

UPSTATE VIDEO HISTORY RECLAMATION PROJECT

The *Upstate Video History Reclamation Project* documents the early historical development of video art and community television in upstate New York during the period 1968-1980. By inviting the direct participation of representatives of over 20 organizations and hundreds of individuals who were active in the region, the project will create a dynamic regional history giving voice to the many independent media makers and organizations, small and large, that have worked to advance the media field. The goals of the project will be realized in a year-long set of activities combining research, the collection of oral histories, the creation of educational resource materials, a World Wide Web site, and a Video History Conference.

Goals

The project goals are to identify, organize, and make accessible information which describes and details the locations of primary resource materials; to facilitate partnerships for preservation of the works; to encourage the exhibition and study of these artworks and resources among curators, educators from kindergarten through University level, and academic and independent scholars; and to increase public awareness of and appreciation for media history throughout the State and nationally.

Significance

New York State has played a unique role in the historical development of the field, in large part because of the early and consistent support of the New York State Council on the Arts and the roles that faculty of the State University system played in the formation of organization. Some of the earliest media activity in the nation occurred in New York State. Collaborations among artist-run organizations around the region and activity by groups of individual artists, unaffiliated with organizations, were other hallmarks of the early history.

The Center's collection includes over 1,000 videotapes created since 1969, art-making tools and related technical and descriptive documentation, artists' writings and audiotaped interviews and print materials that document electronic imaging and video as a visual arts practice. We are a participant organization in the NAMID project of the American Film Institute and have received awards from Media Alliance and the New York State Council on the Arts for preservation. While our collection illustrates the intersection of science and technology with the media arts and emphasizes the area of image processing, all of the upstate collaborating organizations also have significant collections reflecting their own unique contributions to the field. Together these are the primary source materials for an understanding of the history of media and the impact of the region nationally.

The project originated as a graduate-level workshop which has been offered for the last four years at Visual Studies Workshop by Sherry Miller Hocking. We wanted to make visible the contributions of the Upstate area by organizing information which locates and documents media history resources - tapes, artists' instruments, writings, publicity materials, organizational records and other materials. Most are not adequately or accurately described or represented in the various histories of video, in the larger video collections or in distributor's offerings.

The project will not only provide an historical context for the study of early media projects, but also will increase public awareness of how and where to find the artworks themselves, and appropriate contexts in which to present and understand the work. The working partnerships developed through the project will strengthen exhibition and study programs, as well as preservation efforts which are immediately needed to rescue deteriorating tape-based works. This early video history forms a natural confluence with the emergence of performance and installation-based work. The telling of this history will encourage these other histories to emerge.

Project Stages and Schedule

Deirdre Boyle and Chris Hill, will evaluate the existing primary research materials held at specific sites. The methodology will identify existing resources already available, document these resources, and organize these databases of existing resources into readily accessible information available through the web site. Some of the 20 groups we have identified are well documented while others are not. The research will also identify those which are poorly represented in the existing literature, and target these for additional interviews, web site participation and oral history taping. After the assessment of the holdings is completed, a total of ten video oral histories will be created with 15-25 individuals to ensure basic information about the founding and activities of 20 key groups.

Most of the 20 groups and individuals now identified are in varying stages of completion of collection cataloguing through the NAMID project or the Media Alliance Upstate Catalog Initiative. Many also have internal computer-based listings of books, periodicals and catalog holdings, and documents which help define the activities during the target period. Video Data Bank is publishing *Resources and Texts*, a collection of interviews, articles and essays, which will accompany *Surveying the First Decade*, a collection of historic videotapes. New materials will be cross-referenced. All of these resource materials would be listed in an interrelational database, accessible on the computer.

Each site summary includes catalogs of audio, video and transcribed interviews, chronologies, documentation materials from conferences, exhibitions and annual reports. This survey will help curators and educators to locate resources.

The project includes a component which focuses on the development of video art history and media arts education source materials for 8-12 grade classrooms. The National Goals 2000 Education Reform Agenda outlines eloquently the role that the arts must play in reaching the country's goals for school reform. Some of the ways that educators can facilitate the inclusion of technology-based arts activities is to understand: (1) what resources are available in their region; (2) how these resources can be integrated into teaching activities; and (3) the cultural implications of knowing that video history is diverse, innovative and over 25 years old.

High school art/media, technology and social studies teachers have asked for years for assistance in incorporating technology-based resources of local museums and cultural institutions into their classroom experiences. The NYS Arts Education Advocacy Coalition stated that there is a critical need for curriculum based arts education programming guides. To address these field needs, Amy Hufnagel of the NYS Alliance for Arts Education will work in collaboration with Sue Crowles of the NYS Media Teachers Association and the historians who collect the history source materials to develop the *Upstate Video History Teacher's Resource Guide*. This guide will (1) provide regionally specific resource materials for teachers so that the media arts can be accessed by teachers for classroom use or on field trips; (2) foster knowledge of a regionally specific video history that provides professional development materials for teachers to instill in educators and students a broader definition of video art and technology-based expression; (3) encourage a discussion of technology and video-based expression that extends beyond the accessible models of television to include the work of some of the most formative video-based artists in the world between 1970 and 1985.

The NYS Alliance for Arts Education will also facilitate the distribution of the *Upstate Video History Teacher's Resource Guide* through our current partner Elaine Frankonis, Director of the Cultural Resources for Excellence in Education Project, at the Department of Cultural Education in Albany. The Alliance will also coordinate resources with the staff coordinator of the Learning Resource Guides for the Seven Standards Areas in Curriculum and Instruction Division of the State Education Department to include partial listings of these resources in an already published statewide resource guide for social studies, art and technology teachers. These partnerships, facilitated by NYSAAE, will enable the development and distribution of the *Resource Guide* to educational venues statewide. This project enables the important distribution of media resources, encourages coalition building, and builds a critical regional history about this medium's emergence. Without resources of this kind a generation of students have limited access to media history.

A World Wide Web site will serve as both a collection point for information, and as a resource for those seeking information on early video history and video preservation. In a carefully planned progression, a passive site with links to distributors, archives and preservation activities will develop into an interactive site where visitors can contribute their own stories of early video history through discussion areas and email. At quarterly intervals, a digest of each discussion area will be written, the original discussion archived both online and in hard copy, and both will be accessible at two public library sites. Alfred University is the project partner for this stage, assuming responsibility for construction and maintenance of the site.

During Spring 1998, a ground-breaking Video History Conference co-sponsored by Syracuse University will bring together those who made the history with those who use it: educators, programmers and scholars from both regional and nationally-based cultural and educational institutions. Through the conference's public events, these current practitioners will view early works, and will engage in a range of panels that further illuminate the work. Five of the oral histories will be conducted during the conference, saving considerable travel expenses. The conference will also launch the interactive phase of the web site. We will encourage participation by professional education groups, and arts and cultural alliances.

By the Fall 1998, the oral histories, conference materials, and online materials will be deposited at two primary repository sites, one downstate and one Upstate.

Focus Areas and Audiences

Conference organizers will encourage and help to facilitate a range of activities in the arts and education fields prior to and in association with the conference to encourage broad participation and ensure follow-up activities on a regional level. For example, we will work with the Central New York Programmers Group to encourage the circulation of existing tape packages focusing on media history, among them Video Data Bank's *Surveying the First Decade: A History of Video Art and Alternative Media*, and *Set in Motion: A History of NYSICA-funded Film and Video* organized by the Council. We are working to encourage exhibition of historically significant work at regional sites. We will work with several cultural venues which may host exhibitions of important early video installation works and artists. Similar discussions will be held with professional organizations such as the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York State Media Art Teachers Association, and the Media Posse; they may

be invited to convene membership meetings, design and co-sponsor panel presentations and host activities in conjunction with or as follow-up to the conference.

Results

This project will help to create alliances between collecting institutions and educational and curatorial programs, working together for preservation and for media education, to highlight the need for action to save the artifacts of the history. The project will establish bridges for intellectual access to information, making it easier to determine the location and availability of works. The project will help to foster new relationships among makers and audiences, stimulating increased interest in the work and the development of a more complete context from which it may be better appreciated.

Policy-makers, arts programmers and educators are largely unaware of these resources. There are many possibilities for research, education and public programming of video and related materials in areas including socio-political history, cultural studies, women's studies, media history and communications, art theory and criticism. The project will provide a historical context for the study of early media projects, and increase public awareness of how and where to find the artworks themselves. This may lead to partnerships for preservation and for media education, highlighting the need for action to save the artifacts of the history, creating new relationships among makers and audiences, and establishing bridges for intellectual access to information concerning the location and availability of works and contexts in which they can be better understood and appreciated.

Preservation efforts have existed largely among the groups holding collections, rather than as partnerships between those holding the materials and those able to use them. While it is important to focus on the mechanics of tape preservation, time also needs to be spent illuminating the context in which the tapes were made. Making video history accessible will increase public awareness of how and where to find the tapes and also provide a context for the study of early media activity. This may lead to partnerships for preservation and education between those who can use the tapes and those who hold early works.

Participation and Support

The project is a true collaboration among many groups and individuals in the Upstate region. The Center has a long working relationship with many of these groups and individuals; we share a commitment to preservation and to the importance of video history. Our shared concerns and activities have culminated in the partnerships which are critical to the structure of this project. We view this project as an opportunity to centralize information concerning each organization's separate efforts and a way to share information internally within our field, and also with the interested public. Organizations involved in the planning and playing key support roles in each of the stages include Alfred University, the Everson Museum of Art, the New York State Alliance for Arts Education and the Media Studies Department of Syracuse University, as well as the Center. Organizations which will play central roles in the research evaluation stage of the project include Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Media Study Program at the University of Buffalo, Visual Studies Workshop and Media Alliance. Individuals include researcher/historian Deirdre Boyle and Chris Hill. The Project Director is independent preservation consultant Mona Jimenez.

We anticipate the active participation of nationally recognized artists, educators and curators such as Skip Blumberg, Gary Hill, David Ross, Woody and Steina Vasulka and Bill Viola, all of whom have played important roles in this history. Over 20 organizations are identified as research sites; several hundred individuals have also been identified.

The project complements ongoing video preservation efforts, including those supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, Media Alliance, the American Film Institute's NAMID project and the Upstate Cataloging Initiative; the Center as well as many of the participants in this project have been active in all of these areas as have many of the partner organizations.

This project has received support from the Media Action Grant program of Media Alliance, the Challenge Grant Program at the New York State Council on the Arts and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.