

# VIDEO AS ATTITUDE IN NEW MEXICO

Santa Fe, Albuquerque / Susan Zwinger

The original video frenzy of the early sixties has never subsided; it has, rather, matured and moved outward across the nation, spreading the Concept. Video has been explored, theatricalized, juxtaposed, conceptualized, computerized, analyzed and fried. Messengers of high tech have fought windmills of traditional art mechanisms in divergent, sometimes boring and sometimes breathtaking, forms. Meanwhile video babies have been indiscriminately popping out of wombs by the thousands, one hand reaching outward ready to flip the dial, creating a greater need than ever to view, objectively, media which has such vast control over our perspectives.

Twenty years later, it is certainly time to regroup, rethink and recelerate the transformations of video as art. Such an opportunity was given in a large collection of sculptural video pieces (events / environments) recently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, and at the University of New Mexico Museum in Albuquerque. Including such names as Steina and Woody Vasulka, Allan Kaprow, Robert Gaylor, Gary Hill, Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola and Francesc Torres, the two-museum exhibition was curated by Patrick Clancy, who is a leading writer and theoretician, as well as an artist, in the field. John Hanhardt of the Whitney Museum of American Art added his perspective in a symposium at the opening. The settings for this event were unusual in that the two cities regard each other with a certain rivalry and disdain. Santa Fe, which considers itself a sophisticated arts center, views Albuquerque as an overgrown town with little to offer. Albuquerque, in turn, sees Santa Fe as a commercialized, culture-conscious, less-than-innovative arts town full of galleries and chic, adobe-colored wealth. Neither attitude is unfounded.

The exhibition *Video as Attitude* emphasized video within the context of our environment and human consciousness. For many of us more often exposed to this art form as a single-channeled, self-contained videotape, the rich complexity present in these multilayered sculptural

experiences was a refreshing surprise. A number of the pieces used multiple monitors placed in orderly spatial relationships and specially constructed rooms in which there were carefully organized nuances of lighting and atmosphere. Works represented the diversity of the art world in microcosm: there were video examples of formalism, conceptualism, minimalism, social comment, performance and, even, the painterly sensuous surface.

Nauman's untitled interior landscape (1983) sprang from pure concept. A long yellow corridor opened into a small red room in which a formal steel table and chair were bolted to the floor and duplicates were bolted to the ceiling. Continuing the concept of mirrored duality, two cameras recorded live action in the corridor and inner space, with matching monitors on the tables in which we could watch ourselves taking part. In this work Nauman defined the manner of implementation but had no clear concept of the interaction that would take place when viewers entered his installation.

As is inevitable with any idea translated into real materials, a human emotional content came into play. It was easy to read the inner sanctums as Jungian archetypes and corridors as symbols of passageways. Fertile Freudian interpretations of wombs and vaginal corridors, as well as a suggestion of inward and outward dichotomies, turned the artist's concept into mythical territory.

Steina Vasulka's lush painterly surfaces in her manipulated video *The West* (1983) recorded one of the power places on earth, Casa Rinconada in Chaco Canyon, home of the Anasazi's sophisticated prehistoric culture. By panning the circular subterranean kiva and placing parallel but unequal moving images on six to eight monitors, she created a pivotal pinpointing with the viewer as the work's focal point. Colors of the masonry's deep shadows were electronically changed to turquoise or deep blue, contrasting with the oranges and browns of the desert. Woody Vasulka's rich, multilayered electronic sound track—whose undulations were subtle and repeated, seeming built into the human

nerve circuitry—heightened a viewer's emotional, almost kinesthetic response.

In a third and entirely different approach, Gaylor's *Suspension of Disbelief, 10:00pm* (1983) contained more of the social commentary one may remember from the sixties. This was not a judgmental, hierarchical valuing but simply a "poignant remembrance of night walks in the city, passing the darkened houses with only a flickering light inside a room." Each of four exactly duplicated suburban houses with white picket fences enclosed a television's flickering screen. According to Gaylor, "... in a way it is a memorial to a culture. The Zilog/8 microcomputer allows us to randomly sample the audio from four broadcast television channels coming from concealed television sets. The accumulated vocabulary selected by the Z/8 program provides a unique perspective about the quality and nature of information generated for broadcast television."

Gaylor was taking a fairly unpopular and nonformalist leap into the gray area of meaning and content, beyond what is actually present in the media. He was commenting on the loss of a flexible, realistic and creative adaptation to ongoing life. Commercial television requires a catatonic giving-up of critical facility if we are to enjoy something questionable, such as nighttime soaps or sit-coms.

And yet another approach: *In the Planet of the Eye—Second Stage: The Eye of the Beast is Red* (1983), by Rita Meyers, synthesized many approaches. "Four video monitors, embedded in a mound of earth and interconnected by live vegetation, operate as a mythological structure generated by the rotating movement of a



Gary Hill at work on a videotape for a sculptural installation, part of the "Video as Attitude" exhibition, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, and at the University of New Mexico Museum, Albuquerque.

large tower," according to Meyers. "Based on mythological and magical tetrads," the piece incorporated video, architecture and live performance, concept with content—an attempt to initiate "certain cosmological processes".

Two divergent strands seemed to run through this unique collection of pieces: one was an emotional attempt to recapture the magic and potency that man has covered since the days of the inner caves of Lascaux; the other was a search for more conceptual, idea-driven installations. The video in this exhibition could not be seen as a mere fragment dissociated from former human experience and brought to us compliments of Monstrous Science. Rather it incorporated that rich, adaptive, embedding process we call human growth and evolution. □

## NEWS AND NOTES

### NEW CRAFTS ORGANIZATION

The Bay Area Society of Artists and Craftsmen (BASAC) is a new nonprofit organization formed to assist local artists and craftspeople in the marketing of their work and promote networking among local crafts organizations. The society plans to establish a slide bank and sponsor crafts fairs and exhibitions for its members, who will be subject to screening and must live in one of the nine Bay Area counties.

Applicants may either submit slides of their work to BASAC or bring pieces to the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland on July 24. For further information and applications, write: BASAC, 67 Hoff Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

### WASHINGTON ARTS FORUM

Arts Forum '83, the seventh annual meeting of Washington State's arts community, will be held July 29-30 at the St. Thomas Conference Center in Kenmore, Washington. Presented by the Washington State Arts Alliance (WSAA), the conference is intended as a forum for artists, arts organizations and consultants to voice their concerns and discuss their various roles in the art world. Johnathan Katz, Richard Steckel, Kare Anderson, Fred Schultz and Neill Archer Bagg are among the scheduled

speakers. Conference registration fees, including most meals and admission to all activities, are \$65 for WSAA members and \$80 for all others. For further information, call 206-447-3505 or write to the Washington State Arts Alliance, P.O. Box 9407, Seattle, WA 98109.

### CLASS SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Full and partial scholarships for Walnut Creek Civic Arts' fall-quarter classes are available to individuals of any age with artistic promise. Applicants need not be residents of Walnut Creek. For more information, call 415-943-5846 or pick up an application form at the Civic Arts Education office, 1313 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA.

### NEW RURAL ARTS SERVICE

The Rural Independent Artists Program, a new service funded by the California Arts Council, is designed to assist northern California artists who live outside of major urban areas in obtaining business, legal or career advice. Although the program's staff hopes to serve all those who request assistance, time and funds are limited. Artists must submit applications stating their needs to the organization by July 30. To request an application, call 707-937-5818 or write to Rural Arts Services, P.O. Box 755, Mendocino, CA 95460.



VIRGINIA ROMAIN, MONTROSE HAGINS, IDA LEE, seen in a still from film used in the multimedia performance, *Car Dances*. Photo: Richard Hackel.

A one-hour performance that combines film, choreographed automobiles and a broadcast prerecorded dialog and musical sound track is currently being presented by the group known as Gulf of the Farallones. Each performance takes place in a parking lot on Folsom between Main and Spear, in San Francisco. The narrative deals with three older women confronting a major life change—the need to give up driving. (Further information: 415-431-1365.)