

BCC screens Ithaca Festival's intriguing video art

By HELEN L. KOHEN
Special to The Herald

A foster child of both television and Dada, video art was a weird mixture right from the start. It remains a strange hybrid, finding viewing space in nightclubs and coffee shops, libraries and museums, film institutes and the faculty lounge of M.I.T.

The range of its achievements is no less peculiar. Computer technology has made it literally possible to paint by number, while the measured habits of television viewers conclude that video art will be the major growth area in the field of entertainment.

Machine-generated art and art as entertainment used to have bad names. It is still not clear whether video art is the visible edge of the future of visual arts, but, this weekend at least, there will be ample opportunity to assess just what it is now.

The 7th Annual Ithaca Video Festival, a 3-hour, 19-tape long "exhibition," will barnstorm at three locations in Broward County, including both campuses of Broward Community College, and a day-long stint, with live performers, at Boomers.

There were 290 entries for this year's video festival, and the chosen few were tapped to showcase creativity, invention and craft in the medium. Though there may be some question as to whether each of these criteria was well-served in every case, such standards did not limit variety. The gamut is run from pure visions to performance, and from narrative to new wave parody.

Video art, however, is mainly about time and technology, and the works that come closest to satisfying the visual component this year have considered both. No longer is the viewer subjected to the long pe-

riods of synthesized color gymnastics that used to make video art as boring as daytime television. This new dazzle is very much the product of technical advances: The computer and the creative technician have expanded the artist's capabilities of working with line, color, pattern and design, and space.

Sunstone, a short and spectacular entry by Ed Emshwiller, was created by means of (state-of-the-art?) computer graphics animation, and involved the use of a digital paint program developed in a lab. The stunning transformations of Emshwiller's original cherubic image into fractured and dimensional pulsating forms is a highlight of the selections, especially the passage that seems, finally, to articulate the descent of Marcel Duchamp's nude on the staircase. He — Duchamp — would have loved it. (3 minutes).

Among the best of the narrative tapes is *Body Count*, a deadly serious and moving montage, heavy with multilevel antiwar messages. Using selective coloring, and alternating action sequences lifted from daily television fare with live shots of boys brandishing toy guns, artists Dan Reeves and Jon Hilton provoke the connection between innocent child's play and real war games. (9 minutes).

Most of the other festival tapes tackle lighter, less emotional themes. Comic books, and a bad night on Saturday Night Live, probably provided the inspiration for *Steel and Flesh*, by Dana Atchley and Eric Metcalfe. A combination of punk and porn, the piece tracts a disjointed story from frame to frame, imitating the comic book in form and content. (12 minutes).

Television invites its own parodies. *Live from Lunds*, a comedy by Tom Adair and Kenneth Robins (two admitted TV addicts), is set in a supermarket that never closes. Performers from PBS's "Live From..." series dance their *pas de deux*, play their chamber music, recite their lines and fill their market baskets with each other.

Taking television more seriously and less seriously at once, Taka Limura borrows formal minimalist method to involve the viewer in a perceptual and conceptual challenge. Slightly reminiscent of "Will the real Mr. Jones please stand up?" line from "To Tell the Truth," the spoken cadence of Limura's *Double Identities* keeps repeating in memory. This is a slow-paced serial work, in which Limura's television image and his image shown on a monitor carry on a closed-circuit dialogue. Limura identifies himself: "I am Taka Limura." The monitor image identifies itself (himself?): "I am Taka Limura." They switch, change places, become two monitor images, and finally face you, progressing from the "I am" to "I am not" to "You are" and "You are not," at last yielding to the absurdity of the double negative taking on a positive connotation. (8 minutes).

A mention, too, of *Selected Treecuts* (Steina), *2 Aspects* (John Sturgeon), *Similar Nature* (Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn) and *Quarks* (Peter D'Agostino) — four more selections that offer a special experience. For video is special, perhaps the most inherently democratic art yet devised, though it is still the least accessible. That is slowly changing, but meanwhile most of us will have to go out to see it, and this is the time. The festival is a national sample case of what's new, what's

good and what's changing. Video art is largely an art at the attempting stage, discovering an audience as it discovers itself. It is a good time to begin to look at it.

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