls "the video wall, the kinetic painting, the relief, the sculpture, and the installation."²⁷ Morse contends that monitor works are decidedly not "proscenium art" but rather surround the visitor "by a spatial here and now, enclosed within a construction that is grounded in actual (not illusionistic) space."²⁸ Therefore, video sculpture is categorically unlike film, theater, or painting. Indeed, most of the works included in *Before Projection* are situated in the white cube of the gallery rather than the dark space of the cinema. Many of them can be viewed in the round, including the works by Caramelle, Paik, and Oursler. Like Paik's robot sculpture, Pezold's earlier *The New Embodied*

27. Margaret Morse, "Video Installation Art: The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between," in *Illuminating Video*, 163.

28. Margaret Morse, 156.

Sign Language (1973–76) uses monitors as building blocks to assemble a female figure of approximately human height. Each of four monitors shows a close-up of a body part (eyes, mouth, breasts, and pubic area), registering their variously funny and unsettling movements on screen. Fragmented, disproportionately enlarged, and rendered theatrical by black-and-white paint, Pezold produces an abstracted body that not only eludes the conventional sculptural vocabulary of the female form but returns the spectator's gaze.

Some of the works in *Before Projection* do present frontally but are nevertheless not conducive to illusionism or immersive modes of reception. Lucier's *Equinox* charts the sun rising above Lower Manhattan on consecutive days, displaying the footage on seven monitors and pedestals arranged in a circular configuration. Her images of the identical scene, mainly distinguished by the increasing burn on the camera's vidicon tube, unfold in sequence across different screens, distributing the viewer's attention accordingly. While Lucier tackles classic painterly subjects—sunrise and horizon—her sequential moving images are rooted in conceptual strategies of seriality and repetition. In Kubota's *River*, the monitor essentially becomes a projective device. Suspended from the ceiling, three monitors are mounted facing downward, pointing into a curved metal trough filled with water that is animated by a wave machine. Kubota's exuberant images are reflected in the gentle waves, frequently distorted into pools of color, and thrown back onto the shiny sides of the basin, such that the work becomes a kind of light sculpture. Adrian Piper's *Out of the Corner* (1990) consists of seventeen monitors playing footage of "talking heads" (including artists Gregg Bordowitz and Andrea Fraser and other art-world figures) who confront the

viewer with a scathing critique of fantasies of racial purity, as well as sixty-four photographs appropriated from *Ebony* magazine mounted on the surrounding walls. Each monitor is placed on a pedestal, formally referencing Sol LeWitt's cube sculptures, with an upturned chair nestled inside the open front. Piper thus constructs a sculptural tableau that viewers can walk into. Moreover, the work serves as an example of the fact that the development of video sculpture over the course of the 1980s parallels sculpture's overall tendency toward installation during the same decade.

Certainly, given the persistent rhetoric around television, many monitor works were engaged in a critique of its apparatus, institutions, and ideology. Muntadas's *Credits* (1984) assembles a sequence of television credits, stripped from their referents, on a loop. Shown on a monitor mounted above viewers' heads, similar in placement to a television set encountered in a bank or at an airport, the work presents a blunt reminder of television's incessant encroachment on public space. For *TV for TV* (1983), Takahiko Iimura performs the deadpan gesture of turning two televisions toward each other, effectively neutering the flow of images. Positioned on the floor, the anthropomorphized sets almost seem to be hugging each other. Maria Vedder's *PAL oder Never the Same Color* (1988) considers the aesthetic and geopolitical implications of the broadcast standards established in Europe versus those in North America (PAL and NTSC, respectively) while embedding the subject matter of television in the larger framework of culturally determined color symbolism. The work employs one of the earliest video-wall systems, originally controlled by a then cutting-edge microprocessor, which alternates the choreography of the images, variously breaking them

up into different quadrants or displaying one image across all twenty-five screens.

In spite of these varied sculptural approaches, the majority of the exhibited works engage with video qua video. Although artists were clearly asserting their autonomy from television in material and thematic terms, the medium of video for most practitioners was also unequivocally distinct from film. Describing the delineations of the field in the late 1980s, curator Bill Horrigan recalls that "it was not uncommon then for artists to refuse having their work seen via projection, an aesthetic principle maintained by artists whose use of video was allied precisely with the conviction that video was not cinema, i.e. not projected, not spectacle."²⁹

It is thus no coincidence that the works bookending the time period at issue in *Before Projection* acknowledge the intersections of film and video at historical moments that were transformative junctures for these mediums. Birnbaum's *Attack Piece* (1975), for example, which considers the relationship between the electronic video signal and analog photography, represents a transitional piece in the context of the show. The work consists of two monitors mounted at eye level and facing each other in a passageway with dark gray walls and carpet.³⁰ One side shows a series of photographs of (mostly male) artists equipped with Super 8 cameras, while the other displays the film

29. Bill Horrigan, "Five Years Later," in *Art and the Moving Image*, 294. In this essay, Horrigan reflects on the shift in the field brought about by projection and concludes, "In my view, the increasing dormancy of what had been generally understood as 'video art' is tied closely to the triumph of projection over monitor-based presentation, which had been the guarantee of video's specificity within the gallery-based system" (294–95).

30. The work has more recently been shown on two projection screens facing each other.

footage taken as they advance towards the seated photographer (Birnbaum herself); both film-based mediums were transferred to magnetic tape for monitor playback. As spectators enter the work, they are caught in a gendered, scopic attack-field between the protruding monitors. Thater's *Snake River* (1994) examines one of the most iconic American film genres, the western (as epitomized by the films of John Ford). Three monitors positioned on the floor display footage of landscapes in the American West, filtered in red, green, and blue respectively, which are the colors transmitted by the three electron guns of a CRT monitor. Made at the time when video projection was displacing the monitor, Thater yokes the cinematic imagery to the small screen and foregrounds one of the distinctive technical features of video technology, staking a rare claim on the continuity and imbrication of different mediums and their forms of display.

•

The arrival of projection begins to dissolve the distinction between film and video as separate mediums. As outlined above, over the course of the 1990s projective installation took over the exhibition space. In 1996, Douglas Gordon was awarded the Turner Prize for *24 Hour Psycho* (1993). This double projection onto two sides of a large screen bisecting the gallery slows down Alfred Hitchcock's eponymous 1960 Hollywood thriller to extend over a full day. The piece exemplifies a burgeoning interest in the aesthetic and narrative vocabulary of the cinema for a generation of artists emerging at the time, including Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Doug Aitken, Stan Douglas, Isaac Julien, Steve McQueen, Jane and Louise Wilson, and others.³¹ Along with cinematic

imagery and subject matter, the black-box space became a standard feature of contemporary art exhibitions as the display of projective works necessitated the construction of minicinememas within or adjacent to white-cube gallery spaces. These developments were facilitated both conceptually and technically by digital convergence. The new digital media superseded both film's "frames" and video's analog magnetic tape, and the image dramatically improved in quality. Artist and writer Chris Meigh-Andrews summarizes the shifting terms of the preceding decade in his history of video art, originally published in 2006:

Technological change helped to transform video art, liberating it from the inevitable reference of television, and as the resolution and brightness range of video projection increased, video began to be (almost) indistinguishable from film!³²

If in 1989 the quality of projected video was nowhere near approximating the brightness and definition of either film projection or monitor presentation, video technology improved rapidly in the following years.³³ With the launch of first LCD (liquid-crystal display) and then DLP (digital light-processing) projectors, which are smaller and lighter than the older CRT models, projective video installations

31. It is important to note that much of the projective installation emerging in the 1990s took narrative feature films, and very often Hollywood movies, as point of reference, rather than more abstract modes of filmmaking explored in what is known as avant-garde or experimental film.

32. Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 307.

33. Bill Horrigan makes this point when discussing a Julia Scher exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, OH, in "Five Years Later," 296.

became much easier to install. Improving display technology was echoed by changes in film production, specifically editing. In commercial filmmaking, digital, nonlinear editing systems had begun to replace the practice of physically cutting and splicing celluloid by the late 1980s, a shift that was complete by the mid-1990s. In other words, the material separation of film and video collapsed, as big movies shot on 35-mm film routinely lived on video during the editing process before being transferred back to film. Many moving-image artists recorded using 16-mm film but edited and exhibited on video, all the while referring to the work as “film.” Curator Michael Rush identifies 1997 as marking another turning point with the introduction of the first handheld digital-video recorder by Sony, which, “like the Portapak over thirty years before, made digital moving-image recording accessible to a broad consumer public, including artists.”³⁴ So while video-projection technology and digital-media production developed in tandem, it is ultimately the latter that changed the very definition of film and video (in the wake of high-definition video and digital cinema projection, that development has recently come to its preliminary conclusion). Art historian Michael Newman characterizes the changes in the media landscape in 2009:

It is largely the shift in the nature of *remediation* brought about by digitilisation that justifies us in speaking currently of the ‘moving image’ rather than film or video. Moving images today are not only ubiquitous, but also infinitely

34. Michael Rush, *Video Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 167.

transformable.³⁵

In spite of the mediums’ new ambiguity, there were nonetheless patterns of reception that remained distinct. Projected works deployed in black-box spaces tended to allude to the medium’s historical relationship to cinema. Much writing around the cinematic turn drew on film history and theory, analyzing modes of spectatorship as well as filmic narrative. Although this direction is supported by the explicit engagement with narrative film and cinematic space in much work from the 1990s and early 2000s, it is illuminating that nobody asked the inverse—namely, what video projection might mean for television in general and the monitor in particular (we now know that “the flatscreen” is the answer to the latter). Projective video installation was not only a nearly instant popular and critical success, it also finally became collectible and hence viable on the art market (somewhat paradoxically so, as the projected image is entirely ephemeral).³⁶ Another conspicuous difference is in rhetoric. While the unpalatable stench of TV clung to earlier video art, much critical writing on cinematic installation took a decidedly enthusiastic tone. Projection is repeatedly described in the elevated terms of a

35. Michael Newman, “Moving Image in the Gallery since the 1990s,” in *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 88. My italics.

36. Lucas Hilderbrand historicizes the different economic models of distribution versus editioning that facilitated this development in “Moving Images.” However, it is worth pointing out that although film and video are now routinely collected by major institutions and some private collectors, their market as a whole remains far behind painting, drawing, and other “traditional” mediums.

“liberation,” as in Meigh-Andrews’s formulation quoted above. The opening salvo of art historian Liz Kotz’s analysis of video projection in 2004—echoing Beeren’s statement twenty years before—is particularly emphatic:

Monitors are awkward, badly designed and a constant reminder of the medium’s links to broadcast television, domestic furniture and all the degraded industrial uses of video technology. Mounted on the ubiquitous grey utility cart in institutional settings, monitors tend to disrupt the gallery or museum space. Is it no wonder video has so often been confined to the basement or the stairwell? Who among us would not prefer the luminous image freed from its ungainly technical support?³⁷

Now that AV carts are a rarity and boxy television sets hard to come by, the roundabout condemnation of these relatively innocuous display elements appears a little overwrought. It is particularly revealing that large projections, usually requiring the construction of a separate architectural structure, are considered more suited to the museum than monitor works, which can typically be accommodated by the white cube just fine. These sentiments reflect, I think, a number of ahistorical assumptions of cinema’s a priori cultural superiority vis-à-vis TV. But the alignment of film/cinema/projection and video/television/monitor is an institutional rather than intrinsic one. Clearly, these terms have shifted considerably over time. While television today

37. Liz Kotz, “Video Projection: The Space between Screens,” in *Art and the Moving Image*, 371.

is no less of an ideological megaphone than it was then, the medium has also evolved into a dominant purveyor of quality content. More important, as social media and the internet are now defining elements in our mediascape, the segmentation into television and the cinema itself is obsolete. Computer-generated imagery, rapidly improving in verisimilitude, is currently bringing about another dramatic shift in our relationship to images and materiality.

It seems clear that the success of cinematic projection over the monitor in the 1990s and 2000s split video installation into a “before” and “after.” In the process, “video art” itself was turned into a historical category, whereas after the digital turn, the moving image became part and parcel of contemporary art. This is not in and of itself a problem, except that the progress-inflected account tends to imply that the rise of projective installation marks the moment when video really comes into its own. My contention is that, in fact, it was a fully resolved form already. *Before Projection* aims to resituate monitor sculpture more completely into the narrative between early video and projection, but also to claim its relevance for the development of sculpture in the 1980s in general. A familiar process of, if you will, auratic investment follows each technology’s inevitable obsolescence. We have seen this with slide projectors and 16-mm films, for example, once workaday classroom equipment and now sculptural elements on their own. The cubic CRT appliance has become a similarly nostalgic object. It is under these terms that we can look past the “awkward” monitor and “ungainly” television set and reevaluate some of the sculptural strategies that video artists employed from the outset.



















Dara Birnbaum
b. 1946, United States;
lives and works in New York

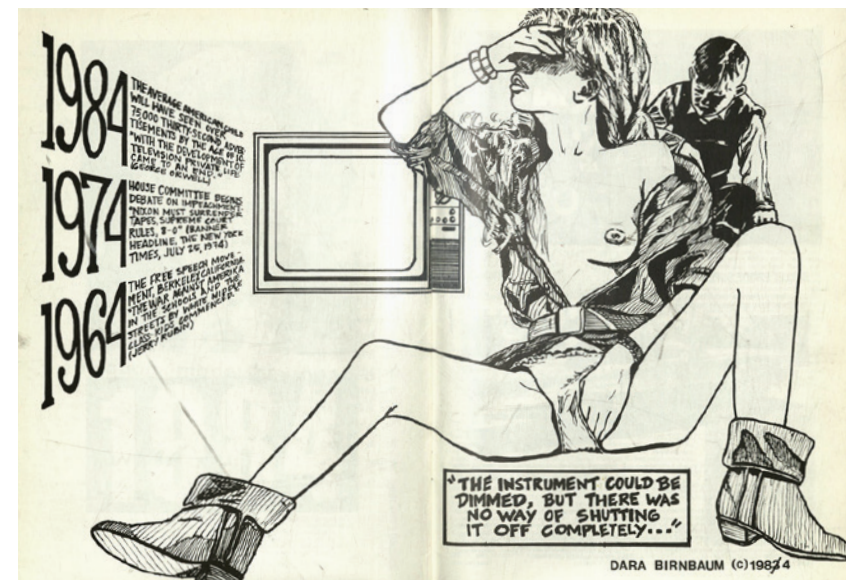


Attack Piece
1975

Dara Birnbaum's work has been in dialogue not only with early video art and the feminist movement, but also with artists who, in the late 1970s and '80s, began to critically investigate the pervasive media landscape of television, cinema, and advertising—such as Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Cindy Sherman. Appropriation was a signature strategy for this cohort, who utilized images from mass media in their work, often reproducing them by way of photography or drawing. Birnbaum, however, was intent on plying television against itself. She wanted not only to make work about TV, but to permeate media culture—to “use the vocabulary of television as raw material, and return it to the public arena transformed into critical discourse.”¹

Birnbaum was trained in architecture, which shaped her keen interest in the relationship of media images to the spatial characteristics of the exhibition space. Living in the politically charged environment of the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1970s further prompted her critical engagement. In 1974 Birnbaum moved to Florence, Italy, where she first experienced video art at art/tapes/22, a gallery established by Maria Gloria Bicocchi. When she returned to New York in 1975, she began her own work with video, taking note of two distinct threads that were emerging in the nascent medium: the first was body- or performance-oriented, as in the work of Bruce Nauman or Vito Acconci; the second was bent on critiquing the medium of television, as seen in projects by the collaborative duo Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider. As Birnbaum characterized it,

1. “Attack Piece,” Collection, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, accessed September 01, 2017, <http://www.macba.cat/en/attack-piece-2462>.



Dara Birnbaum, *Centerfold Drawing*, 1984

the former was personal, the latter social.² Her early *Attack Piece* deliberately situates itself between these threads, giving form to the popular second-wave-feminist rallying cry “the personal is political.”

In *Attack Piece*, Birnbaum considers the ways in which media from beyond the home can aggressively infiltrate domestic spaces; the carpet and monitors in the work recall a living room, while the footage displayed is shot outdoors. She also configures the camera as a weapon, engaging with contemporaneous theories that parsed cinema's gendered and objectifying gaze.³ When viewing *Attack Piece*, the visitor stands between two monitors

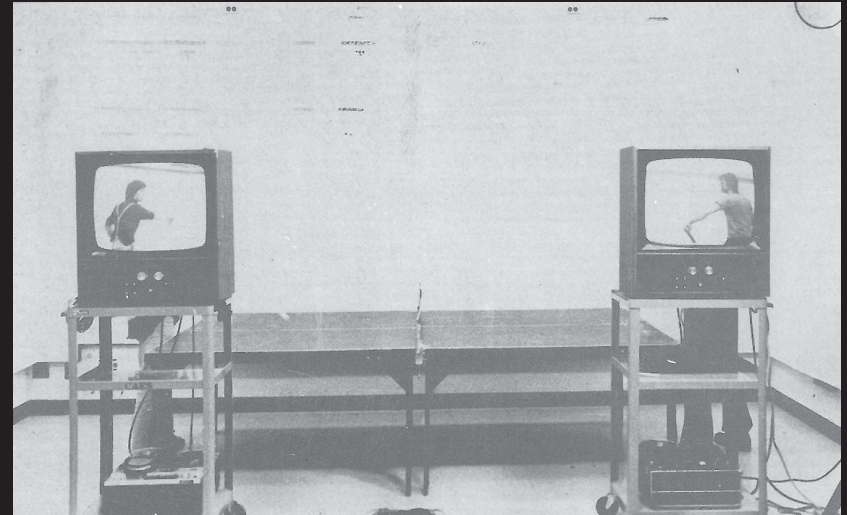
2. Nicolás Guagnini and Dara Birnbaum, “Cable TV's Failed Utopian Vision: An Interview with Dara Birnbaum,” *Cabinet*, Winter 2002/2003, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/9/birnbaum.php>.

3. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay on the topic, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” was also published in 1975.

facing each other. One monitor shows Super 8 footage shot by artists David Askevold, Cyne Cobb, Dan Graham, and Ian Murray. The four successively “attack” a seated and stationary Birnbaum, the cameras recording their aggressive advances toward her. Armed with a 35-mm still camera, Birnbaum does not remain idle, as the other monitor shows a series of photographs she captured as the intruders approached. Both the artist and the attackers are trapped in these patterns, just as the viewer is trapped between the two display monitors. *Attack Piece* sets out to reclaim the medium for the female filmmaker and her gaze: training her lens onto the camera operators, she complicates distinctions between subject and object, stalker and stalked, attacker and attacked.

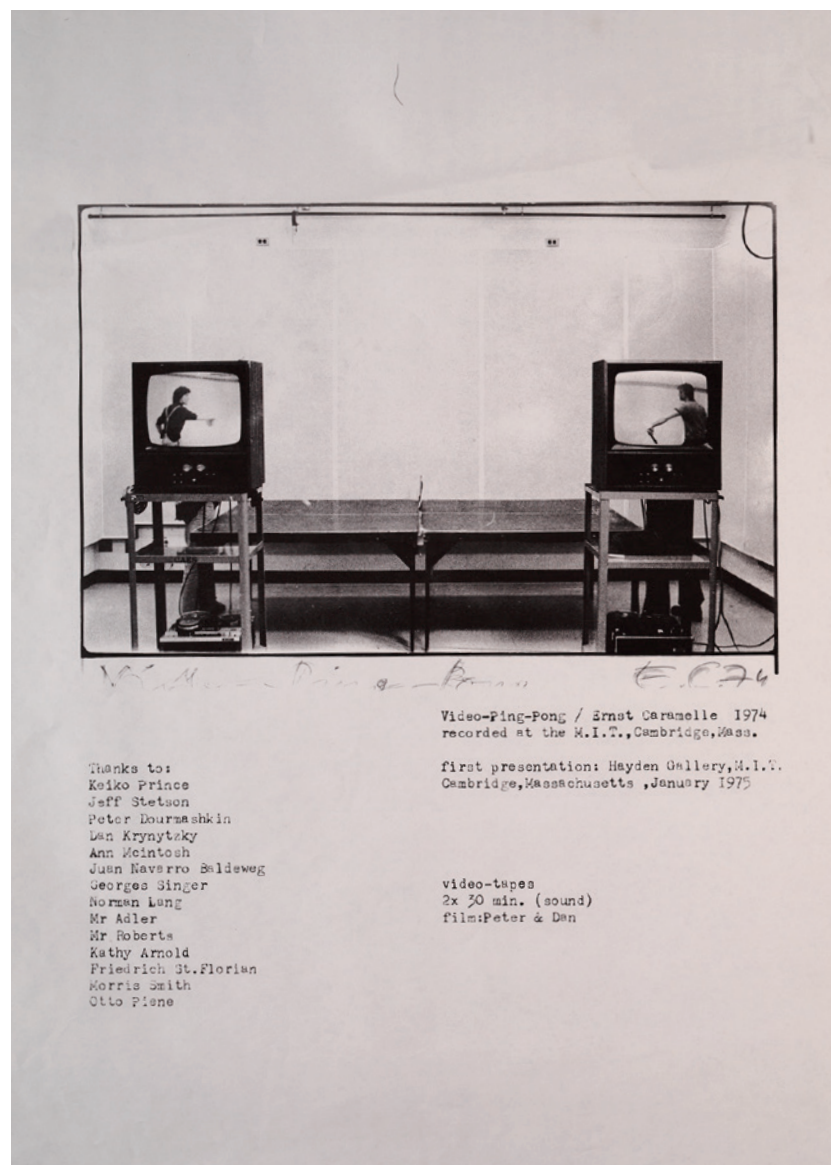
Ernst Caramelle

b. 1952, Austria; lives and works in Karlsruhe,
Frankfurt am Main, and New York



Video Ping-Pong

1974



Poster for *Video Ping-Pong*, Ernst Caramelle, 1974

Ernst Caramelle made a series of video sculptures during an early-career fellowship at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, where he was in residence from 1974 to 1975. The series includes *Video-Landschaft (Video-Raum)* (Video-Landscape [Video-Room]) and *Video-Landschaft (Flowerpot)* (Video-Landscape [Flowerpot]) (both 1974), in which shots of a tree trunk and a flowerpot were screened on TV sets placed in front of their respective subjects. Caramelle's *Video Ping-Pong* was first exhibited in 1975, at MIT's Hayden Gallery, which preceded the present-day List Visual Arts Center.

Continuing his interest in doubling through the simultaneous use of live objects and recorded images, *Video Ping-Pong* juxtaposes a real Ping-Pong table with a videotaped table-tennis match, displayed on two monitors placed at either end of the court. Sounds of the bouncing Ping-Pong ball are audible, although no ball is visible between the two monitors. A ball can be activated in the piece, however, if viewers choose to play a game of their own on the real table behind them. The sounds of the real and recorded bouncing balls are not likely to ever synchronize, and the conflicting noises may disorient players; from afar, the monitors might even be perceived as broadcasting a delayed live-feed.

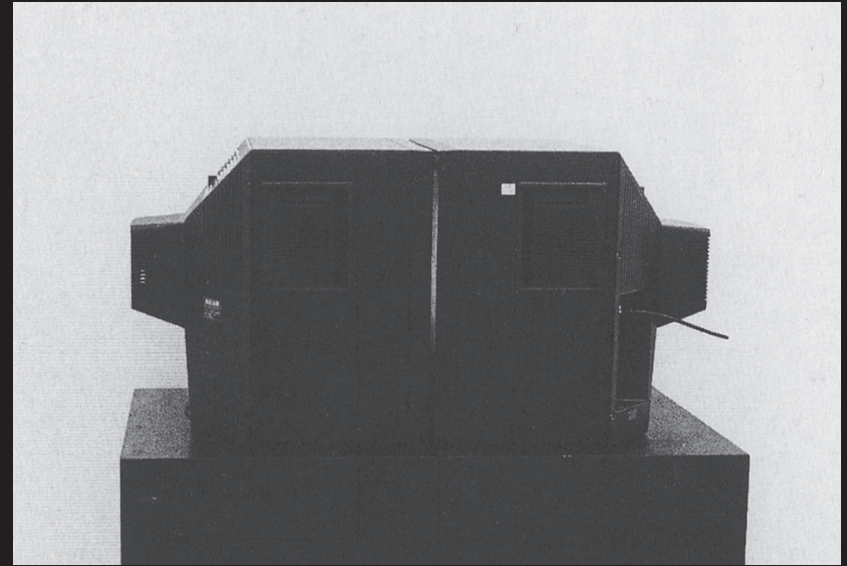
While at MIT, Caramelle also worked on a series called *Forty Found Fakes*, in which he invented works that were intended to be mistaken for the art of various contemporaries, including Muntadas, Friederike Pezold, and Nam June Paik (all included in *Before Projection*). "These works could only be designated fakes if they represent works not yet made by the artist," Caramelle writes, "since

the artists in question are still living. The fakes therefore precede their originals.”¹

Caramelle made his last video work in 1979, but nonetheless retained his interest in the original and copy, which he continues to explore in other media. Critic Brigitte Huck describes *Forty Found Fakes* as “reflections on perception, reproductions and originals, forgery and authenticity.”² Caramelle’s subsequent reflections on these concerns utilize a wide variety of forms and media, including his ongoing series *Sun Pieces*, in which the artist exposes construction paper to sunlight, sometimes for months, using stencils to guide the shapes of resulting discoloration. As in *Forty Found Fakes*, the gesture works to complicate the role of the artist’s hand.

1. Ernst Caramelle, artist statement for *Forty Found Fakes*, Box 18, Center for Advanced Visual Studies Special Collection. MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology Archives and Special Collections, Cambridge, MA.
2. Brigitte Huck, “Ernst Caramelle,” *Artforum*, Summer 2006, 367.

Takahiko Imura
b. 1937, Japan; lives
and works in New York and Tokyo



TV for TV
1983



Poster for Takahiko Iimura, *TV for TV*

When living in Tokyo in the late 1950s and early '60s, Takahiko Iimura read all he could about contemporary American avant-garde filmmakers like Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Stan VanDerBeek. Their work was not shown in Japan during that time, so his understanding of their films and ideas came solely from texts, and imagining what those films might look like was a crucial influence on his early practice. Jonas Mekas, a filmmaker Iimura admired, reviewed Iimura's 1962 film *Love (Ai)* in the *Village Voice*. This prompted Iimura to move to the United States in 1966, where he attended a summer program at Harvard University before moving to New York.

Iimura began as a filmmaker concerned with the formal properties and materiality of celluloid. In these early works, he often gave form to varying linguistic descriptions (and thereby conceptual understandings) of film. In English, film is referred to as a "moving picture," whereas the Japanese word 映画 (*eiga*) translates more literally as "reflected picture."¹ While Iimura's work explores the idea of the "reflected" image, it is interesting to note that the character 映 can also be translated as "projected."²

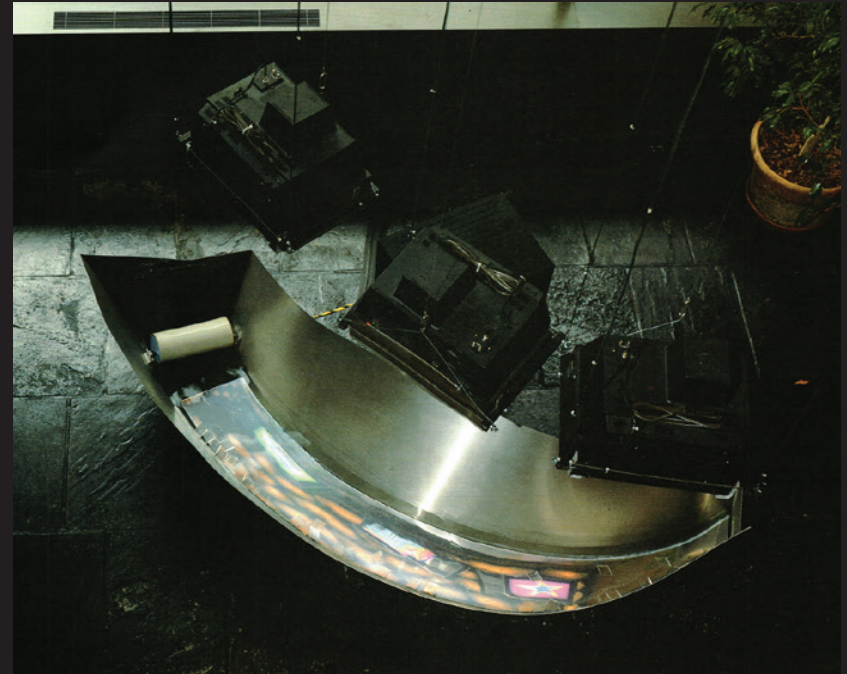
In 1969 Iimura returned to Tokyo, where he began working with a Portapak, the world's first consumer-grade video camera, which had been released by Sony two years earlier. As he transitioned to video, he maintained his interest in form and material, exploring video's unique properties distinct from those of film. Chief among these

1. Takahiko Iimura, *The Collected Writings of Takahiko Iimura* (Rockville, MD: Wildside, 2007), 8. I am thankful to Hansun Hsiung for Japanese-language assistance.

2. The term 映画 (*eiga*) was originally used not for celluloid film but in reference to magic-lantern slides.

is video feedback (itself a form of reflection). While many video works of that era employed a closed-circuit feedback loop, in *TV for TV*—which limura sometimes calls *TV Confrontation*—two monitors are positioned face-to-face, each tuned to a different broadcast station. They play two distinct images to each other, both illegible for the human viewer; their respective streams are only directed toward the other television set.³ The work explores another property unique to video: the medium's capacity for immediacy and simultaneity (properties distinct, again, from film), which in *TV for TV* is realized through its utilization of real-time broadcasts. On view in the gallery for months at a time, the work highlights television's incessant streaming of images, a nonreciprocal, perpetual flow that seems almost impervious to the presence or interest of a human viewer.

Shigeko Kubota
b. 1937, Japan; d. 2015, United States



River
1979–81

3. For *Before Projection*, mounted at a time after analog broadcasting technology became obsolete, the monitors instead show static.

Shigeko Kubota, who moved to New York from Tokyo in 1963, was deeply influenced by the landmark 1969 exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium* at New York's Howard Wise Gallery, which she discussed in a six-page review written for the Japanese art magazine 美術手帖 (*Bijutsu Techō*, or Art Handbook). Together with artists Mary Lucier, Cecilia Sandoval, and Charlotte Warren, she founded the early all-female video-art collective Red, White, Yellow, and Black.¹ For the collective's 1972 exhibition at the Kitchen in New York, Kubota displayed her first video sculpture, *Riverrun*, which comprised a fountain spewing orange juice and five monitors looping black-and-white footage of rivers and canals. A sixth monitor showed live color footage of viewers drinking the juice. Art historian Midori Yoshimoto claims that *Riverrun* was the "first of its kind. While video art pioneers like [Nam June] Paik experimented with single-channel video, none had explored the possibilities of using multiple video monitors along with other materials such as water."²

The artist often preferred the term "video sculpture" to the now more common "video installation" because she, like many media artists, often exhibited in Germany, where she feared the term would be confused with the German word *installateur*, which means "plumber" (though the concept of installation art is now widely used and understood in German).³ She was explicit about her drive to use video

1. The artists would at times change the order in which they listed the colors when referring to the group.

2. Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 188.

3. David A. Ross, "A Conversation with Nam June Paik," in *Nam June Paik: Video Time, Video Space*, ed. Toni Stooss and Thomas Kellein, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 58.



Shigeko Kubota, *Study for River*, 1979

equipment sculpturally, stating: "I wanted to be unique. So I made big video installations. . . . You don't need so many single-channel artists. But you need special [ones], like video installation artists or video sculptors."⁴ Her piece

4. Jeanine Mellinger and D. L. Bean, "Shigeko Kubota," *Profile*, November/December 1983, 4.

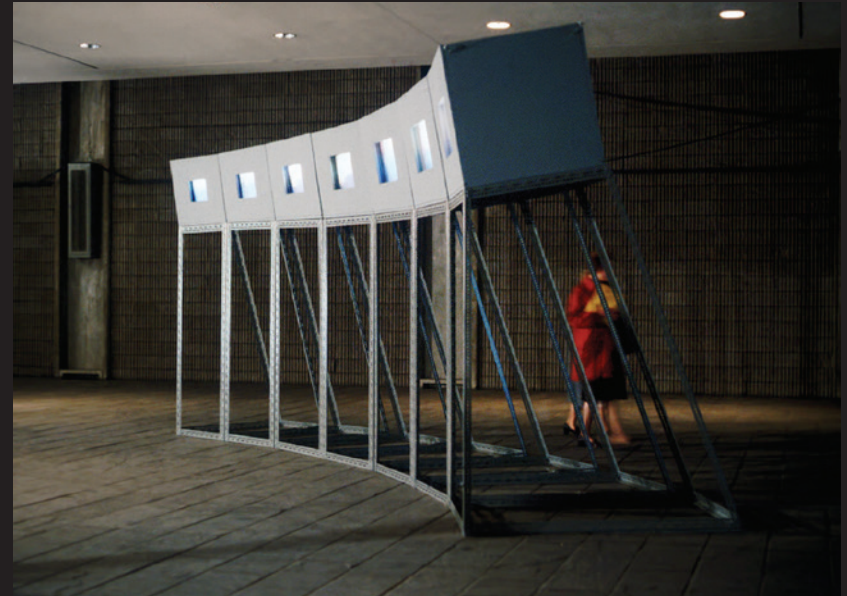
Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase (1976) was the first video sculpture to be acquired by MoMA.

River was inspired simultaneously by a gigantic swimming pool featuring an artificial wave machine that she had seen while visiting Düsseldorf during a DAAD fellowship, and by the centrality of rivers in Buddhist thought (her grandfather was a Buddhist monk). The work was made in West Berlin, where it was first shown in 1981. It was later included in the 1983 Whitney Biennial, but has not been shown since the early 1990s. The work is composed of three monitors hung at eye-level above a reflective trough equipped with a wave motor. The monitors alternate footage of Kubota swimming with brightly colored graphic shapes and hearts, which were created with the state-of-the-art postproduction equipment of the time. Reflected on the surface of the water, the images' legibility is periodically disrupted by the wave motor. The work typifies Kubota's recurring interest in water and video as apt mediums to represent cyclicity. She writes:

In one of their aspects, video and rivers progress through linear time and space, in another, video's closed circuit feedback reflects itself and its environment in cyclical, "whirlpool" time, and rivers throw back images from their surface reflections.⁵

5. Shigeko Kubota quoted in *Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture*, exh. cat. ed. Mary Jane Jacob. (New York: American Museum of the Moving Image, 1991), 41.

Mary Lucier
b. 1944, United States;
lives and works in New York



Equinox
1979/2016



Mary Lucier, *Equinox*, 1979 (stills)

Mary Lucier's *Equinox* is the last of eight video installations that the artist made between 1975 and 1979 exploring “burn,” a technical video phenomenon that she first encountered by chance. Trained in still photography, Lucier was videotaping a dance performance outdoors when she noticed what seemed to be evidence of a hair on her lens while looking through her viewfinder—a tiny black-and-white monitor with a magnifier in the eyepiece.¹ She wiped the lens, but the mark remained—it was not a hair after all, but burn on the camera's internal recording tube, caused by accidentally pointing the camera at the sun: powerfully bright light alters and can ultimately destroy the photosensitive material on a camera's vidicon tube (though weak burns can erase themselves over time). Lucier experi-

1. Melinda Barlow, *Mary Lucier* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 108.

mented with accelerating this process by aiming her camera directly at a white card and opening the aperture to let more light in. Technology, she realized, is, like humanity, “susceptible to trauma, haunted by memory, and inescapably mortal; as each moves toward mortality, each also experiences decay.”² Lucier, a Brandeis graduate with a long-standing love for Romantic poetry, became interested in the lyrical implications of the flaws and limits of technology in the face of the natural progression of decline.



Poster for *Mary Lucier: Equinox* at CUNY Graduate Center Mall, 1979

Some of Lucier's experiments with burn, such as her performance of *Fire Writing* (1975), used lasers rather than the sun. Preceded by the closely related *Dawn Burn*

2. Melinda Barlow, *Mary Lucier*, 14–15.

(1975), shot in black-and-white, *Equinox* is her first work in color. Between March 9 and 21, 1979—the latter date is the vernal equinox—Lucier recorded every daybreak from the thirty-first floor of Independence Plaza in Lower Manhattan, a building with a view spanning 180 degrees, from the Empire State Building in the northeast to the Statue of Liberty in the southwest. Each day, she progressively zoomed in on the sun, while gradually shifting the camera's angle northward to follow the sun's natural movement. And each day, broader marks were burned onto the camera's internal vidicon tube, which manifest on the tape as a series of dark greenish streaks in the sky that trail the path of the sun. The seven consecutive videos showing gradually more pronounced burns are presented on a series of monitors increasing in size, each mounted on a tall pedestal.

Equinox debuted in 1979 at the CUNY Graduate Center Mall on Forty-Second Street; its inaugural installation was an attempt to incorporate video into the public sphere, in response to contemporaneous conversations surrounding public art. As Lucier has noted, “The idea that you could put video in a semi-open space and have it actually function as public art was still a new idea.”³ While some artists turned to broadcast television to get beyond the white cube, Lucier (and others) sought to have their screen-based work enter a dialogue with communal space and public sculpture. In 2016, *Equinox* was updated and edited from fifty-five minutes to thirty-three for an exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art, which is the version included in *Before Projection*.

3. Phong Bui and Mary Lucier, “Mary Lucier with Phong Bui,” *Brooklyn Rail*, March 7, 2007, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://brooklynrail.org/2007/03/art/mary-lucier>.

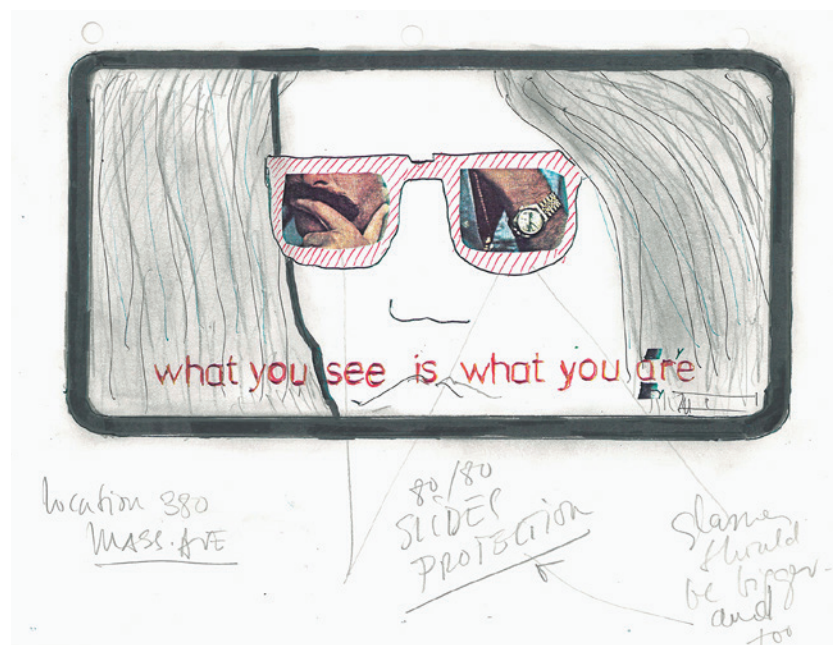
Muntadas

b. 1942, Spain; lives and works in New York



Credits

1984



Muntadas, sketch for *Media Eyes* billboard/slide projection installation with Anne Bray, Cambridge, 1981

Throughout his career, Muntadas—who taught at MIT from 1990 to 2014—has carried out a critical investigation into technology, its cultural functions, and its ideological underpinnings. His oeuvre has long considered the relationship between public and private space—areas that are bridged and blurred by television and other media, which is often viewed in the home but transmitted from beyond. Many early video artists gravitated toward the medium of broadcast television because of its capacity to reach wide audiences beyond the gallery or museum. Chris Burden, for instance, purchased commercial television slots to broadcast his works such as *Through the Night Softly* (1973), in which the artist army-crawls over broken glass.

However, purchasing advertisement slots quickly became unaffordable and inaccessible for artists, which complicated the conception of television as a “public” arena. It is precisely this question of access and control that Muntadas has long critiqued. He has explored power relations behind media including the internet, print publications, advertisements, and of course television, interrogating the ways in which these platforms are co-opted to censor expression and propagate ideology. He has at various times hijacked these media: e.g., employing a billboard to display a critical message, as in his *Media Eyes* (1981), which queried viewers, WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU ARE. Other works prompt awareness and skepticism toward media tactics. “Muntadas has been watching television for us,” writes art historian Ina Blom, “or, more precisely, keeping watch over television for us.”¹ Blom wittily characterizes the artist’s skepticism toward TV sets as an attitude of “monitoring.”

In *Credits*, Muntadas’ analysis of the media landscape extends to what he terms the “invisible” information behind mass media productions. “By isolating the credits of several TV and film productions — *The Lawrence Welk Show*, ABC’s *Wide World of Sports*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, among others — from their original context,” notes the Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) catalog, “he demonstrates that the language, sound/music, visuals, graphics, typography, format and rhythm reflect how the producers and producing institutions choose to represent themselves. In a tape that he intends to have no beginning

1. Ina Blom, “Muntadas’ Mediascapes,” in *Muntadas: Entre/Between*, ed. Daina Augaitis, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2011), 86.

and no end, Muntadas deconstructs and rereads the credits until they become pure information.”²

Thus, in this piece, credits—which we often treat as an addendum to the main event by walking out of the theater as they scroll, or by fast-forwarding through them—become the entire piece. In a gallery setting Muntadas’s video is often shown on a wall-mounted monitor, resembling those commonly encountered in banks or airports in the early 1980s, when the piece was made. In other contexts the video has been shown on a television placed on domestic furniture, highlighting the public and private tensions that underpin the production and consumption of media.

Tony Oursler
b. 1957, United States;
lives and works in New York

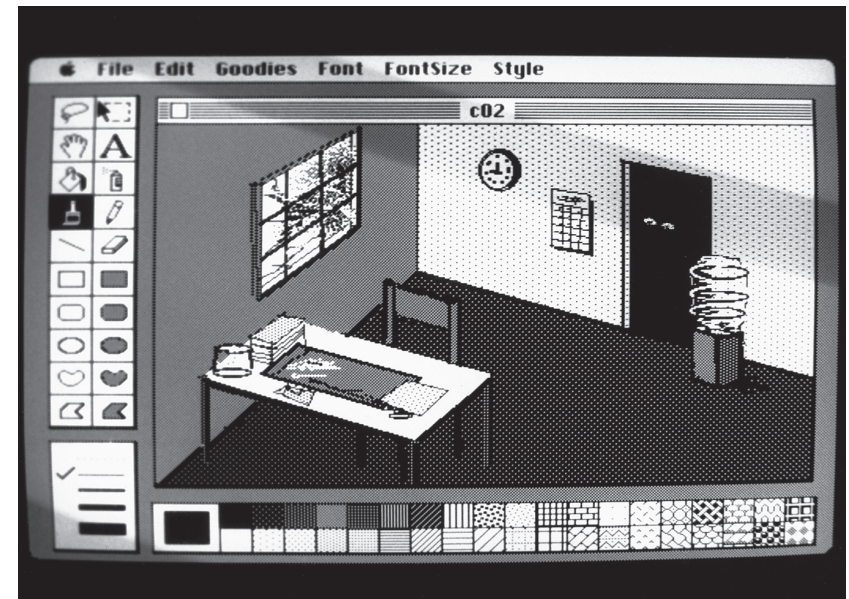


Psychomimetiscape II
1987

2. “Credits.” Electronic Arts Intermix. <http://www.eai.org/titles/credits>.

While enrolled in John Baldessari's famed poststudio course at the California Institute of the Arts in the late 1970s, Tony Oursler collaborated with fellow students working at the intersection of performance and media art, including Ericka Beckman, Mike Kelley, and John Miller. After moving to New York in the early 1980s, he turned his focus to installation and video—mediums suited to exploring his interest in the psychological impact of rapidly changing technology. "My early idea of what could be art for my generation was an exploded TV," he has said.¹ His early tapes often incorporated handmade sets; he later began experimenting with displaying his videos in and among such sets and objects, as in his *Son of Oil* (1981), which is displayed within a painted backdrop featured in the video itself. While Oursler produced numerous immersive media installations throughout the 1980s, he also began to focus on sculptural works incorporating video and sound. *Psychomimescape II* is one of Oursler's early monitor-based sculptures, predating the artist's well-known works involving video projections on dolls and dummies.

Psychomimescape II takes the form of what Oursler calls a "model world."² The work, mounted atop a pedestal, resembles an architectural model; rendered in somber gray, it depicts a nuclear cooling tower next to a medieval-style tower with a crenellated parapet in a barren landscape. Embedded in the structure are two tiny monitors—one



Tony Oursler, *Psychomimescape II* (still)

placed at the bottom of a depression in the ground, transmitting TV images of fireworks, the other located in the tower, playing back an absurdist short narrative employing hand-drawn and computer-generated animation.

The narrator in this video seems a tad unhinged, if not outright paranoid. In it, Oursler captures a feeling familiar to many Americans in the late 1980s, when the escalating nuclear-arms race at the tail end of the Cold War instilled widespread uneasiness. The impression of delirium is amplified by the echoed distortion of the narrator's voice as he recounts the true story of an office employee who plants tiny amounts of plutonium under his boss's desk each day. "All the elements are there, but they're slightly different," the narrator concludes. "The population number, the drunken teenagers, drugs and religion, aplastic anemia, war hero, replica, the stars on the flag—the only thing

1. Alexandra Pechman, "Deciphering the Poetic Jabber of Tony Oursler's Talking Heads," *Art News*, May 7, 2014, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://www.artnews.com/2014/05/07/getting-inside-ourslers-heads/>.

2. Alexandra Pechman, "Deciphering the Poetic Jabber."

missing was the logic." The narrative points to experiences of overstimulation, of information overload from which no sense can be made: "Options, options . . ." the narrator continues. "It takes nerves of steel and an iron will to conduct the decision making."

Nam June Paik
b. 1932, Korea; d. 2006, United States



Charlotte Moorman II
1995



Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, c. 1979

Nam June Paik was one of a group of artists who pioneered the television set as material for sculpture as well as the use of video in art; he began experimenting artistically with the TV set in 1959. The artistic concerns that occupied Paik throughout his career were evident in his first solo exhibition, *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television*, in 1963, mounted at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany. For this show, Paik, who trained as a classical pianist and wrote his thesis on Arnold Schoenberg, displayed “prepared” (i.e., altered) instruments, audio installations, and manipulated secondhand TV sets that broadcast German television. (These early television works preceded the availability of consumer video equipment.) In the brochure for the exhibition, Paik professes his indebtedness to Wolf Vostell’s exhibition earlier that year, *Television Décollage*, which also featured altered TV sets.

In 1964, Paik made his first “robot” sculpture—titled *Robot K-456*, in collaboration with electronics engineer Shuya Abe—in his series of assemblages that employ TV monitors to depict figures. That year Paik also met his long-time collaborator Charlotte Moorman, a classically trained cellist who was introduced to experimental performance by her friend and roommate Yoko Ono. The robots remained a consistent part of Paik’s practice: in 1986, responding to television’s outsize domestic role as well as to depictions of the nuclear family in TV sitcoms, he began his series *Family of Robots*, which included a grandfather, an uncle, a mother, and so on. In the 1990s, he started making robots of historical figures, such as Genghis Khan and Li Tai Po, as well as of his friends—John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Moorman. The robot sculpture included in this exhibition, *Charlotte Moorman II*, which features a cello for a torso,

monitors for extremities that show occasionally distorted footage of Moorman, and wires for hair, is both portrait of and homage to Moorman, made after her death in 1991.

Among Paik and Moorman's most famous collaborations is *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969),¹ in which Moorman plays the cello while wearing a "bra" made of two protruding TV monitors held in place by Plexiglas boxes and transparent vinyl straps.² (Paik and Moorman were later both fellows at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies under Otto Piene in 1982 and 1986, respectively.) Paik's exhibition in the German Pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, two years after Moorman's death from cancer, included an installation titled *Room for Charlotte Moorman*, featuring articles of her clothing and photographs of their performances. A year after he made *Charlotte Moorman II*, Paik suffered from a disabling stroke, making this one of his final works, and an apt summary of his lifelong muses: music, monitors, and Moorman.

1. Shown in a group exhibition of the same year, *TV as a Creative Medium*, at Howard Wise Gallery in New York.

2. When the duo performed *Opera Sextronique* in 1964, Moorman was charged with indecent exposure and subsequently fired from the American Symphony Orchestra. Thereafter, she became widely known as the "topless cellist."

Friederike Pezold
b. 1945, Austria



Die neue leibhaftige Zeichensprache
(The New Embodied Sign Language)
1973–76



Friederike Pezold, *Mundwerk*, 1974

Part of Friederike Pezold's major video series, this sculpture comprises four monitors displaying videos of close-ups of the artist's body altered by theatrical makeup. The videos (subtitled, respectively, *Augenwerk* [Eye Work], *Mundwerk* [Mouth Work], *Bruststück* [Breast Piece], and *Schamwerk* [Pubic Work]) are shown on monitors stacked on top of each other to reach roughly the height of a human body, though the body parts are not represented in proportion to one another. To film the piece, Pezold painted her body white, and then outlined or blacked out certain features. Her pubic area, for example, is rendered as a triangle, thus abstracting the body and limiting its exposure to the viewer. As a result, in *The New Embodied Sign Language*, "the female body is no longer the projection surface for (male) voyeurism; instead the high degree of formalization makes us perceive it purely as a sign," as curator Johanna Pröll writes.¹

Pezold, who in 1995 founded the Vienna Museum of Video Art and Body Art, was interested in subverting classic dualisms between painter and model, subject and object. While for feminists the advent of video offered the promise of a medium whose history was still uncharted by men, it nonetheless had to contend with the existing traditions of representations of women in film, painting, and beyond. Pezold writes of her optimism for the medium's potential:

I was greatly delighted to realise . . . that I could at the same time be in front of AND behind the camera. . . . Finally there was a solution to the

1. Johanna Pröll, "Friederike Pezold" in *2D23D: Photography as Sculpture, Sculpture as Photography* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2014), 36.

dilemma: she = the nude model and he = the painter or in other words she as the commodity produced by him. By using video on a new technological level I managed to make possible what had hitherto been impossible: abolishing the distinction between model and painter, subject and object, image and representation.²

In her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” published in 1975, Laura Mulvey argued that classic Hollywood cinema represented women as subject of man’s active, objectifying “gaze.”³ One way this is rendered formally, she writes, is that women are often depicted as flat and still, while men more actively occupy three-dimensional space. This formal treatment of women by way of the apparatus of the camera mimics the ways in which they are frequently depicted on screen as being without interiority or agency. Pezold plays with the qualities of the monitor screen, abstracting her own body through fragmentation. Willfully exaggerating her own image, she reveals herself as both object and subject, just as her video sculpture places her images in three-dimensional space, refuting simple flatness.

2. Pezold quoted in: Johanna Pröll, “Friederike Pezold,” 36.

3. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 838.

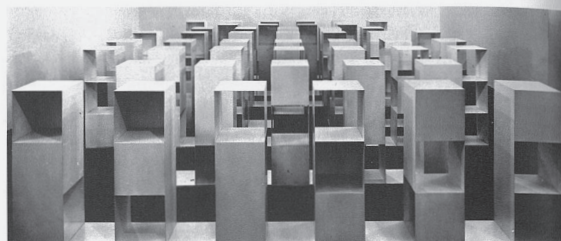
Adrian Piper

b. 1948, United States; lives and works in Berlin



Out of the Corner
1990

17.
Sol LeWitt, *Forty-Nine
Three-Part Variations
on Three Different
Kinds of Cubes*
(1967–1970).
Courtesy John Weber
Gallery.



18.
Out of the Corner
(1990). Courtesy John
Weber Gallery,
collection Whitney
Museum.



Adrian Piper, *Out of the Corner*, 1990, as it appeared alongside
Sol LeWitt's *Forty-Nine Three-Part Variations on Three
Different Kinds of Cubes* (1967–1970) in Piper's collected writings

Adrian Piper's work yokes sociopolitical content to Conceptual and Minimalist forms and ideas—hence her pairing, reproduced in this volume, of *Out of the Corner* with a formally similar work by Sol LeWitt, *49 Three-Part Variations on Three Different Kinds of Cubes* (1967–70). Piper's early work includes purely formal investigations like *Sixteen Permutations of a Planar Analysis of a Square*

(1968), but the major political upheavals of the late 1960s (including the Vietnam War and the subsequent killing of antiwar protesters at Kent State, the feminist movement, and the rise of Black Power) and the racial and sexual discrimination Piper witnessed and experienced prompted her to make politics the overt subject of her work.¹

For instance, Piper adopted tactics of seriality and repetition, common to Minimalism as well as media and advertising techniques. As historian and critic Maurice Berger argues, “By creating visual and sensual experiences that were more or less fresh and unexpected, Piper reasoned that she could create a temporal situation that might jolt the viewer into new levels of consciousness and self-awareness.”² Several of her works specifically sought to disrupt the myth that, because the art world is considered a progressive space, its actors are exempt from racism.

Piper, “The Artist Formerly Known as African-American,” is often assumed to be white.³ This fact was the subject of her video sculpture *Cornered* (1989), in which the artist appears on a monitor behind an upturned table. She begins her dialogue by stating, “I am black.”

1. Adrian Piper, *Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object / Entretien avec moi-meme: L'autobiographie évolutive d'un objet d'art* (Hamburg and Brussels: Hossmann / MTL Galleries, 1974), 6.

2. Maurice Berger, “Styles of Radical Will: Adrian Piper and the Indexical Present,” in *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective*, ed. Berger, exh. cat. (Baltimore, MD: Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1999), 25.

3. Her website reads, “Adrian Piper has decided to retire from being black. In the future, for professional utility, you may wish to refer to her as The Artist Formerly Known as African-American.” “News, September 2012,” on Adrian Piper's official website, http://www.adrianpiper.com/news_sep_2012.shtml.

Confronting the gap between the way others identified her (by appearance) and the way she identified (by genetics), she spends the next twenty minutes explaining why passing for white would be self-hating. While she takes herself as a point of departure, she ultimately concludes that “the problem is not just my personal one, about my racial identity. It’s also your problem if you have a tendency to behave in a derogatory or insensitive manner towards blacks when you see none present.” Piper also unpacks conventions of racial classification, including the “one-drop rule,” which claimed that if a person had one drop of African American blood, they were to be considered black.

The multimonitor work *Out of the Corner* was made the following year, and features a version of *Cornered* alongside sixteen additional monitors with a soundtrack of “We Are Family” by Sister Sledge. The additional monitors feature apparently white men and women who carry on her message, confronting viewers to reconsider their own racial identities. Sixty-four black-and-white photographs of black women that Piper rephotographed from *Ebony* are displayed on the surrounding walls. Piper concludes by asking viewers what they are going to do now that they know they are black, urging them to critically self-reflect.

Diana Thater
b. 1962, United States,
lives and works in Los Angeles



Snake River
1994

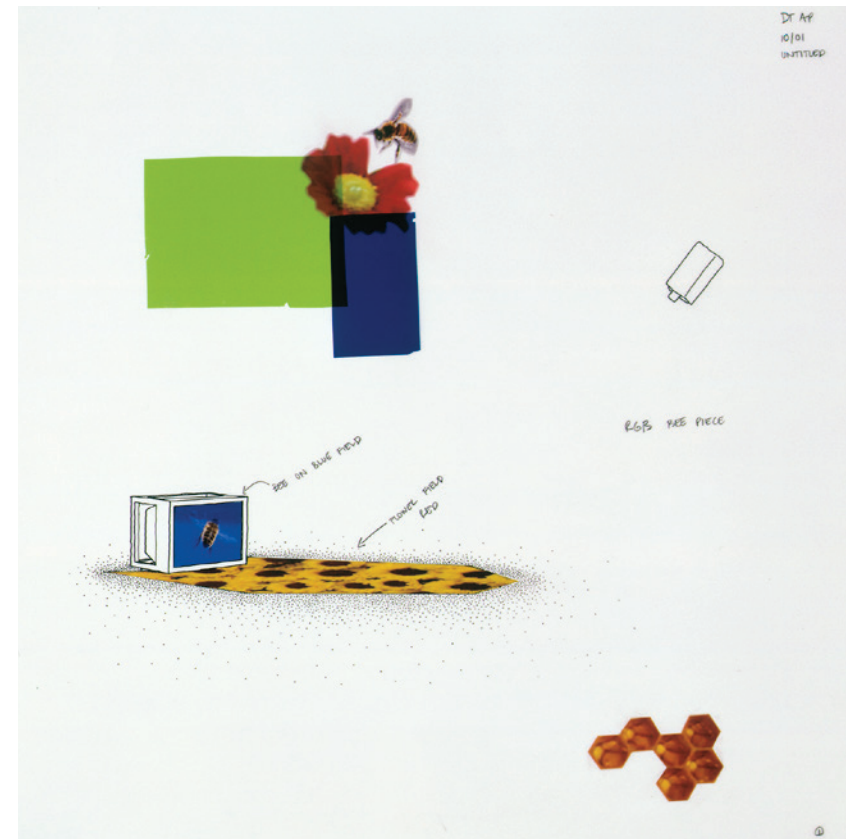
As video projection became more accessible and frequently used in the mid-1990s, the medium became increasingly subject to critique: namely, that it had become overly spectacular—or, worse, uncritical of technology, devoid of content, and merely entertaining.¹ During this time, Diana Thater set out to reclaim some of the aims and interests of early video art that she felt had been lost—in particular, resistance to cinematic spectacle and engagement with basic forms. “If we look at the history of video,” she writes, citing a list of artists that includes Nam June Paik and Mary Lucier, “early installation is not about theatricality at all. It’s about banality or ordinariness or about the medium and how video is made and how television is made.”² Her work, she concludes, “has always been about discovering the medium [of video] from the very beginning.”³

Thater frequently trains her camera on environmental subjects, often filming flora and fauna, but her investigations of such topics are paired with simultaneous explorations of the video medium’s structural and formal properties. *Snake River* utilizes three monitors, each displaying footage in one of the three primary colors—red, green, or blue—which together make a full-color image on a CRT monitor. This tactic makes visible the “additive” system of color mixing,

1. For instance, Alexandra Auder held yoga classes in the immersive installation of Pipilotti Rist’s *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* (2008) at MoMA as an intervention to counteract the “passive” viewing she saw the work as dangerously encouraging. See also Dominique Païni, “Should We Put an End to Projection?,” trans. Rosalind E. Krauss, *October*, no. 110 (2004): 23–48.

2. Kathryn Kanjo, ed., *Diana Thater: Selected Works 1992–1996*, exh. cat. (Basel: Schwabe / Kunsthalle Basel, 1996), n.p.

3. Kathryn Kanjo, n.p.



Diana Thater, *Bee Piece* (study), 2001

which is usually imperceptible, highlighting not only technological standards but also human visual perception, which is often described for the layperson as discerning color through red, green and blue receptor cones in the eye.

The three monitors feature footage of the American West, harking back to the cinematic tradition of westerns yet forgoing any narrative thread. Thater here particularly echoes the movies of John Ford, whose depictions of the West emphasized the land’s vastness to symbolize freedom, opportunity, and sublimity while alluding to the work of certain landscape photographers who preceded him.

Technological advancements in photography were concurrent with westward expansion and instrumental to its project, justifying the doctrine of Manifest Destiny by representing the terrain as an untouched land of opportunity. While *Snake River* resists the spectacle of video projection, it also resists ideologically charged representational tropes of the sublime West by way of humble monitors and technically deconstructed footage.

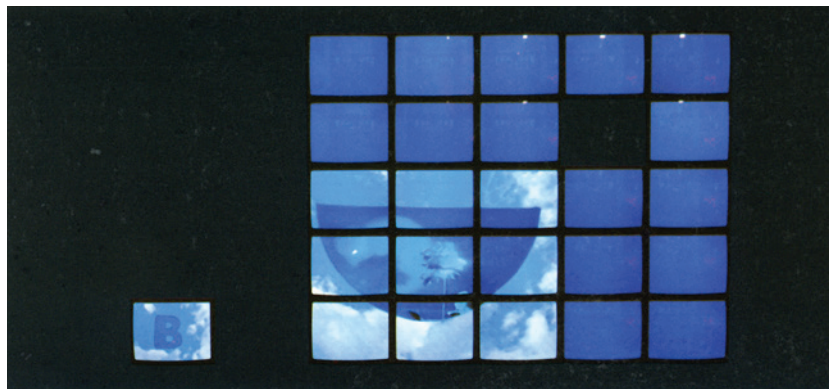
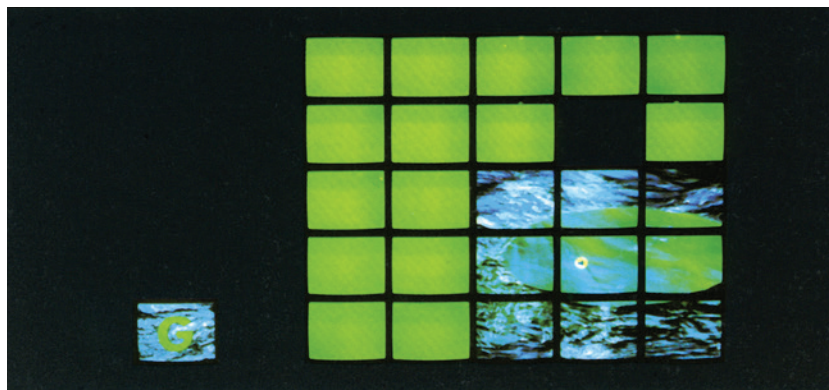
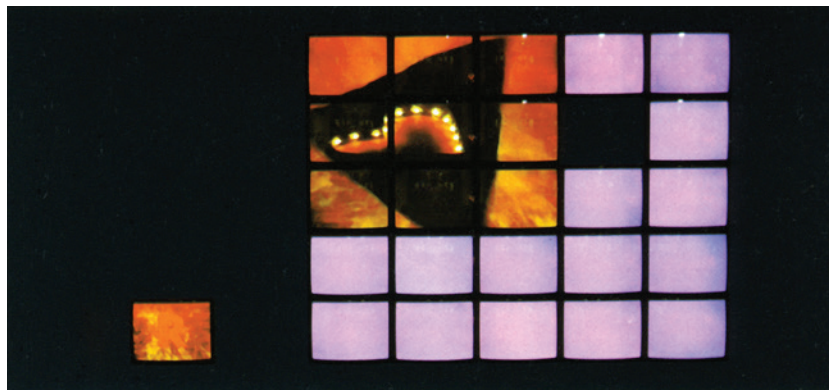
Maria Vedder

b. 1948, Germany, lives and works in Berlin



PAL oder Never the Same Color

1988



Maria Vedder, *Pal oder Never the Same Color*, 1988

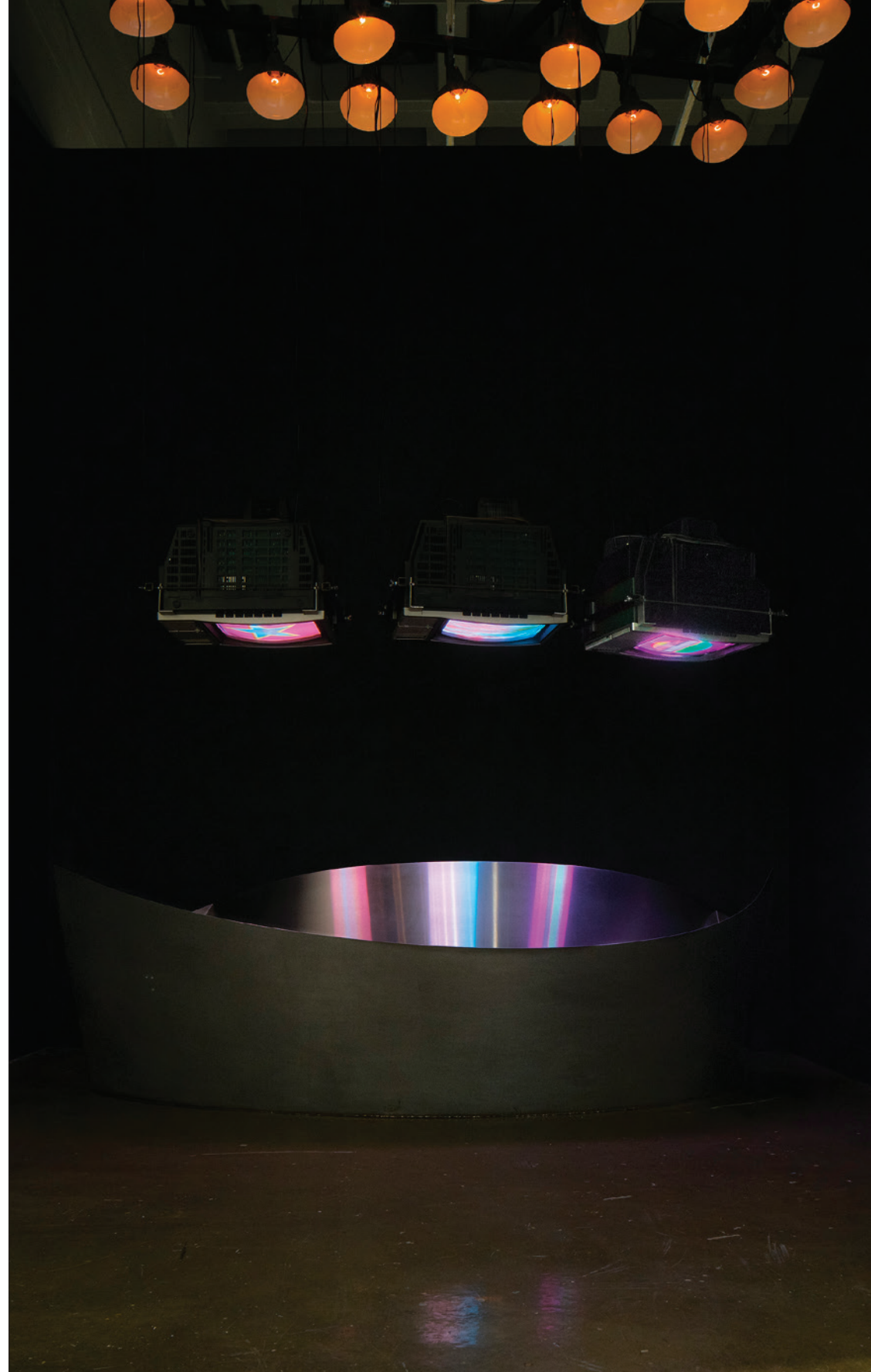
Maria Vedder remains active in video art not only as an artist, but also as a writer and curator. In 1983 she coedited (with Bettina Gruber) the anthology *Kunst und Video* (Art and Video). Around the 1980s, commercial galleries in the United States were struggling to monetize experimental media art at a time when contemporary art was becoming increasingly commodified; by contrast, many European artists were able to fund their work and publications from public grants, state television commissions, and other cultural institutions.

PAL oder Never the Same Color, for instance, was commissioned by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. It was first presented in 1988, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the introduction of the PAL (Phase Alternating Line) color-encoding system to the European Broadcasting Union. PAL is the system used to standardize color broadcasting in Europe (as well as in Australia and much of Asia, Africa, and South America), developed for analog television. NTSC, an acronym for the National Television System Committee but mockingly dubbed “Never the Same Color,” is the competing standard in North America. PAL was developed in Europe in an effort to remedy NTSC’s shortcomings, while NTSC, the inferior system, remains the norm in the United States.¹

PAL oder Never the Same Color consists of twenty-five monitors arranged in a grid, with one TV set removed from the matrix and set aside. The monitors construct a wall in a manner reminiscent of bricks or pixels composing an image. Looped on the monitors is historic television footage designed to test color, including a host who presents

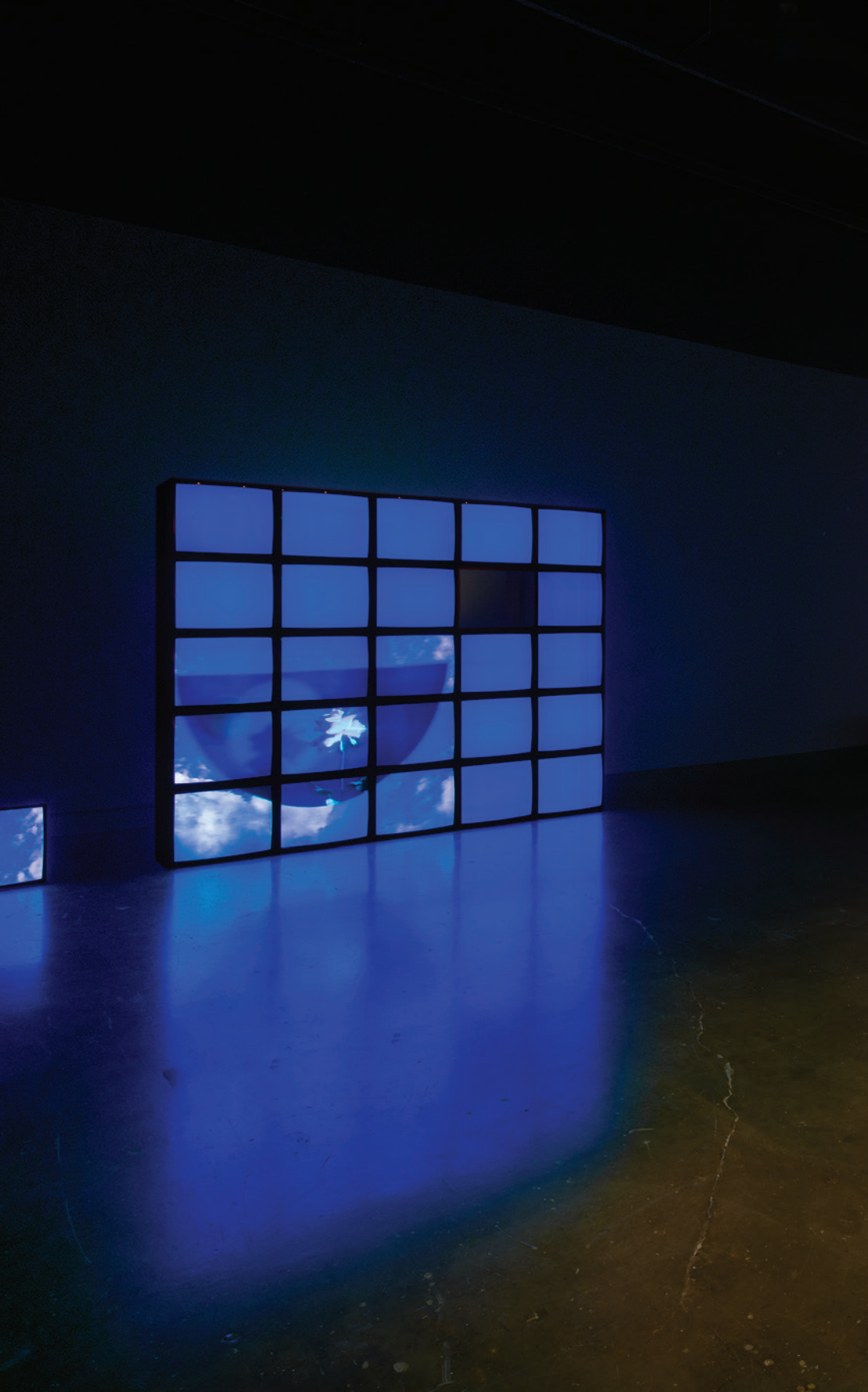
1. As a result, PAL-encoded DVDs are not readable on standard American DVD players.

herself in PAL and then NTSC to illustrate the difference. Also featured is a German logo that signaled a color broadcast (at a time when black-and-white was still standard) reading *IN FARBE* (in color). The video cuts to a more familiar color-bar test, and proceeds to individually test the primary additive colors (red, green, and blue). For instance, a *B* for blue appears alongside footage of a sky, a blue rose, and, finally, a standard blue screen. The work nods not only to different technological systems for calibrating color across cultures, but also to their differing symbolic referents. The blue flower, for instance, would have been recognized as an emblem of Romanticism in Germany.

















Time Turned into Space:
Some Aspects of Video Sculpture

Edith Decker-Phillips



This essay originally appeared in the 1989 exhibition catalog Video-Skulptur, retrospektiv und aktuell, 1963–1989 (Video Sculpture, Retrospective and Current, 1963–1989) which accompanied an exhibition by the same title. Curated by Wulf Herzogenrath, Video-Skulptur was a definitive survey that presented the breadth of video sculpture at that time. The show traveled from Cologne to Berlin and Zurich. This text is published in English here for the first time.

More than a quarter century since the beginnings of video art, it is clear not only that video occupies an important place within postwar art, but also that it is much closer to the other art forms than is commonly assumed. This is true in particular of video sculpture, which is experiencing a veritable boom compared to videotapes, whose combination of high production costs and low sales value threatens the economic survival of this art form. Nowadays the artistic medium is, in fact, taken for granted, and its formal vocabulary has expanded to the point that technological factors have faded into the background. Still, even though most video artists increasingly incorporate contemporary painting and sculpture into their works, it seems reasonable and legitimate to classify video installations based on the various techniques employed when initiating a retrospective stocktaking of this field of video art.

While closed-circuit installations, which show the object recorded by a live camera almost simultaneously with the monitor image, and which on account of this depiction of real time tend to be reminiscent of television in its function as a transmitter of simultaneous events, installations with multiple monitors showing one or more

videotapes are thematically more variable due to the technical circumstances. Multimonitor installation became possible only with the development of the portable video recorder in 1965. Artists had worked in various ways with television sets prior to this, but the possibilities of spatially arranging particular images expanded only when they could produce videotapes of their own.¹ The number of multimonitor installations created in the second half of the 1960s was still small. Paik, who conceived monitor walls as early as 1965 without knowing when his ideas could be brought to fruition, realized his first multimonitor installation, *TV Cross*, in 1966, using manipulated TV sets. Showing three videotapes on six monitors, Les Levine's *The Dealer* (1969) seems to be the first multimonitor installation in the proper sense. Other well-known multimonitor installations of these years were Levine's *Iris* (1968), Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969), and Wolf Vostell's *Heuschrecken* (Locusts) (1969–70). All three works are closed-circuit installations requiring the participation of the viewer, who appears on the monitors—thus becoming a part of the work and completing it.

In 1972, three-quarter-inch videotape became available, which to this day is the format most commonly used by video artists.² Initially adopted by just a few pioneers,

1. Dieter Daniels has kindly pointed out that George Brecht, for instance, drew a TV wall in the late 1950s, which, with plastic sheeting hanging in front of it, showed color images. But here, as in the early works of Paik and Vostell, it would be a mistake to speak of multimonitor installations, since they were created in a different context and were more the result of an opposition to television.

2. Editor's note: $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch tape, also known as U-matic, encased the magnetic tape inside a videocassette, unlike earlier open-reel formats. Playback equipment was made by different manufacturers, which aided to the format's wide adoption. The use of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch tape phased out in the 1990s.



Beryl Korot, *Dachau* 1974. Four-channel video and structural diagram, 24:00, ed. of 3. Dimensions variable

the technology was gradually taken up by a larger group of artists, and more complex installations and new bodies of works developed within this new art form. In 1974, the same year Paik exhibited *TV Garden*, his first large installation using videotape, Beryl Korot developed a very different kind of installation. While Paik used monitors as visible building blocks, Korot hid them behind a wall in the work *Dachau* 1974, leaving only the screens visible. The graphic forms of the shifting architecture were carefully coordinated and the four videotapes were composed with a precision that was extraordinary for that time. An early example of a combination of sculpture and video is Shigeko Kubota's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1976), a work from the *Duchampiana* series. Kubota reconceived Marcel Duchamp's 1913 painting by embedding monitors in an actual wooden staircase and having the monitors show a nude descending the steps. The same principle—the equivalence of form and content—underlies her installation *Three Mountains* (1976–79), but the relationship of different-size monitors to the sculptural mountain shapes seems more nuanced. The footage of landscapes from the American West shown on the monitors does include mountains, albeit without necessarily suggesting a particular outer sculptural form.

Another type of installation that developed as early as the 1970s is the stacked or side-by-side arrangement of monitors showing different videotapes. In 1975, Friederike Pezold conceived such a sculpture, *Madame Cucumatz*, featuring five stacked monitors.³ In many video sculptures

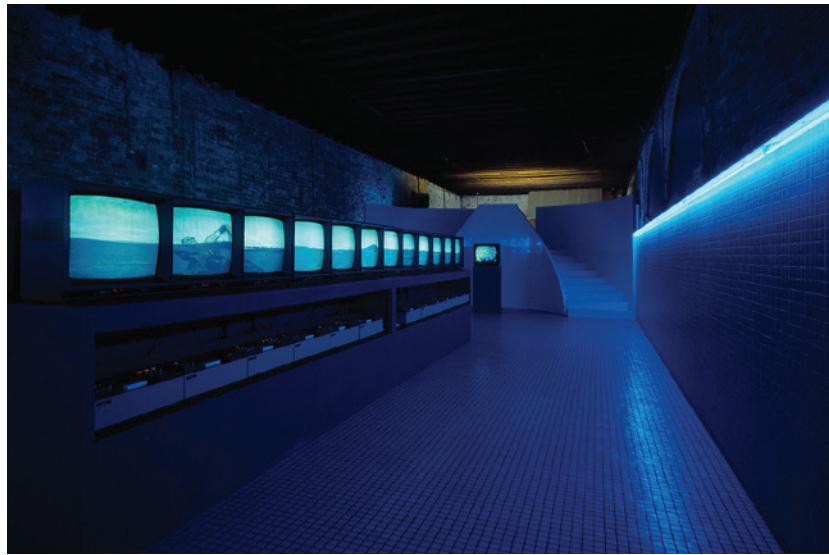
3. Editor's note: The work also uses videos from *The New Embodied Sign Language*. This series comprises twelve parts in total, which the artist assembled in various sculptural configurations.

of this type the individual monitor images appear illusionistic, as in Michel Jaffrennou's *Le plein de plumes* (1980). Four monitors seem to show a man who, with both hands, is dropping feathers until they fully cover him. Taken as a whole, the different videotapes suggest a single image. *// nuotatore* (The Swimmer) by Studio Azzurro (1984) works in a similar way. In this case, an overall picture extends horizontally: twelve monitors seem to be filled with water in which a swimmer paddles back and forth.

The 1980s saw the emergence of a range of new and quite distinct types of installations. Aside from video walls—most notably those of Nam June Paik—many artists now created installations consisting solely of monitors on pedestals, among them Alexander Hahn and Marcel Odenbach. Both focus on the nuanced interplay of spatialized images with sound, which in Odenbach's case is literary in character and in Hahn's sensorially rounds out the imagery he creates. Hahn's installation *Arthur* (1988), for example, consists of eight monitors, five of which have their own sound. While Hahn reveals a pictorial world he created, Al Robbins and Gary Hill convey the immediate sensory experience of reality through the technology they use. Robbins employs a handheld camera to film nature with as few cuts as possible in order to preserve the flow of experience without many interruptions. In his installation he tries to further implement this processual aspect by pointing a camera at a monitor screen, thereby transferring the image to another monitor or a video projector. The projection fills the space to the point that the electricity seems to become palpable to the viewer. Gary Hill's *Crux* (1983–87) conveys a similarly intense impression. Combined with the original sound, the images on five monitors arranged



Shigeo Kubota, *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1975–6.
Super 8 film transferred to video and color-synthesized video,
monitors, and plywood. 66 ¼ × 30 15/16 × 67 in.
(168.3 × 78.6 × 170.2 cm)



Studio Azzurro, *Il nuotatore*, 1984
Twelve-channel video, twenty-four monitors, one
electronic clock. Dimensions variable

to suggest a cross allow us to very directly participate in a hike. The cameras that are attached to the artist's body and point outward create an irritating effect, as we can relate only intellectually to this simultaneous and multidirectional perception.⁴

Most of the video artists of the 1980s work with sculptural elements or actually integrate video technology into their sculptures. Marie-Jo Lafontaine, for instance, incorporates monitors in an overall sculptural form—in the case of her 1988 work *Victoria*, that of a spiral. Viewers are confined within this spiral and confronted with the dance movements that surround them in waves. In addition to markedly compact sculptural types of installation, many artists, including Dalibor Martinis, Rita Meyers, and Antonio Muntadas, stage environments. Martinis and Meyers, for instance, create environments featuring natural elements. But while Martinis's environment alludes to an existing, real place, Meyers's is fictitious and serves to create a certain atmosphere that indirectly conveys nature. Muntadas's *Board Room* (1987) simulates a conference room with a table and chairs that, because of its black walls, red carpet, and portraits of orating leaders on, and in, the walls, seems exaggerated to the point of conveying a message that is as concise as it is universal. These theatrically staged environments turn the exhibition space into a stage, albeit one without actors. Viewers are invited to enter the stage and immerse themselves in the mise-en-scène. The artwork can be experienced "scenically." Parallels between video art and other art forms become apparent: theatricality is

4. Editor's note: More precisely, the cameras fastened at the artist's wrists and ankles pointed at his hands and feet, and another one on an armature attached to his torso was directed at his head.



Marie-Jo Lafontaine, *Victoria*, 1988
Nineteen monitors in wooden cases

not only a feature of the environmental video installation. As Rosalind Krauss notes, it is an umbrella term that may cover kinetic and light art, environmental and tableau sculpture, performance and Happenings.⁵ Though video does possess some special characteristics, for instance, with respect to its roots in television, it generally cannot be isolated from the rest of art. Krauss's statements actually apply to video art as well, even though she doesn't explicitly discuss this art form. Tellingly, the cover of her book *Passages in Modern Sculpture* features a video installation: Bruce Nauman's *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1969).

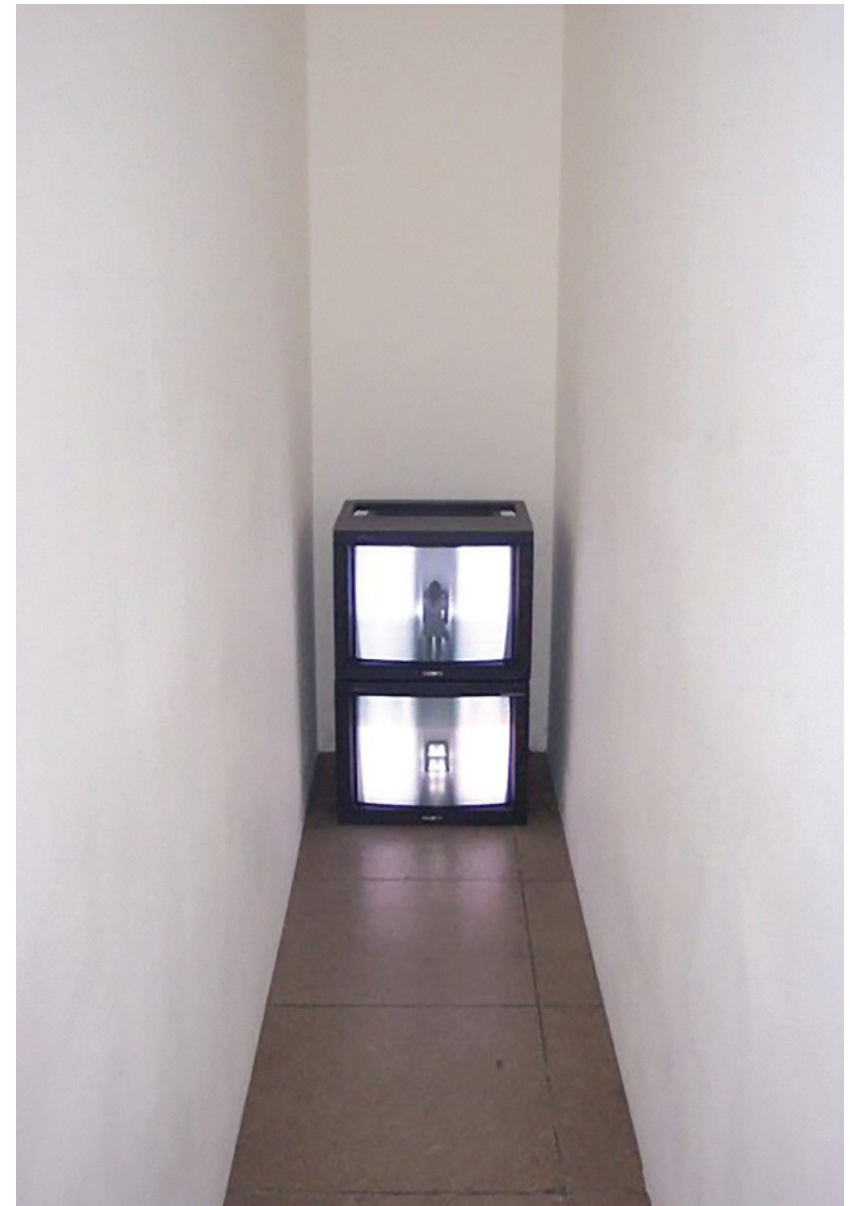
By the same token, the movement of the viewer and movement in images are to be understood as a new feature of the art of this century. Representing movement has always been an objective of art. In previous centuries, however, movement was usually realized virtually—just think of the *figura serpentinata* of Mannerism and the theme of movement in the Baroque period. Examples of actual motion, such as the man-shaped automatons of the eighteenth century, are regarded as a development building on the sophisticated Baroque clocks and usually associated with craftsmanship. In the twentieth century, motion, and thus time, took on a central role. While the prismatic fragmentation of form in Cubism can be seen as a reaction to late nineteenth-century motion photography,⁶ Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) confronts us with actual motion, which in 1920 became a programmatic requirement in the work of Naum Gabo—his *Kinetic Sculpture*

5. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 204.

6. Editor's note: Such as the serial photographs of animals in motion taken by Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge.

(*Standing Wave*) of that same year has three-dimensional volume only as a result of movement. Movement in images is also a concern of light art, which, known to us in various manifestations since the Baroque period, experienced a renaissance in the 1920s and has, in ever-changing forms, consistently played a role since.

Even without invoking Heinrich Wölfflin's 1888 essay "Renaissance and Baroque," a constant change of styles in art can be assumed, although relationships among styles have become so much more complex in the twentieth century. Just as we are aware that technological progress solves problems while at the same time creating problems whose magnitude we cannot yet gauge, it has become impossible to believe in a linear development of art—after all, what possible goal could this development have? Neither abstraction nor Concrete art offers possible solutions, and even the utopian ideas of the Bauhaus do not appear very attractive, because in the final analysis they imply the end of art. As the pace of life has sped up, tendencies in art have changed rapidly, and art in our century appears more complex and diverse than ever. At the same time, styles or artistic fields influence and enrich one another rather than being mutually exclusive. In this context, the technological aspect takes a backseat. In video sculpture, for instance, technology is nowadays more of an extension, a stylistic device among many others, rather than a central theme. The light sculptures of Roos Theuws, for example, have more to do with light art than with video. The same is true of the sculptures of Helmut Mark, whose monitor images modify the form of the particular sculpture, thereby formally supplementing the static with moving images. Marie-Jo Lafontaine's



Bruce Nauman, *Live/Taped Video Corridor*, 1969
Wallboard, video camera, two video monitors, video recording,
and video playback device. Dimensions variable,
approximately: 144 (or ceiling height) × 384 × 20 in.
(365.8 [or ceiling height] × 975.4 × 50.8 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York Panza Collection, Gift, 1992

large-scale sculptures are better understood when they are compared to the installations of Gerhard Merz or the paintings of Anselm Kiefer.

Although Lafontaine makes optimal use of video technology in her art, an analysis of her works should not focus on their technological aspect but, rather, on the idea realized through it—an approach that is only natural for other artistic fields. Video artists have always appropriated the latest technology, which originally was developed for very different purposes. It is up to us to accept this and to learn to understand it as an additional means of expression.

But regardless of whether we are dealing with theatrical environments or with sculptures that are independent of space, as long as video technology is incorporated, we are confronted with the element of time turned into space.

List of Works

Dara Birnbaum

Attack Piece, 1975

Two-channel video (transferred from original Super 8 film footage and 35-mm slides) with two-channel mono-mix sound, black-and-white, 7:40 min.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/London

Ernst Caramelle

Video Ping-Pong, 1974

Two-channel video installation, two monitors, two media players, metal shelves, Ping-Pong table, paddles, and balls, sound, 30:00 min.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Generali Foundation, Vienna

Takahiko Iimura

TV for TV, 1983

Two identical face-to-face monitors, ed. of 3 + 1 a.p.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn

Shigeko Kubota

River, 1979–81

Three-channel video installation with steel trough, mirrors, motor, and water, 32:17 min.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, New York

Mary Lucier

Equinox, 1979/2016

Seven-channel video installation with sound, 33:00 min.

17 ft, 8 × 68 × 94 ¼ in. (539 × 173 × 239 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.,
New York

Muntadas

Credits, 1984

Single-channel video, monitor, wall armature, sound
27:02 min.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

Tony Oursler

Psychomimetiscape II, 1987

Mixed media, acrylic paint, wood, glass, resin,
two-channel video with sound

34 × 40 × 70 in. (86 × 102 × 178 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York
and Hong Kong

Nam June Paik

Charlotte Moorman II, 1995

Nine antique TV cabinets, two cellos, one 13-in.
color TV, two 5-in. color TVs, eight 9-in. color TVs,
and two-channel video

92 × 68 × 24 in. (234 × 173 × 61 cm)

Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; Hays
Acquisition Fund

Friederike Pezold

Die neue leibhaftige Zeichensprache (The New
Embodied Sign Language), 1973–76

Four digitized videos with sound, 10:00 min. each

Dimensions variable

Hamburger Kunsthalle

Adrian Piper

Out of the Corner, 1990

Seventeen-channel video installation with sound, 26:00
min., with seventeen monitors, sixteen pedestals, table,
twenty-three chairs, and sixty-four gelatin silver prints

Dimensions variable

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of the
Peter Norton Family Foundation

Diana Thater

Snake River, 1994

Three video monitors, three media players, digital files,
30:00 min. each

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York/London

Maria Vedder

PAL oder Never the Same Color, 1988

Video installation with twenty-five monitors, sound,
5:32 min.

Dimensions variable

Camera: Stephan Simon; edit: Martina Kaimeier;
music: Uwe Wiesemann, Gerhard Zillingen; produced
by Museum Ludwig Köln, Germany
Courtesy the artist

Contributors

Edith Decker-Phillips

studied painting, art history, archaeology, ethnology, and German language and literature in Bremen and Hamburg. In 1985, she received her Ph.D. in art history with a dissertation on Nam June Paik. Among her publications are the books *Nam June Paik: Paik Video* (1988) and *Niederschriften eines Kulturnomaden: Selected Writings* (Notes of a Cultural Nomad: Selected Writings. 1992). She has also contributed to exhibition catalogues such as *Vom Verschwinden der Ferne: Telekommunikation und Kunst* (On the Disappearance of Distance: Telecommunications and Art. 1990).

Henriette Huldish

is director of exhibitions and curator at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, MA, and recently organized *An Inventory of Shimmers: Objects of Intimacy in Contemporary Art* (2017), including the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Jill Magid, Park McArthur, Anicka Yi, and others; *Edgar Arceneaux: Written in Smoke and Fire* (2016); and *Tala Madani: First Light* (2016). Previously, she worked at Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin, where she curated exhibitions on the work of Harun Farocki, Anthony McCall, and others. From 2010 to 2014, Huldish also served as visiting curator at Cornerhouse, Manchester, where she presented projects with Stanya Kahn and Rosa Barba, and from 2004 to 2008, she was assistant curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Among her publications are *An Inventory of Shimmers* (2017), *Ellen Harvey: The Museum*

of Failure (2015), the *2008 Biennial Exhibition* catalogue, and numerous contributions to exhibition catalogues and magazines such as *Artforum*.

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is curatorial research assistant at the MIT List Visual Arts Center and a graduate student in MIT's History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art program. In 2017, she received the Vera List Writing Prize for Visual Arts. She is a regular contributor to *Mousse*, and her writing has appeared in additional venues such as *Leonardo*, *Frieze*, *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture*, and others. Currently, she is at work on an article titled "'Video is Vengeance of Vagina': Reassessing Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting*," forthcoming in the volume *Expansive Reflections: Returning to the Feminisms from the 1970s*.

Lenders to the Exhibition

Dara Birnbaum
 David Zwirner, New York/London
 Diana Thater
 Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York
 Generali Foundation, Vienna
 Hamburger Kunsthalle
 Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong
 Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., New York
 Maria Vedder
 Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/London
 Mary Lucier
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