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

By GRACE GLUECK

Frank Gillette's new work for television is not the sort of visual spectacle produced in a 14-minute videotape shot on Cape Cod and has as its sole subject the flow of water into and around a cave.

GILLETTE, a 34-year-old artist who used to work with the more conventional printed and canvas, "I want to take this advanced technological tool of television and turn it back on itself, to convey the most primordial of sources, our basic 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 esthetic medium. Unlike the commercial television, they produce videotapes that take imaginative advantage of its technology, from video signposts along the line to elaborate productions that call on the full technical resources of a TV studio.

Their visually transient work, dismissed by the object-oriented art world only a few years ago, is now highly visible on the museum and gallery circuit. In New York, the Museum of Modern Art schedules video tape shows, and they were a feature of the Whitney Museum's recent annual exhibition. Tapes may also be regularly viewed at such galleries as Leo Castelli and Helen Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway, and at video bars such as The Kitchen, 56 Wooster Street, and Global Village, 348 Broome Street.

A Mange à Tres

A proliferation of video festivals has also occurred during the last year. One is now at the Marce de Arte Contemporaneo in Caracas, Venezuela, and in New York a women's video festival is in progress at the Women's Interest Center, 549 West 2nd Street.

"Producing a kind of video poetry is becoming broader, and reaching 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 Leonoff, director of the Smithsonian Institution, at Channel 13.

"With The Youngstown Laboratory, for the first time a complete video work by a tape artist is appearing on the Frontline report of the New York State Council on the Arts.

The Frontline segment, which is entitled "The Youngstown Laboratory," which contains an excerptary version. A "video" among a series of video tape and a video art artists, has been made at the Youngstown Lab."

Individuals are already making their own videotapes, many of them are the result of experiments in television, and the perception of as "TV art," a complex work of art that escapes the artist's hands.

"I'm not interested in exploring the medium," Mr. Gillette says, "but on the other hand everything I do re-

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involved with his subjects. In "One-Eyed Bum," for instance, he persuades a Bowery derelict 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, create installations in which multiple images are seen simultaneously on a number of monitors placed around the gallery. One of these is Robert Brief's "Dachau," a 12-minute study of the German concentration camp in which the camera takes a dead-end "social" point of view.

Mr. Paik, who with an overall reputation, has founded and edits the video magazine Radical Software, does not see her work as limited to a mass "broadcast" audience. "I want a more intimate gallery situation," she 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 the fish suspended in tanks from the ceiling, then projected across the ceiling as fleeting images. Mr. Camper's most recent work at the Bykert Gallery comprised live video installations that activated by the viewers' presence, projected psychologically intriguing images of him on the walls.

The history of videotape is also being altered by the use of broadcast tape in studio tape experimentation. The "portapak," device for editing the tape, combining a video art does not seem in hand-held camera and a battery-operated videomakers is already emerging, gave artists instant access from art schools worldwide, as one the Radical.

At about the same time, some for Foundation (which gave basics)
Since the first Sony Portapaks were introduced to this country in 1968, half-inch videotape, offering increased portability and lower costs, has been hailed as the salvation of the electronic artist or journalist attempting to maintain independence 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 VNET/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 attempt a broad survey of videotape antitrend state of the art. In addition to videotape production—artistic 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 "MV," 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 Jan Hugo, veteran film maker. And, in following weeks, it will include a new work by Ed Emshwiller and "The Irish Tapes," a 48-minute documentary on Northern Ireland by John Reilly and Sefan 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 434 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 "alternative access" but has proved a failure so far. The "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 uniform 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 medium shots, candidly discuss orgasm and sexuality. The "clinical" statements accumulate into sensitive portraits of women of different ages, sexual preferences and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- "Hindustan-Part I," by Ernie Siegel. A trip through India is recorded without narration, without statistics and with superior camera work.
- "Walter" by Bob and Ingrid Wiegand. A gym teacher is interviewed in immediate detail, his work, his boat-sailing and his story about survival in a German slave-labor camp seamlessly intertwined with the white.
- "Giving Birth," by Jane Carey. A desperate modern couple go to Mexico for the delivery of their child. The result is graphic, as painful, and hilarious, as not planned.

In addition, the festival is showing some works that have received some measure. TV1V'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 "Cutout: The People" was carried on P.B.S.

For anyone interested in a safely mediated present containing significant possibilities for the future of electronic art and journalism, the festival is well worth a look.

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