Opening night of the American Film Institute's first national conference on film and television will not focus on a Hollywood spectacular, a compendium of beloved classics or a panel of silver-haired luminaries. The four-day event, at the Sheraton-Universal Hotel today through Sunday, will start evening programs at 8:30 with a screening of video works by artists who would say a raging band—of avant-garde artists. The 90-minute show consists of 13 tapes (including four excerpts) by 19 artists.

Granted, Friday night's screening of Bernardo Bertolucci's "Luna" and Saturday evening's "rediscovery" of the 1922 classic film "Scarface" with commentary by historian Daniel Boorstin and newspaper Bay brothers would attract larger crowds, but artists' video has been given major conference billing. In a society where artistic experimentation usually plays court jester to commercialism's imperial majority, such victories are not taken lightly.

"Kicking off the conference with video is not what was expected of us," said AFI conference director Sam Gragg. "But we decided the front was right up front. That we are not merely interested in what's traditional and established."

Taking a few minutes out Tuesday from incessant phone calls in his office in the stable of AFT's Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills, Gragg explained, "From the very beginning, we planned to bring a microcosm of film and television to the conference. We aimed to put out the whole menu. I hate to use the metaphor, but it's not all hamburger.

"Too often, what's highly visible forms our definitions, he said. "In this conference we wanted to show the personal and idiosyncratic side...to recognize the cutting edge and demonstrate the virtuosity of the media in our culture. The video works represent the range of possibilities that confront artists."

Preconference publicity has billed "the blending of electronic technology and creativity" as "the fulcrum of all "mediatic" issues" to be explored. The video art evening was touted as "a symbol of what the conference is about."

Videotapes were selected by John Giancola, director of media programs for the New York State Council for the Arts, instructor of video at New York University and long-time video advocate. AFT's attention to experimental video does indeed stand as a symbol of support for vanguard efforts. Whether selected tapes represent "the cutting edge," the ultimate in virtuosity, a perfect blend of technology and creativity or a full range of possibilities is open to question.

To an audience unaccustomed to viewing video in art galleries, such work as Stephen Beck's "Union," a pulsating metamorphosis of organic shapes eventually bubbling into a figure in a lotus position, or Dan Sandin's "Water, Water, Water," a painfully abstraction based on rushing, swirling, undulating water, may seem the last word in camera art, but to video devotees, this sort of thing is quite ordinary. Some are as young as seven years old—hardly an up-to-the-minute report of the state of video.

Giancola's selections, if occasionally outdated, are generally high in quality and interest, running from genuine jewels to flawed gems and a few frumkets. The range of approaches includes on-the-street documentary, expressionistic probing and abstraction derived from both natural and manipulated imagery. Heavy social and political criticism, which makes up a big chunk of current video activity, is noticeably missing.
What we have, then, is a nice, safe compilation of some, but by no means all, important video directions in the '70s, squeezed into a palatable and informative package. For those who are curious about what's been going on in artists' video in the last decade, the evening is a rare opportu-
tunity—an efficient way to become sensitized with no dan-
ger of overdosing. The program, open to the public with a $6 ticket, will be shown on two 72-inch screens.

Pioneer Nam June Paik, with Ed Emshwiller, will launch the show with the remarkably effective "Suite 212 — The Selting of New York," a humorous view of commer-
cial television. A complex collage of the city is punctuated by Japanese Pepsi ads and a camed voice on the tube, dRONING on and on about New York's role as a media mar-
ketplace. The commentator gets switched off by a woman taking a bath, a hairdresser and a couple making love. The ultimate turn-off occurs when a burglar enters an apart-
ment where the commentator had begun to report on the crime rate. When the reporter says robbery and burglary have dropped off sharply in the past year, the thief flips the switch, retracts the antenna and walks off with the TV set.

Andy Mann's "One-Eyed Bum" is a model of low-budget accomplishment. This short exchange between a man with a camera and a happy-go-lucky transient with a cataract is a poignant and loving portrait, not likely to be forgotten. Another warm moment comes in John Alpert and Reiko Tsuno's "Third Avenue," an interview with a joyfully

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Jack Smith is on assignment.

Ed & I will make sure you come to cab arts and I want to see you in Santa Fe!
VIDEO ART

Continued from First Page

married old couple who hang on to their past life while
dealing, argumentatively, with the new. Business is terri-
ble, inflation is killing but it doesn't seem to matter much
because they have a sense of humor and each other.

William Wegman, who is forever trying to teach his dog
Man Ray something or other on video, is briefly but well
represented by "The Spelling Test." The dog as student
sits on a stool looking quizzical as Wegman patiently ex-
plains the dog's spelling errors. Wegman's deadpan mock-
ery of educational methods shouldn't be funny after all
these years of exposure, but it is.

Among the most successful forays into abstraction and
manipulation are Steina and Woody Vasulka's "Vocabula-
ry," a play of spatial conflicts between a human hand and
manufactured images; Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn's
"Order," a brisk composition of audiovisual collisions, and
Gary Hill's "Objects With Destinations" where ordinary
tools and furniture are converted to abstract shapes and
patterns.

The show will end with Bill Viola's "Sweet Light," a
confusing work that contains lovely vignettes shot in a
studio and at a dinner party. The piece goes off in too
many directions to add up to anything memorable.

The remainder of the conference, the first of a proposed
annual series, will consist of constituent meetings for spe-
cial interest groups in the mornings and a variety of film
and television symposiums. Most events will be open to the
public, but tickets are necessary. Call the AFI conference
office at the Universal-Sheraton (980-1212) for informa-
tion on ticket availability, rates and schedules. Tickets can
be purchased at the hotel's conference registration desk.

Bach-to-Mozart Festival Set
for CalArts Friday, Saturday

CalArts will host the second Bach-to-Mozart festival
Friday and Saturday on the Valencia campus. Daniel Shul-
man will conduct the CalArts Orchestra in Haydn's