

NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL



Presented By
The American Film Institute

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Video: Recent Narratives

Video, a highly versatile image-making tool, has permeated all aspects of contemporary life. Most people are aware only of video's role as a powerful "mass medium" produced and distributed commercially as television. Yet video has been shown to have vast potential as a poetic form of self-expression. Since the late sixties independent videomakers have explored the boundaries of the technology, and as a result have been able to produce individual expressive statements in video that reflect concerns ranging from the personal to the political. These artists have been challenging the conventions, techniques, and styles of video to develop personal stories, express poetic visions, and create metaphorical narrative impressions.

Today major artistic statements are being produced in video by both younger and more established artists. "Video: Recent Narratives" includes 41 videotapes made between 1981 and 1984 and acquired for The Museum of Modern Art collection. All of the works are narrative in form, in that they are based upon the sequential development of verbal and nonverbal images that tell a story. Events unfold, characters are developed, and situations evolve. In many cases, reality is interpreted impressionistically through the videomaker's handling of image, language and sound. The narrative is a familiar form. It is not only the basis of everyday conversation, but also the foundation of most literary, newspaper, television, theatrical, and cinematic material. To quote Roland Barthes, "narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."

Even though video is accessible and the narrative form is familiar, showcases have been limited for videomakers. Excluded from most regular broadcast programs, the independent has pursued screening opportunities in galleries, on public and cable television, and at film/video festivals, all of which provide modest exposure and only nominal remuneration. Today, some artists are adapting the polished vernacular of broadcast programming for both artistic and political use, in order to gain access to larger audiences (and funding).

Technical options for videomakers are limited by their financial resources. Now that it is possible to join all levels of video systems with more sophisticated computers and image-processing equipment, the medium offers almost inexhaustible creative potentials. Broadcast-quality equipment has been largely confined to corporate and commercial studios because of its high cost, whereas consumer video cameras and recording decks are readily available and are relatively inexpensive. Although artists begin their experiments with the latter, they invariably upgrade their equipment as they seek precision, particularly in editing.

Artists in the United States embraced technology

much earlier than did artists abroad, and have had more opportunity to use broadcast-quality systems. This is a result of federal, state, and foundation support, especially artist-in-residency programs at public television and public-access stations. Today, with active governmental competition on the electronics frontier, artists in many more countries are slowly gaining access to better video equipment. This means there are fewer technical differences now between work produced independently in the United States and that done abroad, as this program makes apparent.

Video continues to be a versatile and challenging form for artists. Whether artists have used the simplest or the most sophisticated equipment, whether they have made fact appear to be fiction or fiction fact, the successful work engages the viewer and makes an eloquent statement that could not be expressed in any other form.

Barbara J. London, 1984

Barbara London has been with The Museum of Modern Art's video program since it began in 1974. She has taught at NYU, and lectured in Europe, Japan, and the U.S. She has organized shows of Japanese, Latin American, and Canadian video, and written for such publications as *Artforum* and *Art News*.

Screenings:

Program Descriptions were prepared with the assistance of Keith C. Johnson

City of Angels by Marina Abramovic and F. Uwe Laysiepen (Ulay). Produced by Continental Video, Brussels. 22:00, color, 1983.

In *City of Angels*, set in Bangkok, Abramovic/Ulay use lengthy shots and slow pans to evoke a feeling of stillness. Camera movement is minimal as the Thai people, motionless amid rich colors and textures, gaze meditatively at the viewer.

Sensible Shoes by John Adams. 11:00, color, 1983.

Sensible Shoes is a stream of consciousness narrative told from the point of view of a young woman, with visual images taken from television and magazine advertising. Throughout the piece, John Adams cleverly connects seemingly unrelated words that appear in writing, the source of which is revealed at the tape's conclusion.

Das Frauenzimmer by Claudia Von Alemann. A ZDF German Television production. 75:00, color, 1981.

Das Frauenzimmer (The Women's Room) is a spare, "associative" narrative that has no

dialogue. All of the action occurs in a large European kitchen where women, appearing to belong to one family, move slowly and symbolically about. Von Alemann has created a curious nightmare-like world, where women experience considerable pain.

Perfect Leader by Max Almy. 4:00, color, 1983.

Perfect Leader explores the manufacturing of a prototypical leader, who best suits television and other mass media. Through computer animation, the leader is assigned physical characteristics, clothes, and personality. Almy demonstrates the inappropriateness of the dictator's personality for television, and provides an alternative—a conservatively dressed "Kennedy-type" figure.

Sharkey's Day by Laurie Anderson. 5:00, color, 1983.

Sharkey's Day mixes computer graphics with elements of the artist's performance style, incorporating mime, dance, and an electronically altered voice. The soundtrack describes the doings of Sharkey, who is both androgynous and intangible—a wisp of smoke in human form, a stick figure racing through space.

Viva Magritte by Ros Barron. 19:00, color, 1983.

Ros Barron mixes art from two different periods in her work *Viva Magritte*. Magritte's surrealist style and idiosyncratic characters are juxtaposed with the former Warhol "superstar" Viva. *Viva Magritte* continues Barron's earlier work relating to Magritte, altered time states, and the mingling of art and life.

Pictura Minuta: Portrait of the Urban Poor, Oaxaca, Mexico by Hans Breder. 24:00, color, 1981-83.

Pictura Minuta: Portrait of the Urban Poor, Oaxaca, Mexico goes beyond strict documentary to present the characters and viewpoints found in a small Mexican town. Within his larger framework, Breder creates a "portrait of Rosa," outlining this woman's role in a marriage in which "macho" sets the guidelines for the husband.

Der Westen Lebt by Klaus vom Bruch and Heike-Melba Fendel. 4:00, color, 1983.

Der Westen Lebt (The West Lives) is a vision of the train as a symbol of eroticism. The repetitive sound of the train, altered to resemble rapid breathing, accompanies the image of the speeding train intercut with the artists' dance-like courting.

California Stories by Nancy Buchanan. 23:00, color, 1983.

In *California Stories*, people living in Madison, Wisconsin describe their impressions of California, which come from mass media and stories they have heard. Some of their views are face-

tious, others simply misinformed. Buchanan's humorous work points out people's inclination toward preconceptions.

Sax Island by Hank Bull and Eric Metcalfe. 12:00, color, 1984.

The creation of a style and "camp" humor are the motifs of *Sax Island*. Hand-painted sets and comic book dialogue are incorporated into the adventures of the inhabitants of Sax Island, which is located between Africa and South America.

Juste le Temps by Robert Cahen. 13:00, color, 1983.

Juste le Temps is an impressionistic vision of a train ride through the French countryside. Cahen's treatment of motion involves varying camera speeds and the blurred color created by allowing images to remain or "lag" after the train has moved forward.

Conundrum Clinique by Colin Campbell. 15:00, color, 1981.

In his work *Conundrum Clinique*, Colin Campbell departs from conventional narrative to tell a story about the exchanging of roles in society. The story evolves into a murder mystery, the protagonist meeting his death at the point where he breaks out of his normal sexual identity.

Grimoire Magnetique by Joëlle de la Casinière. Produced by Image Video Maufaucou; music by Jacques Lederlin. 26:00, color, 1983.

In *Grimoire Magnetique* (Magnetic Rhyme), Joëlle de la Casinière adapts to video the story of Hallaj Al Mansur, the 10th century Sufi master of mysticism. The story is told in operatic style based on a musical score by Jacques Lederlin. The text is sung, broken down into computer generated syllables and told in deaf signing, over stills which relate to this Islamic religious tale.

Qui Vole Un Oeuf, Vole Un Oeuf by Elsa Cayo. 15:00, color, 1982.

Videotaped in a Paris supermarket using a surveillance camera, artist Elsa Cayo performs the role of shoplifter in *Qui Vole Un Oeuf, Vole Un Oeuf* (Who Steals an Egg, Steals an Egg). Collaborating with an office worker whose job is to monitor all activity in the store, Cayo examines the system and personalities of the people found in the market.

Possibly in Michigan by Cecelia Condit. Music by Karen Skladany. 12:00, color, 1983.

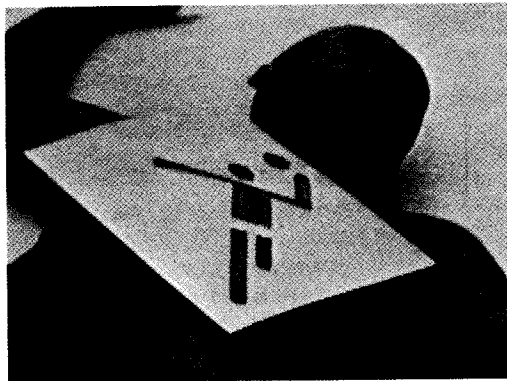
Possibly in Michigan is a humorous and bizarre work in which the themes of fetishism and violence between the sexes are joined in a fairy tale, rock opera scenario. Condit places heavily stylized "slick" shots alongside Super-8 footage in a loosely constructed narrative story about two women who frequent a shopping mall to satisfy their love of perfume.

Historia de la Fisica by Eugenio Dittborn. 15:00, color, 1983.

In his videotape *Historia de la Fisica* (History of Physics), Eugenio Dittborn meshes shots having common themes of creativity and physical exertion. Through the repetition of certain sequences, Dittborn gradually introduces more of a new image and less of an old, until a complete transition has occurred. The effect is similar to the device of anticipation in music.

Information Withheld by Juan Downey. 28:00, color, 1983.

Shot in Egypt, Chile, and New York *Information Withheld* compares signs in everyday life which are supposed to convey information instantly and clearly, such as road signs, to signification in the fine arts, as in classical painting, which resonates with a multiplicity of meanings and ambiguous constructions. Extended segments of landscape are rapidly intercut with illustrations of sign usage to give the work a lush visual and temporal texture.



Information Withheld

New Frontier by Donald Fagan. Directed by Annabel Jankel. 5:00, color, 1983.

New Frontier is an imaginative work set to the artist's tightly arranged music, using live actors and animation. The mood is one of irony, as a young man and his date cavort in his bomb shelter, drinking champagne and listening to Brubeck, finally emerging to find a beautiful world still intact.

What Under the Sun? by Ernest Gusella. 60:00, color, 1984.

In *What Under the Sun?*, Ernest Gusella's lively songs tell the story of the traveler's adventures in Mexico. The artist creates a cast of humorous characters who dance in costumes and masks in this animated musical narrative.

Songs of the Eighties by Doug Hall. 12:00, color, 1983.

Songs of the Eighties is a series of five pieces in record album form which project a sense of precariousness, an apocalyptic courting with disaster. Repeated images of a hammering fist,

objects bursting into flame, and people falling are the portentous verses of this "eighties" anthem.

The Invincible by Gusztáv Hámos. 20:00, color, 1983.

The Invincible is a tribute to the hero in which Hámos assumes the role of Flash Gordon. With his eyes on the camera, Hámos reacts to the action of a radio play not simply as a listener, but as the heroic character himself.

The Force Behind Its Movement by Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield. 17:00, color, 1984.

The Force Behind Its Movement is a study of the movement created by the invisible force of the wind in different environments in Japan and Holland—from the subtle motion of a sheer curtain, to the passage of massive storms viewed by satellite.

Hideo, It's Me, Mama by Mako Idemitsu. 20:00, color, 1983.

Hideo, It's Me, Mama metaphorically depicts the merging of Japanese with western culture, and the changing, potentially fragmenting familial relationships that result. Hideo, an adolescent boy, is seen only as a recorded image on a monitor which sits on the family dinner table. Mama places three meals a day before the television in her desperate attachment to the past.



Chanoyu by Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis. 11:00, color, 1983.

Chanoyu, which derives its title from the traditional Japanese art of serving tea, is a highly sophisticated ritual of great simplicity and harmony. This videotape comments ironically on the disharmony found in western culture by depicting a young Yugoslavian couple drinking tea against a background of a newscaster seen on a television screen.

Mon Tout Premier Baiser by Danielle Jaeggi. 18:00, color and b/w, 1984.

Using her teenage diary as a source, Danielle Jaeggi recounts her first kiss as a young girl. Twenty-five years later, she locates the man who had kissed her and then videotapes their informal

meeting for *Mon Tout Premier Baiser* (My Very First Kiss).

Der Riese by Michael Klier. 82:00, color and b/w, 1983.

Der Riese (The Giant) is an unsettling work recorded from surveillance cameras installed in different urban locations. The ceaseless mechanical scanning pattern reminds the viewer that the cameras are part of an omniscient electronic system. The viewer's role is one of vigilance, of waiting to catch the out-of-the-ordinary or to intrude upon unsuspecting subjects.

Between Daydream and . . . by Naoko Kurotsuka. 9:00, color, 1983.

Between Daydreams and . . . juxtaposes the human form with the textures and contour of landscape. Kurotsuka's camera moves in close to the surface of the human body and finds striking landscape imagery in the movement of the body.

Kikiriki by Tony Labat. 27:00, color, 1983.

In *Kikiriki*, Tony Labat weaves together a series of tales of immigration through broken narrative, flashback, and the divided screen. Labat reconstructs his personal experience of coming to the United States as a teenager, using symbolic characters to depict the problems of entering a different culture.

My Mother Makes Soup Noodles . . . My Father Cuts a Simple Thread by Dimitrije Martinovic. 11:00, color, 1983.

My Mother Makes Soup Noodles . . . My Father Cuts a Simple Thread shows the artist's parents in the work that has occupied them for most of their adult lives. Martinovic compares ideas of work, including labor, craftwork, raising a family, and artistic creativity.

L.A. Nickel by Branda Miller. 9:00, color, 1983.

L.A. Nickel is a visual poem about the inner city, paced by a rock music score. Shots of skid row have a detached, observant quality. Footage taken from a moving car at night shows the boulevards where Los Angeles street hustlers operate, a world which is tough but hauntingly compelling.

J'ai La Tête Qui Tourne by Jacques Louis Nyst. Produced by Continental Vidéo-Wallonie Image Production. 16:00, color, 1984.

J'ai La Tête Qui Tourne is a poetic treatment of an imaginary plan for cosmic rearrangement. A philosophical conversation between two people is interrupted by the materialization of their idea. Through a poetic, electronic collage, Nyst creates an abstract confusion from the rhythms of the everyday world.

Die Distanz Zwischen Mir und Meinen Verlusten by Marcel Odenbach. 9:00, color, 1983.

In *Die Distanz Zwischen Mir und Meinen*

Verlusten (The Distance Between Myself and My Losses), Marcel Odenbach illustrates a stirring soundtrack with images that stimulate the imagination. Utilizing different electronic framing techniques, Odenbach reveals small portions of an image and creates a window that conceals as much as it offers.

Spin Out by Tony Oursler. 15:00, color, 1983.

Spin Out combines painting, sculpture, narrative, and poetry, as well as imaginative "home-made" special effects. The schizophrenic narrative examines the darker aspects of the conscious realm, with the intent of honing in on the subconscious.

Naked Doom by Edward Rankus. 17:00, color, 1983.

The subject of this work is a crime of passion seen from the viewpoint of the criminal, now prisoner, as he writes in his journal. Filled with harsh angles and shadows, *Naked Doom* has an ambiance of macabre humor, described by the artist as a "psychological noir thriller."

Das Feenband by Ulrike Rosenbach. 15:00, color, 1983.

Das Feenband (Visual Gong) is a visual autobiography glimpsed through a round glass held before an upturned monitor. The glass at times is transparent, revealing the monitor, or, through video editing techniques, serves as the monitor itself, with the properties of a magic looking glass.

Cubist's Fantasy II by Yasuo Shinohara. 20:00, color, 1982.

Cubist's Fantasy II uses electronic editing techniques to express the conflicts between Japanese and western culture. A motionless, traditional rock garden in Kyoto becomes a digitally animated grid of colors, then is transformed into the "bamboo kids," Japanese teenagers who dance western style every week in certain Tokyo streets.

Some Call It Bad Luck by Lisa Steele. 50:00, color, 1982.

Some Call It Bad Luck creates the experience of a woman interrogated for a crime she did not commit. Under the relentless probing of the investigators, her story breaks down. Although the tape has the appearance of a documentary, the truth is veiled, putting the viewer in the same position as the prisoner—confused as to what is real and what is fabricated.

The Commission by Woody Vasulka. 45:00, color, 1983.

The Commission is based on the relationship of the violinist Paganini and the composer Berlioz, played by Ernest Gusella and Robert Ashley. Video and audio techniques are used to suggest the

similarity of distortions of reality through electronics and the supernatural.

Anthem by Bill Viola. 11:00, color, 1983.

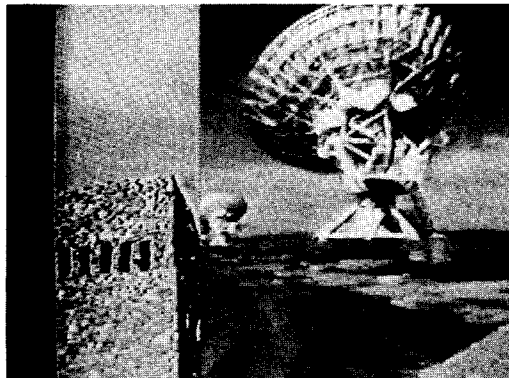
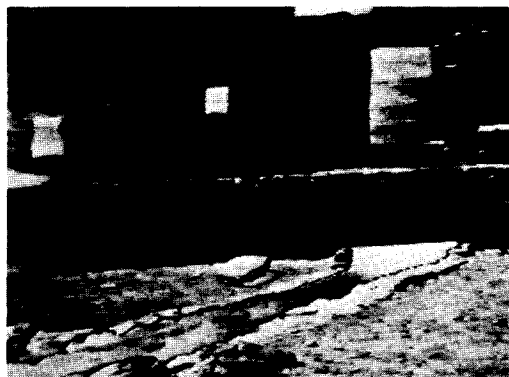
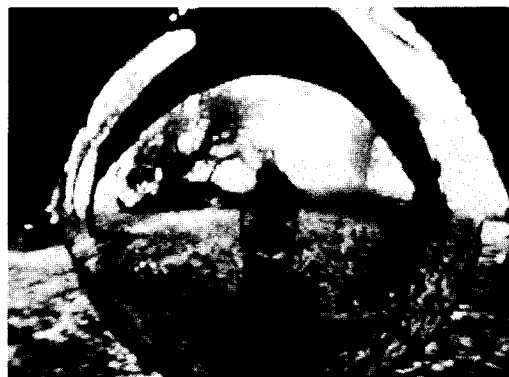
The structure of *Anthem* is provided by a seven-toned soundtrack derived from the scream of a young girl standing alone in Los Angeles's Union Railroad Station. Against this isolated figure, the artist juxtaposes images of industrialized southern California. The eerie soundtrack and the compelling imagery form a powerful poetic comparison between the urban and the natural.

Casablanca II by Peter Weibel. 1:00, color, 1983.

Casablanca II is what the artist calls an "electronic narration." Utilizing the rapid pace and extreme editing style found in commercial advertising, Weibel presents an ironic hero who resembles Bogart, parodying the desires of western culture.

Green Card: An American Romance by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto. 68:00, color, 1982.

Green Card: An American Romance adopts the Hollywood genre of soap opera to present a provocative social satire. A young Japanese artist finds herself in the ironic position of having to marry in order to stay in the United States and thus avoid the trap of marriage in Japan's traditional society.



From the video
installation
The West

The West. Created by Steina; instrumentation, production assistance, and 4 Channel audio environment by Woody Vasulka. Copyright: The Vasulkas, 1984.

The West is a video environment which generates a phenomenological experience of the vast Southwestern landscape, a landscape so arid and clear that any human notation on the land is preserved for a very long time.

The Vasulkas' installation employs a matrix of six monitors in a darkened room. The viewer sees imaginary panning in constant, stately motion, enveloped in the eerie tones of the audio track. This 2-channel video/4-channel audio piece depicts not just the landscape, but also manifestations of human expression on that landscape: ceremonial Indian dwellings, earthworks and installations of scientific equipment. The

primary structural element of the circle is invoked by the Vasulkas' mirrored, rotating globe, the circular structure of the Anasazi ruin Chaco Canyon and the giant silver discs of the VLA (Very Large Array) — a radio telescope system which turns slowly to scan the sky. The natural red and blue tones of the earth and sky are manipulated to produce highly saturated colors which hardly seem out of place in the dramatic landscape.

The West is an elegant demonstration of how image and sound can constitute a complex mapping of the presence of the individual in a vast landscape of space and time.

The West was produced through State University of New York's Program in the Arts, with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts.



The Vasulkas

Woody and Steina Vasulka were pioneers in the development of the electronic arts. In 1970 they founded "The Kitchen," a New York City media theater and exhibition center. Steina has continued explorations in the possibilities for the generation and manipulation of the electronic image. In 1978 her exhibit, "Machine Vision," was held at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1976. In 1974 Woody became a faculty member of the Center for the Media Study at State University of New York, Buffalo, and began his investigations into computer controlled video, building "The Vasulka Imaging System," a personal imaging facility. He is a 1979 Guggenheim Fellow. Since their move to Santa Fe in 1980, Woody has produced *Artifacts* and *The Commission*. Steina has produced a series of videotapes relating to the land of the Southwest.