

A video "installation" does more than present videotape; it treats the monitor as an object to be considered as part of an information package. An installation, in effect, becomes a sculptural environment.

In the mid-1960s, Nam June Paik embedded TV sets in furniture. Recently, Paik has set up a video landscape, a walk-through array of monitors showing gardens and rivers. Dennis Oppenheim has put a monitor at the end of a trough of turpentine; the viewer gets the smell of art school, while Oppenheim, on tape, recalls the attendant horrors. Doug Davis has turned a monitor to the wall, denying image-content, letting the blueish video glow paint the room. Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Les Levine, and others have used closed-circuit (often with time-lag tape) to let the spectator produce video content in the process of walking through the installation.

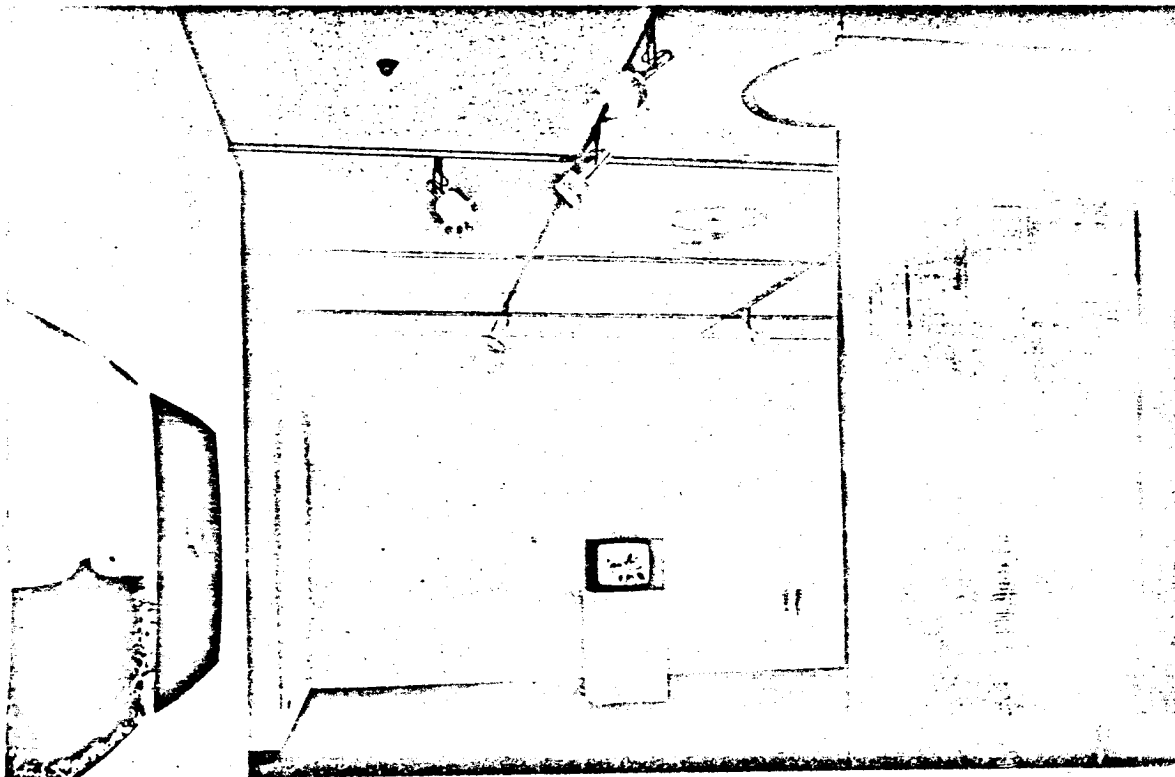
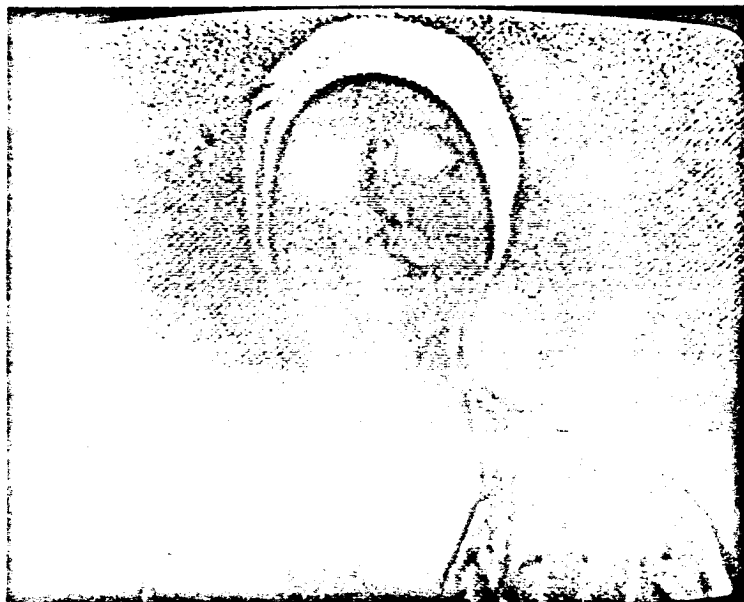
These installations are related to the happening-derived environments of the early 1960s, to certain examples of mixed media and expanded cinema, and to certain earthwork presentations in museums. But the situation is probably closest to that of electronic music where some composers went environmental to escape the tedium of taped, that is, non-live music and to exploit further ranges of sonic possibility. Max Neuhaus' *Water Music*, for example, was accessible only to listeners who would get into a swimming pool.

Most of the first wave of video artists used tape merely as cheap and convenient film. They seemed embarrassed (or stymied) by video's childish simplicity and by its seemingly retrograde aesthetic of gaudy realism. They also seemed to feel an irresistible urge to "get on TV" themselves. The typical "performance" tape of the early 1970s showed the artist engaged in some mindless, repetitive, painful chore, as if the indulgence in self-expression required an act of torture to redeem it. The tape, moreover, was unedited, in the

VIDEO INSTALLATION: PAUL KOS AND THE SCULPTURED MONITOR

HOWARD JUNKER

In seeking and developing the intrinsic qualities of video, Paul Kos realizes the sculptural potential of video, in which the monitor has not merely a two-dimensional face, but becomes a creator of sculptural space as well.



manner of early show-what-you-shoot Warhol, although the rationale was merely technical: the artist simply lacked an extra deck on which to edit. Then too the tape ran on forever, as if the artist made no distinction between dramatic time—to say nothing of real time—and the timelessness of painting and sculpture. Worst of all, the tape was shown over any old set, in any old setting, as if there were no difference between looking at TV (or painting or film) and watching tape. But video seen in a gallery or museum does have its own set of expectations and possibilities, most notably, the fact that the monitor is an object among others; it occupies space; it is available to the viewer only from a specific, however barren, perspective.

Paul Kos, 33, has tried to deal with the context in which his tapes are seen, first, by providing documents to supplement the information conveyed by the monitor and, finally, by designing the viewing space itself. For Kos, the monitor has become more than a projection device; it has become the core of an environmental piece of sculpture, its explanation, focus, and payoff.

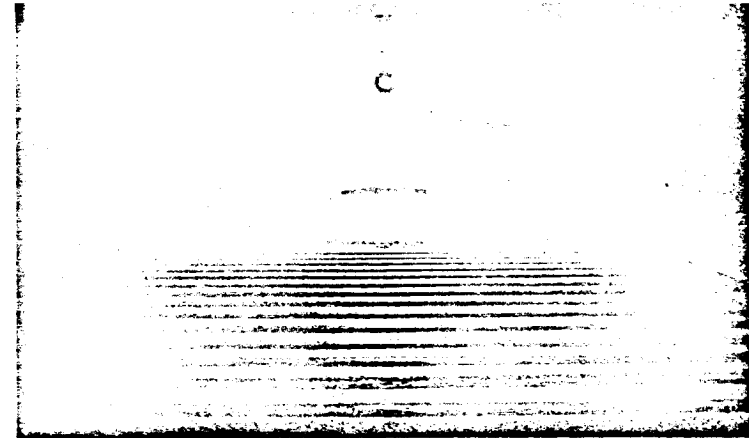
His first installations were inadvertent; he used closed-circuit to let the viewer see perform-

... from a different angle. In a .../0 event, Kos spent an afternoon on the lawn of a country house firing shotgun shells at a wooden target (destroying one kind of mass by transferring another). Noise-sensitive—or weary—viewers could observe via a monitor in the living room.

In 1971, Kos drilled a hole in a gallery floor to let a pile of sand seep through to form a cone on the basement floor (another mass transfer). Again viewers could watch the action at one remove over closed-circuit.

In 1973, Kos moved from using video to clarify a live performance towards creating a set decorated by objects related to a taped event. *Olga/Gold* was a tape in which the camera scans the hills of Wyoming, "searching" for Olga, a miner's wife who disappeared on her honeymoon in 1936, "without a trace." On the soundtrack, Kos calls out "Olga ... Olga ... Olga ..." and, alternately, "Gold ... gold ... gold ..." (a scrambling of the letters of "Olga"; another kind of futile search). Kos also made "prospecting" sculptures, sluices and pans "spotted" with gold, which he showed in the same room as the tape, although not as part of a unified piece.

The first integration of a tape with supporting objects came in 1974 with *Cymbals/Symbols: Pilot Butte* presented at the DeYoung Museum, San Francisco. The monitor sits on a white stand in the corner of a room facing the entrance. Approach to it is blocked by twin steel sheets, 4 by 10 feet, hanging from the ceiling. Two photos, to the right of the entrance, are flanked by another diptych, a statement by the artist and one by the curator. (Kos, raised a Catholic, is almost Manichaeian in his preoc-



cupation with dualisms.)

The tape itself is in two segments. The first is another obsessive search: Kos wandering in the desert near Pilot Butte, outside his hometown, Rock Springs, Wyoming. As he walked, carrying the camera aimed at the ground—the blurry image is the equivalent of action painting in action—he chanted: "There are tinny sounds in the desert; there aren't any sounds in the desert." When he finished the couplet, he froze (as in the children's game, "Red Light"): the new image is stable, in good focus; the ground is parched, rubble-strewn, the equivalent of the surface of a Jackson Pollock, who, coincidentally, was born in Cody, Wyoming.

As Kos moved on, alternating the couplet-with-movement and silence-with-still-life, he discovered new terrain: scrub. And he discovered tinny sounds (off-camera, Marlene Kos, his wife and co-worker, banged and scraped a coat hanger against the top of a trash can). Thus, the first line of the couplet ("There are tinny sounds in the desert") is made literally true; and the second line ("There aren't any sounds in the desert") literally untrue. Finally, Kos came upon an ant colony: life, survivors in the desert, workers, travellers with a purpose.

The importance of sound in this segment, that is, the importance of the controlling couplet and the silence and/or tinny, tiny sounds, is emphasized in the way the audio is broadcast: through the giant steel sheets, which are driven as (whispering) loudspeakers by tiny, invisible

transducers. At the simplest level, this is a bit of magic, nothing more, tricky technology. But by extending the audio out from the monitor, by translating it as an independent object in the space of the viewer, Kos manages to defeat the recessiveness of conventional video, its tendency to retreat from the viewer, back toward a remote, dimly perceived, gray distance. He makes the video belong to the room in the way Rauschenberg's combines broke through the picture plane into the viewing space.

The steel sheets are of course a typical Minimalist configuration, the obverse of Serra's steel slabs: these sheets seem to float. Moreover, they are only a half inch apart, nearly two-dimensional. They carry further the "flattening" of reality by the photos and by the (black-and-white) video. The sheets seem more graphic than sculptural. Indeed, each sheet is inscribed with a set of concentric circles centering on a small hole drilled three feet from the bottom. The circles are literally the shape of cymbals, and the sheets are literally cymbals—they resonate. Kos claims the circles are topographic representations of the butte, which, in turn, is shaped like a cymbal. Wyoming, Kos adds, is itself shaped like a butte, rising from the eastern plains to a high plateau.

The sheets are lit by theatrical mini-spots that cause an "X" of light to center on the holes and cast shadows of the sheets onto the end walls. These shadows seem like eclipsing objects, since light spills over their edges,

not unlike Robert Irwin's illuminated paintings. Most important, the walls and floor of the viewing space are thus also activated.

The second video segment, *Pilot Light/Pilot Butte*, is essentially visual in orientation. It is documented, for example, by the two photos on the wall, a view of the butte at midday, another view at sunset (the shots that open and close the segment). The photos are therefore time-marks, frozen moments, before-and-after, in contrast to the in-between, on-going, process time of the video.

After the first shot of the butte, the segment continues with Kos, shown in extreme close-up (so his face is not seen), building a fire on top of a tree stump (a nicely ironic fireplace). He arranges split logs in a log cabin array. Then he twirls a piece of ice in a big, upside-down (cymbal-shaped) pot top, trying to make a magnifying lens. The effort is frustrating and almost silly, although the idea of an ice lens is mentioned in a survival book Kos found on his teen-age brother's bookshelf.

After a long time, the lens is held up to focus the sun, and, at last, to light the fire. The lens is then put on the raging fire, and, finally, as the logs begin to tumble, the as-yet-unmelted lens falls into the ashes. The last image is the butte, in silhouette, as if eclipsing the sun, trying to put out that light.

A pilot light, normally, serves as an easy way to ignite a gas fire; the tape shows the great effort needed to start a fire by ice. A pilot light is also a beacon, a guide to the pilot, as the butte was, in fact, a landmark for travellers to Rock Springs. But this particular pilot light cuts more in the direction of a distress signal, an identifying flash to request and assist the arrival of a rescue party. In this context, each hole in the steel sheets resembles the hole in a rescue mirror: one aims the sun's reflections by spotting the oncoming plane through the hole.

Thus, the search of the first

At left; above:

Paul Kos, Tokyo Rose, 1975-76.

At left:

Paul Kos, *Cymbals/Symbols: Pilot Butte*, 1974. Courtesy deYoung Museum.

At right; above:

Paul Kos, *reVOLUTION: Notes for the Invasion—mar mar march*, 1975.

egment touches bottom and reaches a climax in the second. In calling for help, in discovering a means to help himself, a competence possessed, a far-fetched idea to work out, the artist ensures his survival. In the first segment, he was lost in the void, in the deserts of art history, alternately tramping to nowhere, compulsively mumbling, then freezing, lapsing into a catatonic state, staring at the ground. Then he observed that work is a survival technique, a purpose that gives direction to the wanderer. He then came unto an altar—the tree-stump, the butte itself, a landmark from childhood. (In the Catholic Mass: "I have come to the altar of God, to God the joy of my youth.")

He performed a boyish Boy Scout ritual, fire-building. He invoked the sun (elevating an icelens host). He expiated his sin: "I felt," Kos says in his statement, "like a 'cold' arsonist doing a perfect crime—the instrument used to start the fire would melt away and eventually extinguish the fire." He performed a Promethean act, but made up for it by making an absurd, sacrificial offering.

As an installation, this piece remains barely more than an elaborated documentation: the viewer must untangle the slight knot posed by the two photos, decipher the markings on the sheets, and interpret the involved story-line of the tape itself. But that's all: participation means viewing and analyzing, little more.

In *rEVOLUTION: Notes for the Invasion—mar mar march* (1975), the viewer is brought into the action. This installation is important in the way it de-emphasizes the video. The tape is still at the center of the piece, but only as an explanation, a justification, not as a commanding presence for which the installation is decoration. Kos used a Panasonic 1½-inch mini-monitor precisely to reduce the impact of the video. It is almost invisible upon entering the room, which is suffused with warm red light and, at first glance, looks like

the travellers' chapel at some modernist airport. At the end of the room, on an altar-like pedestal, there is a small, tabernacle-like red box (an old chemistry set); in it, a typewriter, a stack of typed sheets (the misal), and the tiny monitor. The approach is marked off by redwood 2x4s (pews), spaced a foot apart.

Sound is again extremely important. (Kos may be unique in exploiting the audio aspects of video.) The viewer must take five or six steps into the room before being able to hear a muffled drum roll (ta-ta-tatum, ta-ta-tatum, ta-ta-tum-tum-tum). It is almost impossible not to march in step (the spacing of the 2x4s encourages short, clipped steps). The monitor finally explains (in a split-screen image, another dualism): on the bottom half, a typewriter drums out "mar mar march," that is, when struck, three letters and a space make a ta-ta-tatum sound. (All the letters of the typewriter in the red box are blacked out, except for "m,a,r,c,h.") On the top half of the screen, Marlene Kos (mar mar . . .), in a black, priestly coat, marches back and forth.

Again the piece is very literary, filled with puns. Again the detail is small, the action muted, the soundtrack incantatory, the overtones religious. Yet the piece is political; it tells the viewer what to do: march. The viewer recognizes this command, however, only after he has tried to negotiate the planks on his own and only after his rhythm has been regulated by the martial music. Only then can he decipher the command. Or is the command really a caption, a subtitle for the little movie of Marlene marching? Is Mar a truncated god of war? Is the red light and the red box the liturgical color of war and revolution: Is the "rEVOLUTION" less a forced march than an endless turning about, a mark time, mark . . . ?

Compared to the wandering and rescue rituals of *Cymbals/Symbols*, *rEVOLUTION* is a playful, yet compulsive, no-exit

journey. The artist is, nonetheless, in control, vanishing to perform his typewriter march, another absurd technical feat, like lighting a fire with an icelens. The artist is now sure enough of his craft to employ an actress and to try to shape the environment of his audience. He lures the viewer in, withholding information until the viewer is halfway through the "invasion." The artist makes things difficult, exerts a more thorough control, with the planks and the music. Finally, he provides a small payoff and reveals that a trick has been played, a ritual performed. The viewer has marched to a different drummer.

Tokyo Rose (1976, taped but not installed at this writing) will be a trap, easy to enter, hard to escape. It will be an environment that mirrors for the viewer the content of the tape: Marlene Kos (who is credited with script and performance), in Oriental make-up as Tokyo Rose, is shown behind the meshes of a flytrap (similar to the trap the viewer has entered); she seductively repeats: "Come in. I want to be your friend. Do not struggle. Lay down your arms. Come in. Do not resist. I want to be your friend." She baits the viewer just as Tokyo Rose tried to persuade American fly-boys to surrender. Several of her "victims" (flies) can be seen crawling around the surfaces of the trap.

In *Tokyo Rose* the decor and the tape have been fully integrated. There is no documentation, no reportage from another time, another place. The tape is the bait of the trap. The relationship with the audience is the content of the piece. Will the audience get caught up? Or will it feel seduced and manipulated?

The action of the tape is static; the soundtrack, again, is loop-like, incantatory. The configuration of objects is simple, to a new degree of austerity. The central act is again a ritual passage, a certain kind of game of skill. Again there is the question of submission/manipulation. Here the overt mode is propaganda, doubly devious because the ex-

act means of persuasion is sexual enticement. (The entrance of the flytrap is shaped like a cone, like a vagina.)

The made-up woman promises, cajoles, and traps the traveler. She has disguised herself; she only pretends to be warm and friendly. Actually, she's no rose, she's a Venus flytrap, a false beacon, a misleading voice. The pilots who heard Tokyo Rose must have understood as much; the seductive message, with its obviousness, its vulgarity, may always be understood as a false give-away, a trap. Yet (sexual) surrender is so appealing. Failure itself has its appeal. Being trapped even doubles these appeals, because it absolves the victim, who can claim to have been tricked.

Tokyo Rose is a long step from early artist-as-ego-tripper tapes. At one level, Kos has retreated to the traditional posture of the artist working from a model, using her sex appeal as the ultimate bait. But the relationship between artist and model here is extremely complex, not simply because Marlene Kos shared in the act of creation. Despite the apparent historical allusion to Tokyo Rose, the piece seems to bear most heavily on the relationship between husband and wife, on the relationship between co-workers dependent on each other like star/director. It raised highly charged questions about who is manipulating and who is being manipulated, who is the trapper and who is being trapped.

At the formal level, Kos' achievement over the past three years has been to develop the internal characteristics of video—video as sound, video as light, the monitor as object—and also video's relationship to the viewer—the context in which the screen is watched. Most importantly, he has managed to deal with video in traditional sculptural terms; he has arranged the monitor in space, a space that includes not only the dimensions of the viewing room, but also the stored images and elapsed time of the video itself.