Videotape Replaces Canvas for Artists Who Use TV Technology in New Way

An image from a video work by Peter Campus, who has worked in experimental psychology.

By GRACE GLUECK

Frank Gillette's new work for television is not the sort of thing that's geared to peddle soap. The 14-minute videotape shot on Cape Cod has as its sole subject the flow of water into and around a cave.

"This is determined in two extremes," says Mr. Gillette, a 34-year-old artist who used to work with the more conventional paint and canvas. "I want to take this advanced technology and see if we can turn it back on itself, to convey the most primordial sources, our life-support system."

Mr. Gillette, whose new work is part of a 12-piece cycle with an ecological theme, is one of a growing breed of video artists, for whom the TV screen has become an aesthetic medium. Uninterested in commercial television, they produce videotapes that take ingenious advantage of its technology, from crude vignettes shot on site to elaborate productions that call on the full technical resources of a TV studio.

Their visually transient work, dismissed by the objet-centralized art world only a few years ago, is now highly evident on the museum and gallery circuit. In New York, the Museum of Modern Art schedules videotape shows, and they were a feature of the Whitney Museum's recent biennial exhibition. Tapes may also be regularly viewed at such galleries as Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway, and at other places such as The Kitchen, 59 Wooster Street, and the Village Voice, 52. Broadway.

A Menage a Trois

A proliferation of video festivals has also occurred during the last year. One is now at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in Caracas, Venezuela, and in New York a women's video festival is in progress at the Women's Interart Center, 514 W. 52 St. Street.

And a respectable number of videocassettes is being broadcast, via the network of public television stations. "There's a significant body of works being produced by independent videomakers that warrants weekly exposure on the public television system," says David London, director of the Television Laboratory at Channel 13.

Guest to the Television Laboratory, for the first time a regular program of artists' tapes is appearing on the air. Funded with $94,000 by the New York State Council on the Arts, the laboratory is currently scheduling works by the video community in a 4-week series. Housed in a former storefront, it's a "nurturer of the video movement," in the best sense.

The programs range from John Kapter's "Global Image," a tracking narrative of nude, naked and abstract images, to Arthur Copper's "Continuing Story of Carol and Fred," which employs an omnibus-like technique to deal with perception, as in "K.D.B.," a complex work in 4 parts that gives the viewer many different encounters with color.

"But I'm not interested in exploring the medium," Mr. Campus says, "but on the other hand everything I do relates to it."

Hermine Freed, one of the increasing number of women working in videotape, also uses it in a complex, "layered" way. A gifted visual and verbal performer, she most recently made "Art Therapy," which she describes as "a video recapitulation of art history from the Middle Ages to the present." The work, using paintings of women and a superimposition device that allows Miss Freed to appear as some of the women in the paintings, comments on what she sees as "the cultural schizophrenia of contemporary women."

The works of Bill Wegman and Andy Mann are somewhat less tuned to perceptual and "devices." Mr. Wegman, who formerly stars with his dog, Man Ray (known as the Rin-Tin-Tin of video), can often be accused of humor, a quality not yet greatly in evidence among his colleagues in this field. In one of his short pieces, "The Spelling Lesson," for instance, he gives a terse critique of his dog's spelling to which the animal actually spells the response.

Mr. Mann, a 28-year-old tapernaker who is also an expert technician, does penetrative candid-camera-style tapes wherever he "happens to be," and often becomes involved in situations that "throw him off," often becomes involved in situations that "throw him off,"...
TV Review

Videotapes Living Up to Star Billing

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

Since the first Sony Porta-paks were introduced to this country in 1963, half-inch videotapes, offering increased portability and lower costs, have been hailed as the salvation of the electronic artist or journalist attempting to remain independent and "personal." While the road to mass-audience access and recognition has been-and still is-rocky, the medium has produced work of outstanding quality.

A collection of good examples can be found in two new series that begin tomorrow. The first is on public television: "Video and Television Review," a 26-week series produced by WNET/13's Experimental Television Laboratory. The second is in a lower-Manhattan loft: The First Annual Video Documentary Festival, featuring a different schedule on Fridays and Saturdays, at 8:30 P.M., for the next three weeks.

The Channel 13 series, with Russell Connor, artist and critic, as host, will include a broad survey of videotape production-creative and journalistic. It will include both information about the latest developments in hardware and conversations with artists and producers.

The first program will examine the aims and style of TVTV, a group that gained a respectable measure of national success with "The Lord of the Universe" and, more recently, a four-part series on "Gerald Ford's America." Next week will feature "Transcending," the first videotape of Ian Hugo, veteran film maker. And, in the following weeks, it will include a new work by Ed Emshwiller and "The Irish Tapes," a 46-minute documentary on Northern Ireland by John Reilly and Seafan Moore.

The series will obviously provide a valuable forum for a medium in desperate search for any forum. That desperation is the reason for the documentary festival at the Broome Street Loft, housing the Video Study Center of Global Village. It's at 5th Avenue at 454 Broome Street (phone 966-7526). Mr. Reilly is director of the center and his "The Irish Tapes" will be included on one of the programs.

Much of the material, however, has not found an outlet on either TV or cable, which initially promised "alternative access" but has proved a failure so far.

The "video documentary" generally makes no pretensions to objectivity. Tightly controlled by a few people or even one person, the documentary tends to be extremely subjective. For the "Irish Tapes," for example, several trips to Ulster were made. Scenes of hate and suffering, on both sides of the conflict, were set in a form that opens and ends with glimpses of a St. Patrick's Day parade in New York. Grim reality is powerfully counterpointed with unformed fantasy. The "troubles" are portrayed by the participants-defiant, hysterical, puzzled.

The scope and styles of the video documentary are broad. Other works in the festival include:

"The Politics of Intimacy," by Julie Gustafson, Ten Women, recorded in close-up and in medium shots, candidly discuss orgasm and sexuality. The "clinical" statements accumulate into sensitive portraits of women of different ages, sexual dispositions, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"Hindustan-Part I," by Erle Siegel. A trip through India is recorded without narration, without statistics and with superb camera work.

"Walter" by Bob and Ingrid Wiegand. A young teacher is interviewed in immediate detail, his work, his boat-making and his story about survival in a German slave-labor camp seamlessly interwoven with the whole.

"Giving Birth," by Tohe J. Carey. A desperately modern couple go to Mexico for the delivery of their child. The result is graphic, as plotted, and hilarious, as not planned.

In addition, the festival is showing some works that have received some exposure: TVTV's "Four More Years," an irreverent and, particularly in light of Watergate, perceptive view of the 1972 Republican convention in Miami, was shown widely on cable television. And Downtown Community Television's "Cuba: The People" was carried on P.B.S.

For anyone interested in a sadly neglected present containing significant possibilities for the future of broadcast and avant-garde dynamics, attention. The price of admission, the "contribution," is $2.
Videotape Is Replacing Paint and Canvas for Artists

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involved with his subjects. In "One-Eyed Bunt," for instance, he persuades a Bowery delinquent to talk revealingly about his life and his street philosophy.

Not all tapemakers work in broadcast video. Some, for whom the medium is still best suited to gallery viewing, prefer installations in which multiple images are seen simultaneously on a number of monitors placed around the gallery. One of these is Bruce Nauman's "Dachau," a four-screen study of the German concentration camp in which the camera takes a dead-end "tourist" point of view. Nauman, who with another tapemaker, Al Dickey, founded and runs the video magazine Radical Software, does not see his work as geared to a mass "broadcast" audience. "I want a more intimate gallery situation," he says.

Some artists work well in both gallery and broadcast modes, however. An elaborate recent environment by Mr. Paik had as one feature a closed-circuit color filming of live fish suspended in tanks from the ceiling, then projected across the ceiling as floating images. Mr. Campau's most recent work at the Bykert Gallery comprised live video installations that, according to the viewer's presence, projected psychologically unsettling images of him on the walls.

The short history of videotape—"the term as used by tapemakers differentiates their work from commercial TV—poses both new possibilities and new problems. A third, Electric Television Laboratory, is already experimenting with video art. A third, Electric Television Laboratory, is already experimenting with video art. The money to establish, and has since given large grants to, the Television Laboratory at Channel 13, the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, are now providing money for "alternative" video, including video by artists.

Centers for video experimentation and theory, such as the Channel 13 Laboratory, the WEGB New Television Workshop in Boston and the National Center for Experimental Television in San Francisco, are providing artists with technically sophisticated facilities in which to work. And the new Long Beach and Sunset Area television stations, operated by artists, are also providing artists with technically sophisticated facilities in which to work. And the new Long Beach and Sunset Area television stations, operated by artists, are also providing artists with technically sophisticated facilities in which to work. And the new Long Beach and Sunset Area television stations, operated by artists, are also providing artists with technically sophisticated facilities in which to work. And the new Long Beach and Sunset Area television stations, operated by artists, are also providing artists with technically sophisticated facilities in which to work.

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