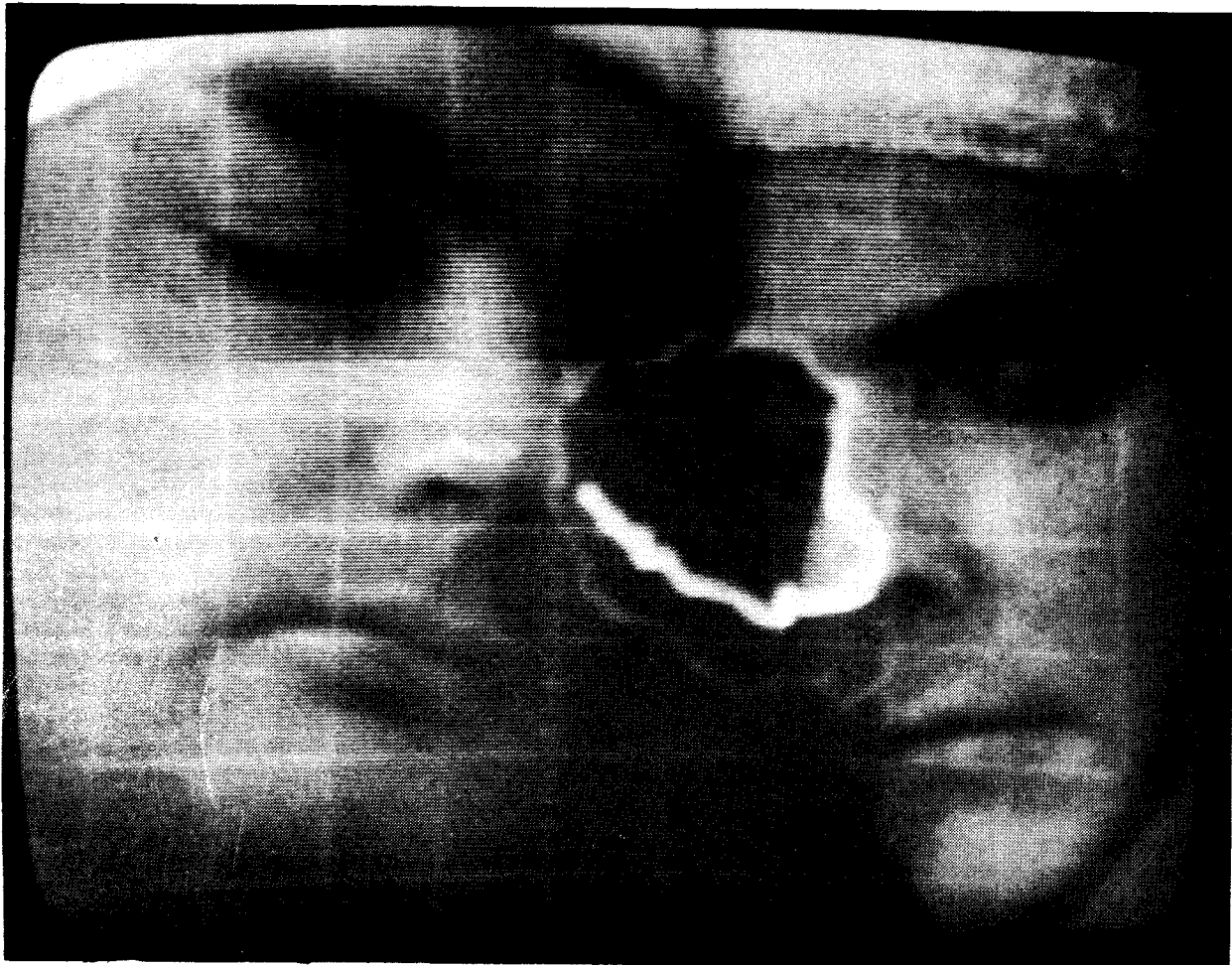


# ARTV V L E K

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NINA SOBEL: INTERACTIVE ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPHIC VIDEO DRAWING, 1974, 10 minutes, sound, at the Long Beach Museum of Art.

## The Chinese Show

San Francisco

H.J. Weeks

One of the major exhibitional coups of the decade is now on view at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. The exhibit consists of Chinese artifacts unearthed and catalogued since the establishment of the People's Republic twenty years ago. Since mainland China has been closed to westerners for most of these years, the material in this display is as new for European and American scholars as it is for the general public. We normally use the term, for none of the pieces in the show were strictly conceived as a pure expression of the artist's sensibilities. Many of them were functional or ceremonial objects. As we look at them with alien eyes, inevitably, if unconsciously, we impose our standards on the objects. We can see them in terms of our own concepts of design or composition — and through these qualities sense the expression of the maker's individuality and the uniqueness of a culture and time during which the works were made.

To my eyes and mind, much of what is presented is beautiful; all of it is of great interest. The famous jade suit of the Princess Tou Wan, like the equally famous solid gold coffin of Tutankhamen, was made in the cultural belief that the material would protect and preserve the body of the personage it sheltered, thus insuring a prosperous afterlife. Much of the other material on display was also designed to accompany a departing soul and provide it with material comforts which would allow it to exist as comfortably as before.

Such concepts make the esthetic responses of today's viewers immaterial, but it is through an esthetic response that someone like myself, whose religious views are so alien to those held by the makers and users, can come to grips with the objects. The jade suit, for instance, is such that I can only look at it with curiosity and, finding it impressive, discover that other objects in the exhibition appeal more to my esthetic tastes.

Those viewers familiar with art history concepts as applied to western objects by western scholars will find that a similar approach will enable them to discover developments in Chinese art and culture which can be viewed similarly, though some of the Chinese terminology and classifications differ from ones used in the west. The exhibition is carefully arranged chronologically, enabling viewers to walk down through time, observing the complex development of cultural concepts and the growth in technical facility of artists and workers.

This development is most clearly seen in the ceramics. Such early pieces as *Pottery jar with stippling* and *Pottery jar with finger-nail*

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## Southland Video Anthology

Melinda Wertz

Long Beach

David Ross' massive (more than sixty artists) *Southland Video Anthology*, on view through September 7th at the Long Beach Museum of Art and funded by the County of Los Angeles, represents an exhibition genre that is rare in the inflationary seventies — a broad survey of a geographical region. Video is perhaps the only economically feasible medium through which in the seventies a small museum like Long Beach can provide a sequel to exhibitions like Maurice Tuchman's *American Sculpture of the Sixties*.

Beyond the geographical limitation to work done in Southern California, Ross has made a definite effort to be as inclusive as possible, representing graduate students alongside old masters like Nam June Paik. (Nonetheless, he viewed more than twice the number of tapes that are being shown.) Because the selection is uneven in quality, some criticism has been voiced regarding Ross' democratic attitude, which confers historical status on students. I see the unevenness of the exhibition, however, as a plus for the viewer. As was pointed out by Michael Compton of the Tate Gallery, London, at last week's convention of museum directors in Los Angeles, no art museum deliberately sets out to show the art of a particular period inclusively, from first to tenth rate examples, but instead at least attempts to align itself with qualitative judgments. This stance contrasts markedly with the anthropology museum's avid collection of every fragment of an era, regardless of quality. Ross refers to the trend toward a post-literate age in his introductory catalogue notes, indicating that he leans away from a view of art as an elitist activity and toward a blurring of distinctions between the activity of art and everything else in the culture.

Nonetheless, *Southland Video Anthology* provides an invaluable opportunity for viewers to develop their own standards of quality and taste with regard to the video medium. As any connoisseur knows, only by seeing and comparing in depth is the critical faculty able to develop. The availability of thirty hours of videotape for a period of three months is unprecedented, and prevents any Southern California art buff from claiming ignorance of the medium except through laziness.

Ross' conception for the exhibition grew out of

his awareness, as one of the foremost video experts in the country, of the invisibility of California video artists here, in New York and in Europe (which he notes as largely a function of the lack of support of experimental video on the part of the NET station here, as opposed to New York or Boston). In spite of the medium's poor exposure, he feels that the history of video can largely be traced in terms of what has happened in Southern California. Beginning with Nauman's seminal exhibition of videotapes as an art medium at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in 1968; adding the presence of Nam June Paik, uncontested technological wizard of the medium, at Cal Arts in 1971 where he developed his video synthesizer; to the influence of John Baldessari and William Wegman as teachers at Cal Arts and Cal State Long Beach respectively, the region has subsequently spawned a whole generation of artists who are utilizing video in one form or another.

Of course, there is no more stylistic unity

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PAINTED WOODEN UNICORN, Western Han Dynasty, 2nd century AD, unearthed 1959, Wuwei, Kansu.