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, just as it has been conceptualized, computerized, analyzed and admired. Architects of high tech have fought windmills of traditional art mechanisms in divergent, sometimes boring and sometimes breath-taking 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 reevaluate the transformations of video as art. Such an opportunity was given in a large collection of sculptural video pieces (events / environment) 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 Steinha 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.

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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-channelled, 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 unconscious

Nauman's unified interior landscape (1983) sprang from pure concept. A long yellow corridor opened into a small red room in which a formal steel table and chairs 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 sanctum as Jungian archetypes and corridors as symbols of passageways. Fritz Freundian interpretations of wombs and vaginal corridors, as well as a suggestion of inward and outward dichotomies, turned the artist's concept into mythical territory.

Steinva 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 distinguished video monitors, embedded in a mound of earth, she created a psychological structure generated for broadcast television. According to Gaylor, "in a way it is a memorial to a culture.

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 through the rotating movement of a light tower," according to Meyers. Based on mythological and magical tetras, 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 coveted 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 more a mere fragment dissociated from former human experience and brought to us composites of Monstrous Science. Rather it incorporated that non-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 craftpeople 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, 675 Hot 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 23-30 at the St. Thomas More 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, Karen Anderson, Fred Schultz and Neil White are among the 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.

WASHINGTON ARTS FORUM

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 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 62, Kenmore, Washington.

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