

Bonnefantenmuseum

VIDEO & FILM MANIFESTATIE

kijken en doen

11 februari-20 maart 1977

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Verenigde Staten

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Video art from America

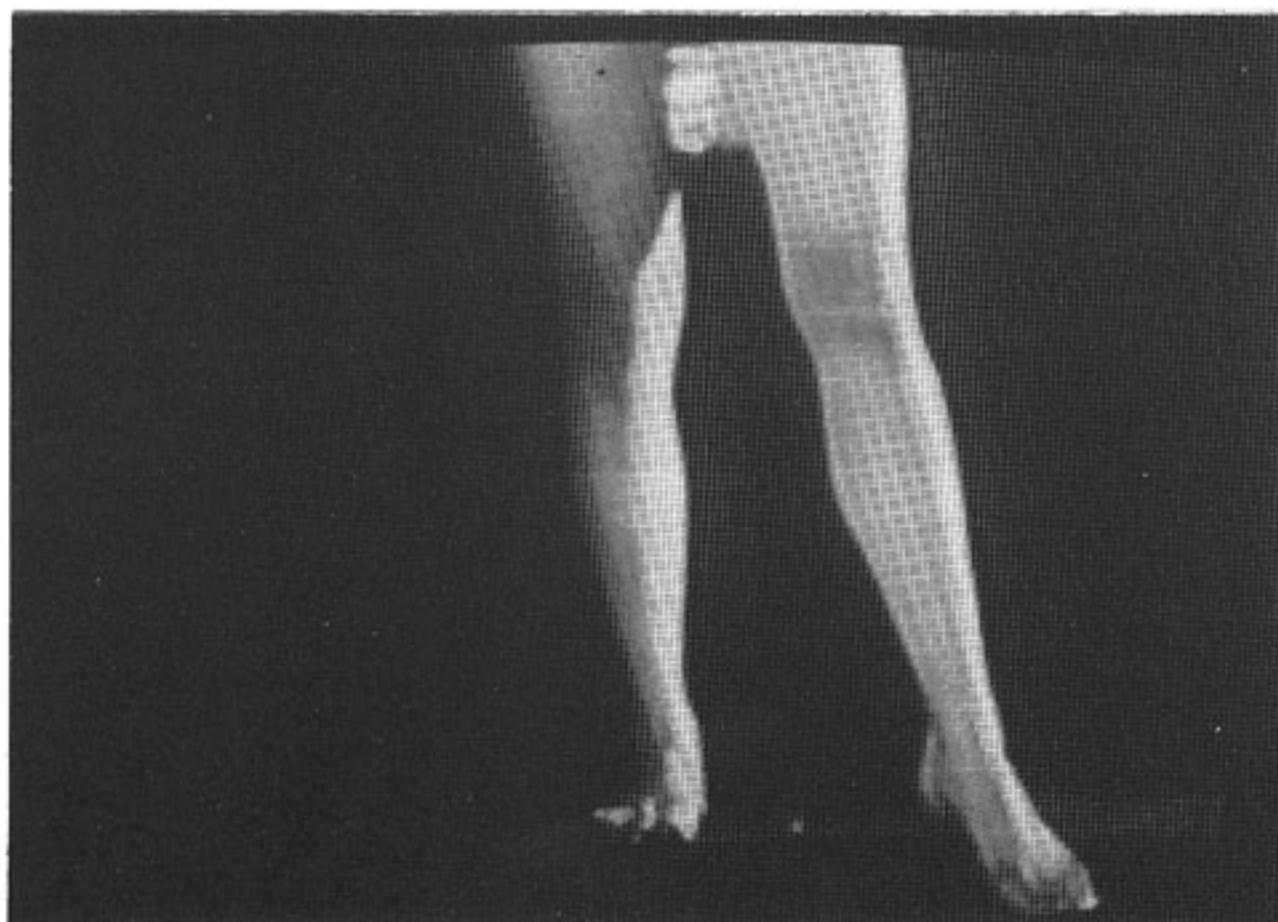
The collection of art work presented in this exhibit represents the culmination of what might be called the first generation of video art. The several artists presented are part of the handful of men and women who have created the art form, people who have been with video from the beginning. Their work is the first which began exploring the medium as a mode of personal and artistic expression in response to the ubiquity of the 'box' and the universally bad fare emanating from it. Could individuals take over this medium that seemed to come from some exalted place on high, and make it their own? This was the birth of the video movement which has had many manifestations, all integral and all important. Some of the video people took the medium to explore the world around them, particularly their own communities, and a kind of socio-political video emerged. This is the kind of video most often seen in Europe. Others took the same medium to explore themselves in the tradition of many of this century's artists who have gone before them. These personal voyages have often been called art. Since, in the process, they have also probed the very nature of the electronic medium called video, their work is called video art.

Nam June Paik, a collector of life, began the movement when in 1965 he purchased the first black and white portable camera and deck and taped his ride from the Sony showroom to a cafe in Greenwich Village where he presented the tape as the first work of video art. Since then he has been a moveable lighthouse guiding others and, at the same time, constantly pushing forward at the boundaries of the medium, inching it toward its potential. Ed Emshwiller moved from a brilliant past in new cinema to video and immediately understood the differences and demands of the new medium. In his first tape, *SCAPEMATES*, he uses video to its fullest with the cathode ray tube giving him an immensely expanded palette. Peter Campus brings a personal intimacy to video, putting himself in the middle of an electronic system which he has created, and, thereby, visualizing an irreality which is yet tangible and witnessed. The video environments he creates usually also involve the public in a video system, which creates for them a new world of imagination simple and startling. Stephen Beck has created his own video synthesizer which he uses with delicate strength to prove beautifully man's domination of the machine for his own esthetic end. Bill and Louise Etra have also advanced the technical capabilities of the medium first by collaborating with Steven Rutt on the development of a synthesizer, and through working with Peter Crown on actually plugging the body into the electronic system to generate images. One of their most sensitive tapes, *NARCISSICON*, demonstrates this powerful interaction of man and machine. Woody and Steina Vasulka have also pushed at the technical boundaries of the medium and worked out a relationship

between electronic image and sound which takes common images to the uncommon level of their imaginations. David Cort and the Videofreex, in an early tape, play with video. They demonstrate the early conquest of this very complex technology by taming it through games, not mocking or destroying it, but by definitely making the machine theirs. Bill Viola who has come to video through his work in electronic music brings with him the same sensitivity for sound and rhythm tying them to the third dimension of his highly personal imagery. Skip Sweeney also draws a musical parallel, this time from popular music, by himself comparing his complete mastery of the feedback process to the swirling stage performance of a rock lead guitarist. Bill Gwin and Bill Rosenquist touch a northern Californian pulse through two totally different landscape tapes — one 'real' and the other 'imaginary' — to reveal man's mystical relationship with nature. In so doing, they pull us back to a slow meditative pace of inner peace and mental recuperation. Juan Downey searches another landscape, that of his native Latin America, in order to find his own soul. His voyages through the real and mystical land of the South American Indian lead to further, but never complete, self-discovery. Frank Gillette also treats landscapes in yet another fashion, that of the pastoral painter. By attuning his movement with the movement of the land- and seascapes around him, he gives subtle glimpses of what revelations can come from that harmony. Finally, Ron Hays creates a completely electronic Landscape, which, like many of the other works, leads us through the television screen to a new space beyond it, a space of new color, form and dimension. His interpretations of classical music are personal experiences which, through his mastery of the technique, he is able to share with us. Can we not also call art the sharing of each other's imaginations.

There are others who should be in this exposition whose work has formed a fundamental part of the creation of video art. We apologize to you and to them, and promise them another day.

The work of these men and women, and many more like them, has led to the creation of several video centers in the U.S. in public television stations like WGBH in Boston, WNET New York, and KQED in San Francisco where many of these artists have or are working; in universities such as the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT where Peter Campus and Ron Hays are working, the State University of New York at Buffalo whose excellent Media Department, created by Gerald O'Grady, invited the Vasulkas as the first in a long list of resident artists. Many of the artists support themselves through teaching in the universities, and the ease of communication through video tape is helping in the creation of a network first among the universities, then between the universities and other video centers. The work is also being collected by important museums of contemporary art such as the Modern and the Whitney in New York and the Longbeach County Museum in Longbeach, California. Important galleries now represent video artists, and new initiatives have been advanced such as Electronic Arts Intermix from whom this exhibit has been acquired.



Don Foresta
Paris, Jan, 25, 1977