

Long Beach Museum of Art

May 09, 1986

Woody Vasulka
Route 6, Box 100
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Woody:

Your work The Commission recently donated by you to the Museum's video collection of 1000+ titles has been selected for inclusion in "POETIC LICENSE," a thematic exhibition of single-channel works which explore new strategies in form, technique, style and narrative. The exhibition is scheduled from June 22 through August 17, 1986. Attached you will find an inventory of the program.

The works will be on view in the Museum's screening room, a 300 square-foot darkened exhibition gallery with 25" Sony color monitor with amplified stereo sound. As is our policy, announcements, press releases, reviews and program notes will be forwarded to you following the close of the exhibition.

The Museum will offer you a rental fee of \$100. Please notify us immediately should you have any reason to believe the copy in the collection is not in suitable condition for public viewing.

Finally, may I ask you to consider an understandable problematic proposal. The Museum is currently programming selected works from each of its exhibition on University (cable) Television, California State University, Long Beach. The cable program is limited to the communities of Lakewood and Long Beach (approximate number of subscribers: 50,000). Although we anticipate this pilot endeavor to be funded in 1987, at present we are without resources to offer rental fees. We are therefore requesting your permission for a gratis screening of your work on cable during the same period as the exhibition.

POETIC LICENSE

June 22 - August 17, 1986

Robert Ashley

Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again: The Lessons.
1981 (30:00)

Dara Birnbaum

Damnation of Faust: Will-O'-The-Wisp (A Deceitful Goal).
1985 (7:00)

Francois Girard

Le Train. 1985 (5:00)

Gary Hill

URA-ARU (The Backside Exists). 1986 (27:00)

Joan Jonas

Double Lunar Dogs. 1984 (25:00)

Tony Labat

La Jungla. 1985 (20:00)

Meredith Monk/Bob Rosen

Ellis Island. 1982 (28:00)

Dan Reeves

Sabda. 1984 (15:00)

Bill Seaman

S.He. 1983 (11:30)

Woody Vasulka

The Commission. 1983 (45:00)

POETIC LICENSE

June 22 – August 17, 1986

"Poetic License," organized by the Long Beach Museum of Art, was presented at the Museum with selected works cablecast as part of LBMA's "Open Channels" program on University Television, California State University, Long Beach (Channel 25, Long Beach; Channel 42, Lakewood) during the period June 22 through August 17, 1986.

Program notes by Marga Bijvoet.

All photos courtesy Kira Perov unless otherwise noted.

The Video Program of the Long Beach Museum of Art is supported by grants from the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency located in Washington, D.C.

Poetic License: the permission to ignore strict, literal norms that characterize expression, to try some other strategy, to challenge the canonical conventions of the craft, to circumvent established standards, to subvert the order of language, to transcend its limitations . . . the license to invent new texts, some other sense, the license to invent non-sense, to escape sense, even the notion of sense . . . Or, perhaps, the compelling obsession to express this passion that conceals itself in oblique stories of lost illusions, of not told "truths," of a silent past near extinction, of time passing, of lessons learned too late, of sensed perceptions that elude the sense of orthodox sense, the sense that explanations pursue . . . Eloquence neither indeterminate nor evasive, that expresses itself indirectly, in some circuitous process that shapes its structure in connecting links, no end in sight, that trusts communication can occur on the periphery of sense, the site of sense production . . . To consider the possibility of some other possibility, of every possibility . . . Insisting too on the position of the other, the sovereignty of the other, of those that complete the text, that transform speech into communication, the social exchange that takes place in the circulation of the text, in the subjective construction of sense, the other's production of sense, the poetic license of every perception . . . Choosing to explore some other logic than the one that seeks to synthesize opposites, the order of negative polarities, the either/or logic that can't permit the existence of contradiction, of conflict or complexity, the logic that seeks to order . . . Losing nothing in the process that offers no solution, no closure, no convergence, no climax scene . . . No "the end" . . . Subject only to the inevitable Order of Things, concealed in this instance in the term that signifies imagination, the condition of *permission*, that permits only to preserve . . . the language that never ceases to exert the presence of its control.

Connie Fitzsimons,
Curator, Video Program
Long Beach Museum of Art

Robert Ashley, composer, poet and performer, is a pioneer in the development of avant-garde music theatre and large scale collaborative performances. John Sanborn is a well-known innovative contributor to the field of video and TV.

Robert Ashley

Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again: The Lessons, 1981
28:00, color, stereo sound

Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again: The Lessons is an overture to the opera for television *Perfect Lives*, which is comprised of seven half-hour episodes. Described as "a postmodern version of the mythology of small-town mid-America," *The Lessons* takes place against a backdrop of mid-western farmland and features the adventures of "R" (Robert Ashley) and Buddy ("Blue" Gene Tyranny), the world's greatest piano player, and their relationship with Isolde (Jill Kroesen), and "D" (David Van Tieghem), the captain of the football team. *The Lessons* is an extremely complex melange of innovative music, surreal imagery, printed and spoken texts which serve as metaphors for abstract ideas – "themes of reincarnation, of alienation within yourself and from the rest of society, the split between mind and body." John Sanborn (Video Director): "Central to understanding the opera is the metaphor of the keyboard as both instrument of change and landscape of desire."



Dara Birnbaum

Damnation of Faust: Will-O' - The-Wisp (A Deceitful Goal), 1985
5:39, color, stereo sound
Producer: The C.A.T. Fund

Will-O' - The-Wisp centers on the reflections of a woman about a past relationship. Recalling the past as moments of pain, pleasure and loss she looks out the window onto the street where children are playing. Evolving from Birnbaum's previous tape *Damnation of Faust: Evocation*, *Will-O' - The-Wisp* is characterized by quiet contemplation about the nature of memory and seems to suggest that the passage of time is one marked by transitions, that loss – of innocence, of one's object of desire – is another, although less celebrated, rite of passage. Using a structure of opposites and relations between formal motifs – video wipes and fans that reveal and conceal in the moment of dissolve, scenes of interior and exterior, references to the window/picture as framing devices – as well as Japanese *Ukiyo-e* pictures of the floating world, Birnbaum creates a psychological portrait of the ephemeral quality of memory and human experience.



Dara Birnbaum, who holds degrees in architecture and painting, has produced video-works since 1978. Her works have received international recognition. She currently resides in New York City.

Meredith Monk/Bob Rosen

Ellis Island, 1982
28:00, color-b/w, sound

Ellis Island – the port of entry to the United States for millions of people between 1892 and 1927 – is a visual/musical narrative which recaptures this segment of American history by recasting its historical settings as black/white still-photographs and tableaux-vivants of the examination, registration and acculturation of the immigrants. In transferring the viewer to the past and back to the present condition of the island – now a ramshackled ruin in the center of New York harbor and a popular tourist attraction – memory of the past and present is perceived as separated yet continuous. Monk describes *Ellis Island* as "a mosaic of sounds and images woven together into a formal musical design."



Meredith Monk is a renowned composer, choreographer, singer and director. Her film *Ellis Island* has won several awards and was shown on PBS, February 1983.

Tony Labat

La Jungla, 1985
20:00, b/w, sound

La Jungla is a visual narrative which follows a day in the life of a man and a woman. The camera, mounted on a motor, pans the interior of an apartment, recording the activities of life in fragments. These moments are interrupted by images of natural and architectural elements, the melancholic sound of a saxophone (performed by Ben Bossi) which fades in and out, and excerpts from a text based on true encounters of an unidentified individual with a witch called Tete, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Karl Einstein. Life, art, reality perceived as fragments, simultaneously engaging and disengaging, open to a variety of interpretations: Labat seems to speculate about the disparity between life/reality and art, the perception of reality and reality itself, fact and fiction, and the elusiveness of what eventually is considered historical truth.

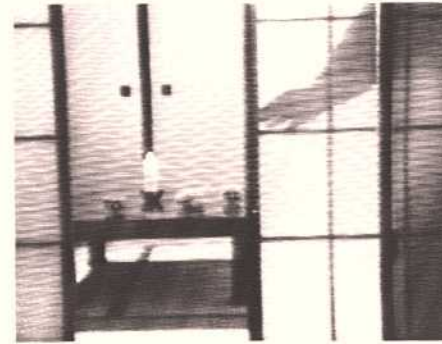


Tony Labat is a video and performance artist who has produced videos since 1977. He currently teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Gary Hill

URA-ARU (the backside exists), 1986
27:00, color, sound

In *URA-ARU (the backside exists)* Hill constructs a densely interwoven narrative of words/phrases, sounds and images, which refer to categories of god, man, woman, lunatic, demon – the main protagonists in the Japanese drama of Noh. Hill: "In *URA-ARU*, Noh appears as a kind of play within a play. Using . . . an abbreviated embodiment of the classic Noh play, Lady Aoi emerges as a series of conceptual vignettes. The spirit of Lady Aoi is followed to the other world, or annoyo . . ." Based on selected Japanese – as well as English – acoustic palindromes, *URA-ARU* defies the highly defined and structured Indo-European language concepts and creates an open space free of predetermined closing, indeterminateness and syntactical sparseness to allow for multiple layers of meaning.



Gary Hill, who began his artistic career as a sculptor, has produced works in video since 1973. He has exhibited widely, both nationally and internationally. He currently resides in Barrytown, New York.

Dan Reeves

Sabda, 1984
15:00, color, stereo sound

Sabda is a eulogy to the North Indian poet Kabir and other Indian mystics. The title refers to *the word*, the original sound of life. Excerpts from Bhakti poems are seguelessly interwoven with a continuous flow of images and sounds of daily life situations in India – children guarding buffalo, women cultivating rice fields, men crafting the image of Shiva – sometimes perceived as through a veil, sometimes clearly distinguishable, constantly moving in and out of sight. *Sabda* portrays a view of Indian life and nature in terms of its philosophy which holds that all forms are relative, fluid and ever-changing; life as a forever revolving wheel; the unity and interrelationship of all things and events as central theme and essence of the Eastern world-view.

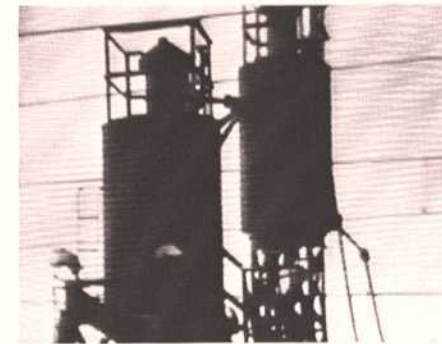


Dan Reeves has been working in video since 1979. His videotape *Smothering Dreams* (1981) was broadcast on PBS, Summer 1985. Reeves currently resides in Scotland.

Bill Seaman

S.HE, 1983
11:30, color, stereo sound

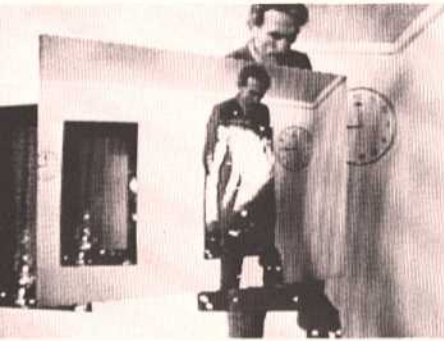
S.HE is an audiovisual poem interweaving image, music and lyrical text. Images from the man-made/industrial and natural environment – originally shot on Super-8 film from the window of a moving train and later transferred to videotape – move by in slow-motion, while a male voice narrates a litany that seeks to define "she" accompanied by synthesized and acoustic music reminiscent of gregorian/ritual chanting. A meditative contemplation about the male and female elements of the universe, *S.HE* constructs its notion of sexual difference based on division, the archetypal pair yin and yang, and the philosophical concept of polar opposites, intricately connected in a continuous yet shifting movement of synthesis.



Bill Seaman is a visual artist, musician and composer. He studied at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, and the San Francisco Art Institute. He currently resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Joan Jonas

Double Lunar Dogs, 1984
25:00, color, sound
Producer: The C.A.T. Fund



Double Lunar Dogs – based on Robert Heinlein's science fiction story *Universe* – presents an Orwellian vision of a post-nuclear world in which an "Invisible Power" controls mind and information retrieval. The survivors travel through the cosmos having forgotten where they came from and where they are going. In an attempt to recollect past history, the travelers (portrayed by Joan Jonas, Jill Kroesen, Spalding Gray, John Malloy and David Warilow) play games with images of the earth that "flit" by occasionally. Their efforts remain futile. Joan Jonas: "Only the Double Lunar Dogs, the outcasts, living in the corridors above, know that all this information is controlled and interpreted . . . The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."

"Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."

—Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Woody Vasulka

The Commission, 1983
45:00, color, stereo sound



The Commission is an eleven-segment video opera in which Hector Berlioz (played by Robert Ashley) and Niccolo Paganini (played by Ernest Gusella) meet in a video- and audio-synthesized environment. Centering on the confusion about a "commission" by Paganini to Berlioz to compose a music piece for him, it relates the last days of the legendary violinist – his fame and glory and the misfortunes surrounding his death and funeral. Interlaced are scenes with Berlioz wandering in a "surreal" desert landscape, contemplating Jungian notions of character, archetype and knowledge. A sequential phantasy of filmic images alternated with computer-generated imagery, *The Commission* reflects upon the artist as genius and the creation of myths and legends surrounding the rise to fame and fortune – the process of art-making and art-politics.

Francois Girard

Le Train, 1985
5:45, color, stereo sound



An older man sits alone in a sparse room with only a photograph of railroad tracks disappearing into the horizon. Staring vacantly out of the window, he recalls past moments in surreal, dreamlike images: a young man riding and pulling a train, reflections of windows disturbed by a hand moving the surface of the water, a window-pane falling, glass breaking. "*Le Train* is an allegorical tale. The life of a railwayman has come to a halt at just the same place as his locomotive. A place between memory and imagination, where the viewer can join in the poetic fiction. The work with no music, weaves a soundtrack at once impressionistic and symbolic."

Joan Jonas has held international acclaim as a performance artist since the 1960s and has an extensive background in painting, dance, sculpture and art history. She began to incorporate video into her performances in 1972. She currently resides in New York City.

Woody (and Steina) Vasulka are pioneers in the field of electronic image processing systems, and have participated in major video exhibitions in the United States and abroad. The Vasulkas currently reside in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Francois Girard is a young Canadian artist. His videotape *Le Train* received awards at the "Iere Semaine Internationale de Video," Geneva, Switzerland (1985) and Tokyo Video Festival, Tokyo, Japan (1985). He currently resides in Montreal, Quebec.

Long Beach Museum of Art, 2300 East Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90803, (213) 439-2119

Summer exhibition hours: Wednesday, noon-9 p.m. Thursday through Sunday, noon-5 p.m.