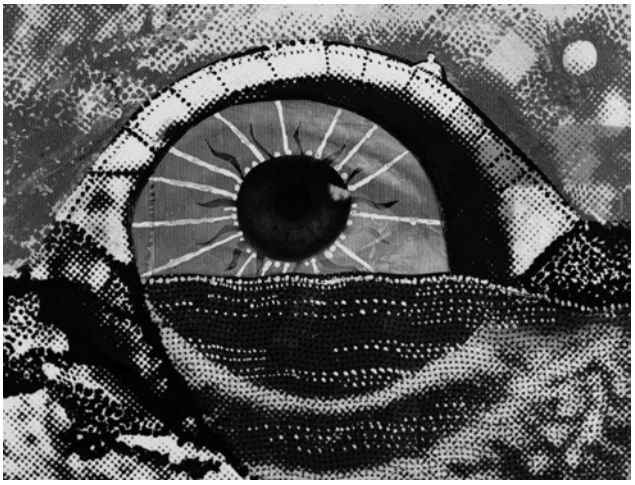
STAN VANDERBEEK

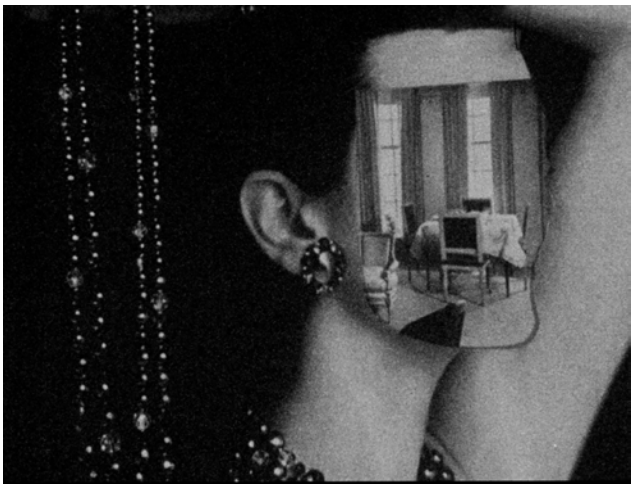
Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984) was a prolific multimedia artist known for his pioneering work in experimental film and computer art. He studied at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. New York (1948-1952). and at Black Mountain College. Asheville. North Carolina (1949-1950). Recent exhibitions that have featured VanDerBeek's work include *Signals: How Video Transformed the World*. The Museum of Modern Art. New York. NY (2023): *Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age. 1952–1982.* Los Angeles County Museum of Art. CA (2023): *CONSOLAS: Democracia para la imagen digital (1972-2003)*. ETOPIA_Centre for Art and Technology. Zaragoza. ES (2020): *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* at the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center. Asheville. NC (2019): *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done* at the Museum of Modern Art. New York. NY (2018): *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason. 1950-1980* at the Met Breuer. New York. NY (2017): *Merce Cunningham: Common Time* at the Walker Art Center. Minneapolis. MN (2017): *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art. 1905-2016* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. New York. NY (2016): *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College.1933-1957* at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Boston. MA (2015): the 55th Venice Biennale. IT (2013): and *Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom* at the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Cambridge. MA. and at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. TX (2011). VanDerBeek's work can be found in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art. New York. NY: Whitney Museum of American Art. New York. NY: Walker Art Center. Minneapolis. MN: Art Institute of Chicago. IL: Los Angeles County Museum of Art. CA: Centre Pompidou. Paris. FR: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Madrid. ES.

Musée
June 13, 2023

MUSÉE
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE
Written by Nicole Miller



Magenta Plains presents the experimental cinema of the prolific Stan VanDerBeek in See Saw Seems. This exhibition features three of VanDerBeek's radical collage animation films of the early 1960s, *A La Mode* (1960), *Breathdeath* (1963), and *See Saw Seems* (1965). VanDerBeek employs newspapers, magazines, and found footage, intermixing media to assemble animations in a collage format. Through surrealist techniques, he juxtaposes otherwise unrelated images to unsuspecting audiences, showcasing the power of the fusion of new technology and the unconscious mind. VanDerBeek investigates what he calls the art of seeing, challenging what constitutes reality, and exposing the ironies and illusions in motion pictures and our firmly established societal expectations.



In the film still above, an elegant room with a small table and long drapes is collaged over a woman's face. Opulent jewelry hangs on her neck and ears as she poses fashionably, her arm curved above her head. Although her facial features are obscured, her regal stance and expensive gems prompt the audience to assume she adheres to 1960s beauty standards. VanDerBeek chooses not to reveal her emotions as they are not what the public is encouraged to analyze. We do not dwell on what expression lies under the stylish room. By likening her face to furniture, VanDerBeek comments on women as commodities, emphasizing the pervasiveness of the objectification of the female form within pop culture.

Breathdeath examines life and death through a darkly comedic lens, featuring skeletons, explosions, and comedian, Harpo Marx, playing the harp on a battlefield. Questions emerge from this surrealistic world and are complicated by the frantic speed at which the images cut across the screen. The audience becomes overwhelmed by the onset of content, and a sense of anxiety is produced as death is portrayed as comical. The plot's disjointedness and the clips' absurdity allow VanDerBeek to express how lightly humankind can take the weighty topic of death. The destructive actions of our governments, who often justify violence, counter our notions of death as distant and unavoidable.

VanDerBeek's experimental film, *See Saw Seems*, escalates the mystical elements of his animation, creating a dreamlike atmosphere that investigates the boundaries of sight, memory, and illusion. As seen in the film above, a scene may appear like a simple castle on a hill. However, looking deeper, we may observe that the hills and trees produce an abstraction of the female form. VanDerBeek explores how our observations transform throughout the viewing and urges his audience to develop new conclusions, highlighting the ever-changing nature of perception. By making sense of reality with illusion through his experimental films, VanDerBeek advanced the avant-garde landscape of the twentieth century.

Artnet News
May 19, 2023

artnet news

Independent's Spring Edition Demonstrates the Market's Turn Toward Diverse, Thoughtful Work Over Trophies

The fair saw a significant uptick in sold-out booths and attendance.

Caroline Goldstein, May 19, 2023

The scene at Independent New York 2023. Courtesy of Independent.

As New York continues to barrel through a two-week marathon of fairs, auctions, and events, moments of reflection are hard won. In the wake of its presentation at Spring Studios May 11–14, Independent has issued its 2023 Market Report, which outlines key takeaways that offer clues to where the market is headed more broadly.

Distinguished by its curated, invitation-only model, the fair saw a marked uptick in attendance and sales this year. Twenty-five percent of the booths sold out completely, double the amount from the 2022 edition. The highest reported transaction was $150,000, which was the selling price for sculptor Richard Van Buren's historical installation *Untitled* (1969/2023), consisting of resin and fiberglass works dangling like talismanic feathers from Garth Greenan's booth wall.

While the major auction houses are seeing a dip in sales for multimillion-dollar trophies, it appears that interest in more accessibly priced works is the sweet spot for both seasoned and new collectors. Independent has carved a niche for itself within the crowded fair landscape as a source of discoveries, whether by emerging ultra-contemporary artists (defined by Artnet News as artists born after 1974) or by artists of the 20th century who were passed over because of their race, gender identity, or access to the prevailing establishments.

As institutions and individuals take stock and reassess what had previously been cemented as art-historical canon, “the market is leading, or sometimes following, some of the evolving value questions that set criteria for change,” observed Independent founder Elizabeth Dee in the report. “Much of this important and time intensive work is a partnership between gallerists, curators, and collectors that can be accelerated by or be a result of a strong exhibition at Independent.”

At Magenta Plains booth, works by the late experimental filmmaker and artist Stan VanDerBeek capped off a triumvirate of presentations around the city focused on 1960s Surrealist-inflected collages, which were the foundation of his radical animated films.

Stan VanDerBeek, *Untitled* (1964). Courtesy of the artist, Magenta Plains, and Independent New York.

“We are seeing an extraordinary reaction to a Stan VanDerBeek moment in New York right now,” gallery director Olivia Smith told Artnet News, pointing to his 1960s films running at the Canal Street gallery; his seminal *Movie-Drome* on view as part of the exhibition “Signals: How Video Transformed the World” at the Museum of Modern Art; and the handmade collages on the stand at Independent. The gallery sold six collages for $20,000 each, with one placed a major institution, Smith said. “VanDerBeek’s ideas around visual velocity and immersive image networks predicted how we consume media today.”

Art Review
May 18, 2023

ArtReview

The Rogue Signals of Half a Century of Video Art

Jenny Wu Reviews 18 May 2023 ArtReview

At MoMA's largest media exhibition to date, the polemical power of transmission-based works is explored in works that are at once personal and political

Mona Hatoum's 1988 video *Measures of Distance* features photographs the artist took of her mother in the shower. According to a letter from her mother, which Hatoum reads aloud, these intimate images of artistic expression irritated the artist's father, who perceived them as a form of "trespass" against him. The Lebanese Civil War had since separated the women – one in Beirut, the other in London. Nevertheless, the mother's cadences can be heard in the daughter's voice, as if Hatoum were smuggling her mother's personality out from behind a patriarchal censor. Such ideas – that the image, once captured, trespasses against authority, that people have the power to transmit unsanctioned information across time and space, and that broadcast makes the personal political and vice versa – are latent in a wide range of practices considered 'video art'. These tensions and revelations recur throughout MoMA's sprawling sixth-floor exhibition *Signals: How Video Transformed the World* – in which Hatoum's piece appears along with over 70 other transmission-based works – forming the emotional rip current of what is, at first glance, a show that's all about visuals.

Signals is MoMA's largest media exhibition to date, showcasing over half a century of work starting from the 1960s, a decade marked by the release of the Sony Portapak, the first commercially available portable camera, which put agency in the hands of ordinary consumers and artists, even as mass media became synonymous with corporate power in the West and the state apparatus in the East. As the curators point out, viewers are seldom brainwashed so much as they are actively 'talking back', jamming signals, pirating, infiltrating and testing alternatives to mass media. *Signals* proceeds from the truism that the televisual image is both constructed and unstable, and argues that these qualities are what make video a powerful tool for protest. Throughout the show, we see ways in which rogue signals persist across time and geography, connecting, for instance, pro-democracy struggles in China to those in Myanmar and the fight to preserve public space in Russia to similar questions being asked in Sweden.

The first work one encounters on the sixth floor is Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz's *Hole in Space* (1980), a split-screen satellite broadcast between Lincoln Center in New York and Century City in Los Angeles that stands sentry on adjoining walls by the entrance. In this then-novel work, crowds in two cities gather, with enthusiasm and slight disbelief, before their counterparts on the opposite coast. This early telematic transmission primes the viewer to spot moments of recognition between everyday people separated by literal and figurative distance throughout the show.

It is important to note that the medium of video is not solely the image on the screen, nor is it limited to the screen itself or where the image is stored. It is instead something wholly immaterial: an instant transmission that reaches a global network. Nonetheless, *Signals* does not hide the hardware that keeps its transmissions flowing. Rows of monitors, hot beams of light from projectors and structures like Stan VanDerBeek's 1964–65 *Movie-Drome* – the refabricated dome of a grain silo in which viewers lie on cushions and watch montages flashing overhead – fill the exhibition space and compete for attention. Audio from each work bleeds into the galleries, adding a layer of white noise to the chaotic energy in the rooms. Within the frenzy, however, patterns emerge: crowds assemble, classified information leaks, images become visible, then fugitive, glitched and transfigured.

Capturing and circulating footage from political movements indexes and potentially implicates those present at scenes of unrest. Doing so, however, is a way to oppose both the state and mass media's selective and exploitative gaze. In response to news blackouts in China after the Tiananmen Square massacre that suppressed public knowledge of the death toll in Beijing, Dara Birnbaum excavated clips related to the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations, including the Chinese government's decree to end satellite broadcasting. Her five-channel video installation *Tiananmen Square: Break-In Transmission* (1990) loops these clips on LCD screens extending from the tentacular arms of a large, conspicuous metal scaffold.

Tiffany Sia's short film *Never Rest / Unrest* (2020), made 30 years later on Sia's iPhone during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, documents the quieter, less newsworthy intervals of civil unrest: protesters' subway commutes to and from demonstrations, conversations in secluded alleyways and moments of peace. Works such as these commemorate, to quote Harun Farocki, whose work also appears in the show, those who 'dared to record' what lay before their eyes.

While the televisual medium's knack for bridging physical distances is no longer ground-breaking, its poignancy still lies in its ability to close temporal gaps. For example, Emily Jacir's *Ramallah / New York* (2004-05), which compares the cities' hair salons, shawarma shops and travel agencies on twin flat-screen monitors, feels stilted in its critical capacity. Conversely, Fujiko Nakaya's *Friends of Minamata Victims – Video Diary* (1972), which documents protesters stationed in shifts outside the headquarters of a Tokyo-based corporation charged with severe cases of mercury poisoning, demonstrates more complexity because the artist not only filmed the protest but also brought a battery-powered TV monitor to the sit-in, which she used to play back footage from previous shifts, allowing the crowd to see and relate to those who'd come before them.

Absent from the exhibition are names like Vito Acconci, Lynda Benglis and Bruce Nauman, whose videoworks appear in Rosalind Krauss's oft-cited 1976 essay 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism'. *Signals* has little to do with narcissism. However, resonances between the self – the personal – and the political are omnipresent. Consider, finally, Martine Syms's *Lessons I–CLXXX* (2014–18), a 90-minute visual poem constructed from found footage that indexes the Black radical tradition via a hyperspecific culling of home videos, memes, talk shows and sitcoms. Likewise, *Signals* traverses an eclectic medium's history in a way that illuminates human connections within the polemical and vice versa. In a world whose social spheres have collapsed into handheld devices, the show attunes us to how far connectivity has gotten us and how much farther we still have to go.

Signals: How Video Transformed the World *at MoMA, New York, through 8 July*

The NYTimes
May 11, 2023

ART FAIR REVIEW

The Independent, More Inclusive Than Ever

Important lessons absorbed from cultural upheavals have translated into a more thoughtful fair around issues of representation.

By Martha Schwendener
May 11, 2023

If you were holding your breath for another art fair filled to the steel-girder ceilings with contemporary painting, you can let go. The Independent, the local-brand fair that features art ranging from emerging to the radical old-guard, is not it. The current edition at Spring Studios in TriBeCa, which opens to the public Friday, includes 69 exhibitors from 11 countries, lots of photography and ephemera, idiosyncratic installations, and career resets — and yes, a healthy dose of painting.

You do feel a shift here, though. This fair feels more thoughtful, even reflective. Artists of color are celebrated and several presentations focus on older artists, trying to refine old narratives and biases. Here are some of the booths and tendencies that caught my eye.

Reconsidering Careers

Two other artists getting a refined look are Stan VanDerBeek at **Magenta Plains (Booth B. 6)** and Eleanor Antin at **Richard Saltoun (Booth C. 6)**. VanDerBeek's recreated "Movie-Drome" (1964-65) of projected images is in "Signals: How Video Transformed the World" at the Museum of Modern Art and a current show at Magenta Plains. However, his collages, made for his animations, are potent art works on their own. Antin's photographic-conceptual project "100 Boots" — black rubber boots photographed in public spaces — are a terrific project, and Saltoun is showing "100 Boots Head East" (1973), in which the boots sit like eerie, funny witnesses and participants around New York.

e-Flux Criticism
March 24 2023

e-flux Criticism

“Signals: How Video Transformed the World”

Dennis Lim

Marta Minujín, *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad*, 1966. Documents, slides, and ephemera, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, Marta Minujín Studio, and Henrique Faria, New York. © Marta Minujín.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA),
New York
March 5–July 8, 2023

"Video is everywhere," begins the wall text at the entrance to MoMA's largest video show in decades, as if on a cautionary note. Equally, to borrow an aphorism from Shigeko Kubota, subject of a recent MoMA exhibition: "Everything is video." (It is worth noting that Kubota said this in 1975.) In tracing the evolution of video from its emergence as a consumer technology in the 1960s to its present-day ubiquity, "Signals" covers a dauntingly vast sixty-year span. A lot happened—not least to video itself—in the years separating the Portapak and the iPhone, half-inch tape and the digital cloud, and as the material basis of video changed, so too did its role in daily life.

This sprawling, frequently thought-provoking show proposes a path through these dizzying developments by considering video as a political force. In their catalog essay, curators Stuart Comer and Michelle Kuo call the exhibition "not a survey but a lens, reframing and revealing a history of massive shifts in society." Not incidentally, this view of the medium—as a creator of publics and an agent of change—is in direct contradiction to a famous early perspective advanced by Rosalind Krauss, who in a 1976 essay wondered if "the medium of video is narcissism."[1] Seen in this light, Song Dong's *Broken Mirror* (1999), on view in the first gallery, acquires a neatly symbolic function. In Song's four-minute loop, one Beijing street scene after another is revealed as a reflection when a hammer enters the frame, smashing the mirror to expose an entirely different scene behind the glass, often startling bystanders who direct curious gazes at the camera. The mirror-reflection that was, for Krauss, inherent to early video's operations vanishes in an instant, giving way to an altered social situation, a more complicated reality.

Occupying MoMA's sixth floor galleries and spilling over onto an online channel, "Signals" includes more than seventy works, drawn largely from the museum's collection, and running the gamut from single-channel tapes to multi-screen installations. The multiplicity of forms speaks to video's adjacency to performance and conceptual art, and also to its eventual absorption into the broader categories of multimedia and digital art as well as artists' cinema. Many of the pieces here were conceived for the gallery space, but a significant number have also circulated on television, in cinemas, or on the internet. The plasticity of the medium is pronounced throughout, evident in the glitch and ghostly decay of old analog tape, the synthesized distortions of Nam June Paik and other formalists, and the increasing malleability of the video image as it is coupled with CGI, game technology, or AI software.

The show's notion of politics affords an alternative genealogy, bypassing many of the usual suspects who might otherwise populate a decades-spanning video exhibition. Conflict zones, historical cusps, and social movements are well represented, in works that encompass acts of witness and testimony, performance and protest, allegory and ethnography. Many share an oppositional stance, and "Signals" suggests that one way to tell the story of video is to note its many adversaries, the systems and structures that this most viral of formats has attempted to circumvent or infiltrate: broadcast television, corporate media, government repression and censorship, surveillance technology, the carceral state, and various regimes of visibility that have shaped and skewed our understanding of the world.

This exhibition captures the early promise of video in an array of works that seize on the nascent technology's ease of recording, playback, and transmission relative to film. The documentary impulse, prizing vérité immediacy and spontaneous vox-pop testaments, is strong in the late '60s and early '70s—in electrifying footage of Fred Hampton, interviewed in Chicago in 1969 by the Videofreex collective weeks before he was murdered by the police, or in TVTV's guerilla foray behind the scenes of the 1972 Republican National Convention, *Four More Years.* Pre-internet telecommunications experiments reveled in the wonders of simultaneity: for their "Send/Receive" project (1977), Liza Béar and Keith Sonnier secured the use of a NASA satellite link to create a live feed between artists in New York and San Francisco; with *Hole in Space* (1980), Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz staged a proto-video chat, establishing real-time interaction between public spaces in New York and Los Angeles, to the delight of unsuspecting passers-by who happened upon screens showing their counterparts in the distant city at life-size. Fujiko Nakaya's *Friends of Minamata Victims - Video Diary* (1972) documents the eighty-first day of a sit-in at the Tokyo headquarters of the Chisso Corporation, responsible for a wastewater discharge that caused widespread mercury poisoning. The tape concludes with the day's footage being replayed for activists on a portable monitor, refiguring video's signature feedback loop as a dynamic political process.

It would be naive to think that video was ever simply a window onto the world. One might argue that another mode comes to dominate not long into the medium's existence: video as a contestation with the world that video wrought, a world of too many images, too much information. Well before our age of post-truth bombardment, the television news broadcast is taken up as a form and a language to warp (Wolf Vostell's *Vietnam*, 1968–71/72), deconstruct (Martha Rosler's *If It's Too Bad To Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION*, 1985), and parody (Marcelo Tas and Fernando Meirelles's *Varela in Serra Pelada*, 1984). Dara Birnbaum's *Tiananmen Square: Break-In Transmission* (1990) dislodges several fragments from the media repository produced by the Tiananmen protests of 1989, including the exact moment that the Chinese authorities cut off the access of TV news crews, and disperses them across a display—four small LCD monitors suspended from the ceiling and one larger, wall-mounted cathode-ray monitor switching among the four at random—that encourages a closer look at these partial views.

"Signals" repeatedly attests to the impossibility of grasping the big picture. While an installation like Birnbaum's gets this across with rigor and purpose, this position can also settle into glib conventional wisdom, as in Frances Stark's *U.S. Greatest Hits Mix Tape Volume I* (2019). Across six tablet screens, YouTube clips pertaining to what the accompanying text vaguely and confusingly calls "the history of US military intervention"—in Syria (1949), Iran (1953), Afghanistan (1979), Libya (2011), Ukraine (2014), and Venezuela (2019)—are paired with a Billboard chart-topper of the day. There is no prospect of sensing, let alone comprehending, the very different particulars of these situations (which range from coup d'etats to popular uprisings) or the nature of American involvement in each, since the point is to flatten everything into an atmosphere of distanced distraction.

In individual works—and in the show as a whole—the condition of inundation is both subject and strategy. The problem of our shattered attention spans, for which many would blame the proliferation of video screens, is not unrelated to the problem of exhibiting moving images in gallery settings. “Signals” confronts the viewer with no less than thirty-five hours of material. Certainly, a good number of these works do not ask to be experienced in full or from beginning to end. Temporal linearity is thwarted in the circular polyphony of Nil Yalter’s *Tower of Babel (Immigrants)* (1974–77/2016), and in the enveloping planetarium-like attraction that is Stan VanDerBeek’s reconstructed *Movie-Drome* (1964–65) (which actually deploys 16mm projection; the video aspect stems from the work’s unrealized potential as one node in a global “culture intercom”). But many single-channel pieces that require sustained engagement are presented as part of looped programs. Nearly forty videos—including important work by Ant Farm, Howardena Pindell, and Walid Raad, and lesser-seen standouts like Michael Klier’s *Der Riese (The Giant)* (1983), an eerie city symphony assembled from surveillance footage, and Yau Ching’s layered portrait of exile and dislocation, *Flow* (1993)—reside within the nine monitors that make up a viewing nook beyond the last gallery. Over two lengthy visits to the show, I could not help noticing that most museumgoers did not linger here for more than a few minutes, if at all. Anticipating the limits of spectatorial attention, MoMA has made many of these videos available for online streaming—a logical and meaningful decision that increases the reach of these works even as it effectively consigns them to a context of even greater overload and inattention.

The central propositions of “Signals” are inarguable. It is self-evident that video is everywhere, that it has transformed the world. The exhibition offers a compelling selective history of how this happened, cutting through multiple technological and geopolitical upheavals. What is less certain is video’s place in this transformed world: the view of the present that emerges here is diffuse and tentative, perhaps understandably so. It is hard to discern the shape of things as they change before our eyes, but it is also all too easy from our clouded, cluttered perspective to succumb to a kind of defeatist teleology. In accounts of both moving-image circulation and political film and video, one often detects a palpable longing for the before times: before the digital deluge in the former instance, before helpless despair and apathy in the latter.

At its most suggestive, “Signals” complicates these familiar chronologies, putting old work in productive conversation with new, as in the first gallery. Here one finds Gretchen Bender’s eternally relevant *TV Text and Image (Donnell Library Center Version)* (1990), with its sly block-lettered phrases (“SELF-CENSORSHIP,” “NO CRITICISM”) superimposed on live television broadcasts; the participatory playfulness of two early experiments in interactivity, Marta Minujín’s *Simultaneidad en simultaneidad* (Simultaneity in simultaneity, 1966) and Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider’s *Wipe Cycle* (1969/2022); and two recent works that chart different ways through and around the media flood. Martine Syms’s *Lessons I-CLXXX* (2014–18) consists of 180 30-second clips, fashioned from internet-sourced and original material and playing in randomized order, an epic collage of Black existence that uses its whiplash tonal shifts as a poetic organizing principle. Largely shot in a vertical aspect ratio and strikingly mounted in front of a floor-to-ceiling window at the show’s entrance, Tiffany Sia’s *Never Rest/Unrest* (2020) seeks to capture the 2019 Hong Kong protests as it was lived on the front lines, searching for an ethical vantage on events that are usually spectacularized and seen from the outside. The works in this space are disparate in their methods and registers, but in their complex entanglements with issues of immediacy, circulation, and (self-)representation, one senses a common question being addressed with urgency and imagination, the question of what it means for video to be political—and, as per Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, to be made politically. “Signals” shows us a multitude of answers, some more persuasive and consequential than others. In so doing, it also affirms that this is a question always worth asking.

ARTnews
March 6 2023

ARTnews Est. 1902

MoMA's Biggest Video Art Survey in Years Is a Winner

BY ALEX GREENBERGER March 6, 2023 10:40am

Nam June Paik, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (still), 1984.

Let's start with a sad fact: the last time New York's **Museum of Modern Art** staged a sizable survey of **video art** was in 1995, nearly three decades ago. Better late than never to remedy that, however, and right now, the museum's spacious sixth floor is filled with moving images in that medium—roughly 35 hours' worth, to be exact. That's not even counting works whose durations are not listed on the show's checklist.

The exhibition, titled "Signals: How Video Transformed the World," offers more footage than anyone could ever absorb in a single visit. Individual pieces in the show only seem to reinforce the idea that this is indeed the point.

There's **Dara Birnbaum**'s *Tiananmen Square: Break-In Transmission* (1990), an installation featuring four armatures hung from the ceiling, each with a screen attached that plays videotaped images of Chinese students protesting governmental oppression. A surveillance switcher cycles out their feeds on a fifth screen in the center, making it so that a partial view of all this footage is the only possible experience here.

Not far away, there's Ming Wong's *Windows on the World (Part 2)*, a 2014 installation composed of 24 screens' worth of material dealing with the history of science fiction in China. Some monitors display footage of fictional Chinese astronauts boarding rockets; others offer news broadcasts about space travel; still others contain text about recent forays into the genre by Cixin Liu, Jia Zhangke, and more. Arranged in a style that recalls displays once used to sell TVs before the era of flatscreens, these monitors demand darting eyes and probing brains, but they never allow viewers to take it all in at once.

Dara Birnbaum, *Tiananmen Square: Break-In Transmission*, 1990.

No one is expected to watch every single second in “Signals,” a show that rewards fast-paced sampling rather than prolonged, contemplative viewing, and if anything, this is to the show’s credit. Curators Stuart Comer and Michelle Kuo have organized a thrilling experience, one that gets to the heart of what video art is all about: the sense that we need no longer be passive viewers who are force-fed a one-way stream of information.

“Signals” can’t really be called a history of video art. The show, Comer and Kuo write in its catalogue, is “not a survey but a lens, reframing and revealing a history of massive shifts in society up to the present day.” That frees them from having to contend with some classics of the medium and to lure in some unexpected artists.

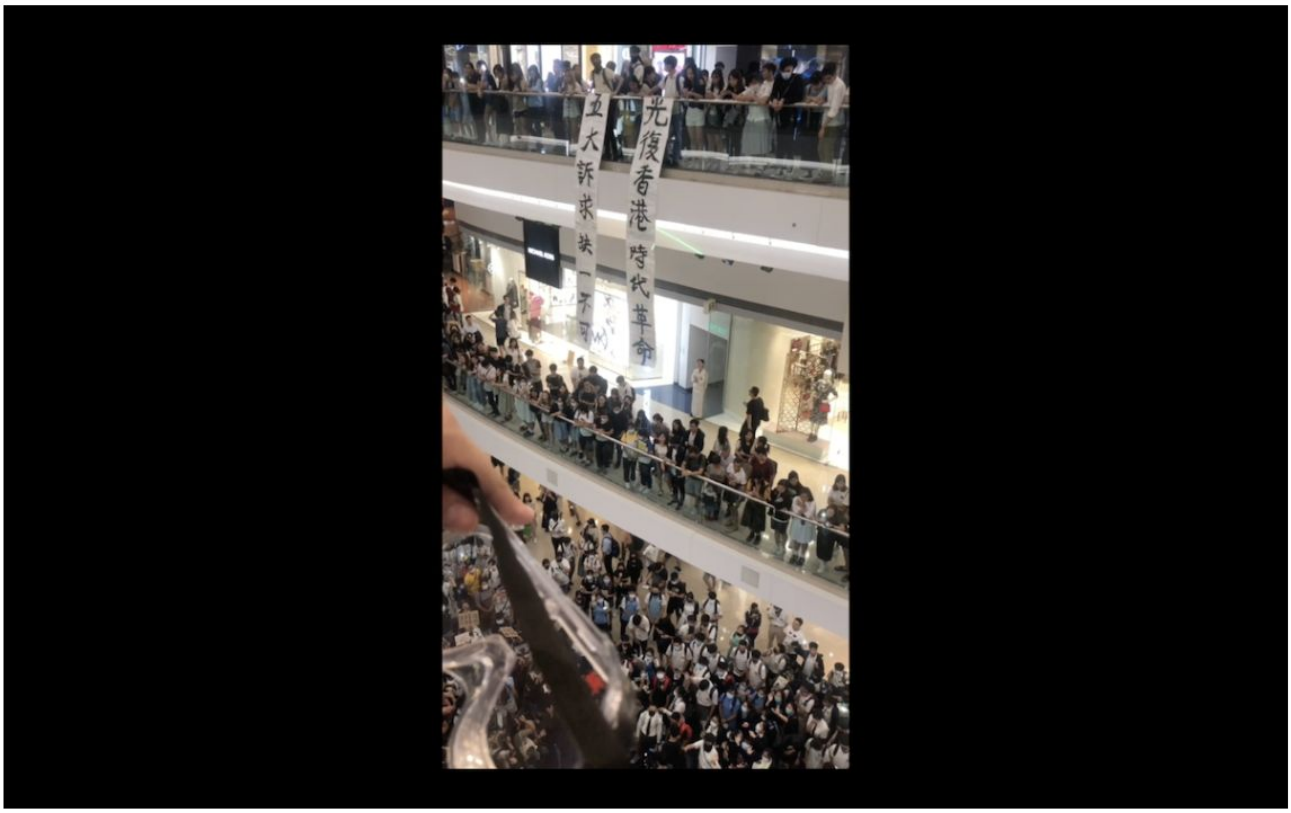
Notably absent from the show are a number of video art pioneers who appeared in Barbara London’s 1983 survey at MoMA, such as Bill Viola, Gary Hill, Joan Jonas, and Vito Acconci. It would be all too easy to quibble with those omissions, as well as ones of other giants that rose in the intervening years, from Stan Douglas to Hito Steyerl. But doing so would be pointless, since the lineage presented in “Signals” is deliberately idiosyncratic and, in some ways, even more exciting than a traditional canon. (The purview is also limited by what’s in MoMA’s collection—almost everything in the show comes from its holdings.)

Installation view of “Signals: How Video Transformed the World,” 2023, at Museum of Modern Art, New York.
PHOTO ROBERT GERHARDT

The curators seem most interested in video as tool for protest, one that could achieve just as much as a leaflet or a soapbox. Indeed, throughout this show, artists turn their cameras on upheaval, partly in an effort to document political actions and partly to transmit calls for change through screens around the world.

One section is devoted to collectives who welcomed video technology as a means of consciousness-raising. Not Channel Zero, a group of African American artists, toted around their camera at protests held across the US, offering a less polished and more nuanced view of matters than you'd find on the nightly news. *Not Channel Zero Goes to War* (1992) tackles leftist anger over the Gulf War. At one point, with a camera pushed close to her face, a Black woman attending a demonstration says, "There's a lot of things we can do peacefully instead of fighting over one white man's ego!" Producing video art, it would seem, is but one of those activities.

The low-budget look of Not Channel Zero's work is a feature, not a bug—it differentiates this video from what's beamed through the airwaves. Many other artists in the show have utilized that look too, with Artur Zmijewski bringing his camera to Israeli uprisings decrying intervention in the Gaza Strip and Tiffany Sia wielding an iPhone to document recent protests in Hong Kong. There's an immediacy to it all that can't be found in a CNN report.



Tiffany Sia, *Never Rest / Unrest* (still), 2020.

Video has made it impossible to separate what's happening at home from what's taking place abroad, these artists suggest. That much is made literal in **Emily Jacir**'s *Ramallah/New York* (2004–05), in which quotidian-seeming images filmed in the West Bank and Manhattan—bland offices, buzzy bars—are placed side by side. In a tiny gesture of video-based magic, more than 5,000 miles of space is collapsed by way of two monitors set inches apart.

Since video can circulate live images in a way film cannot, artists have enlisted it to bring together people distanced by geography. In a touching proto-Zoom gesture, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz used video to link a department store in Los Angeles with Lincoln Center in New York. The results, recorded in the 1980 video *Hole in Space*, show smiling people jumping for joy at the realization that they can now wave at strangers across the country.

Some artists have eyed the ease of enacting gestures like Galloway and Rabinowitz's with suspicion. Julia Scher's *Information America* (1995), featuring several cameras that film viewers and play back their images on a group of mounted screens, aims to underscore how surveillance can't exist without video technology. It succeeds in making its point, albeit ham-fistedly. More successful is Song Dong's lo-fi *Broken Mirror* (1999), in which a camera is pointed at pieces of glass that capture confused passersby on the street. Those mirrors are then smashed with a hammer, revealing structures you'd never imagine behind them.

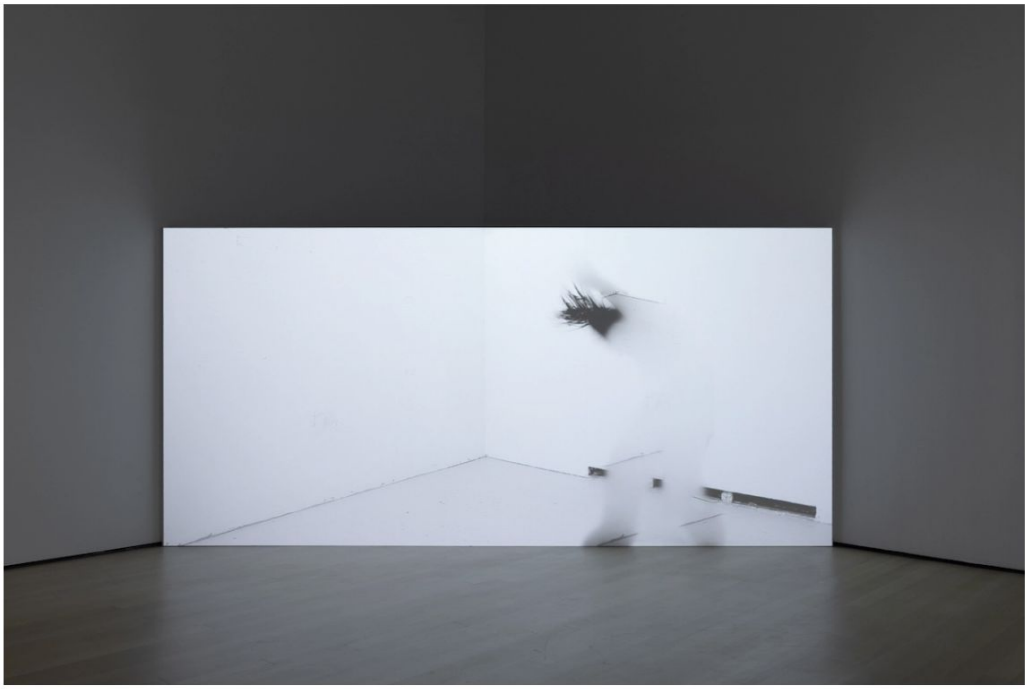
If "Signals" has one pratfall, it's a problem that plagues almost every video show ever curated: sound bleed. You can hear the shards shattering in *Broken Mirror* all the way across the room as you stare at a Martine Syms installation. In the next gallery over, a Philip Glass score ends up accompanying more than just a Nam June Paik video, even managing to infiltrate the walls of a domed Stan VanderBeek installation whose ceiling is covered in overlapping projections.

To mitigate the aural crowding, MoMA is supplying headsets that play the videos' soundtracks when held up to a QR code. These do little to help when there are few partitions and lots of noise. The few works cordoned off in black-box spaces—like a can't-miss Chto Delat video installation called *The Excluded. In a Moment of Danger* (2014), in which the Russian collective's members huff and puff and wax poetics about resistance while moving around balletically—fare somewhat better, but only marginally so.

Then again, some videos in the show explicitly comment on this barrage of sound and image, and even embrace it. **Nil Yalter**'s striking *Tower of Babel (Immigrants)*, 1974–77/2016, features at its core a ring of outward-facing monitors displaying interviews with Turkish immigrants in France. The mélange of Turkish and French being spoken, only some of which is subtitled, is meant to simulate a community whose individuals cannot be pulled apart from each other. Consider that a metaphor for how the videos in this show ought to function.

Ming Wong, *Windows on the World (Part 2)*, 2014.

The last couple galleries of “Signals” are the most interesting ones, since they present relatively new additions to video history that argue against some of the medium’s long-established core tenets. If Not Channel Zero used video to advocate for visibility, Sandra Mujinga, a young artist born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and now based in Berlin and Oslo, relies upon the medium to move her performers toward states that cannot be perceived. The performer in her hypnotic 2021 video *Pervasive Light*, Mariama Ndure, appears to disappear, thanks to an array of digital effects that cloak her image in darkness while a thumping score by NaEE RoBErts plays.



Recent works by Sondra Perry (seen here) and others in “Signals” react to some of the core tenets of video art.
PHOTO ROBERT GERHARDT

New Red Order's *Culture Capture: Crimes Against Reality* (2020) provides what may be considered the show's big finale. Projected at a scale typically reserved for blockbusters played in multiplexes, the work focuses on two sculptures featuring representations of Native Americans—one is the monument to Theodore Roosevelt that once stood outside the American Natural History Museum in New York—that become jelly-like flesh via CGI. As one of the melted-down statues expands and contracts in a glass case, you are reminded of just how far video has come since the days when live-streaming across the country seemed revolutionary.

Exiting the show, visitors encounter a group of banks where a looping playlist of videos is on view. There is simply too much to see here, and it's difficult to know exactly when a desired tape is going to play. The good news is that MoMA has uploaded most of these works to a **dedicated channel on its website**, where they will be reabsorbed into the flow of moving imagery uploaded to the internet daily. That's as fitting a temporary home for these works as I can imagine.

The Guardian
March 3 2023
The Guardian

'An expansion of the public sphere': how video transformed the world

In a new Moma exhibition spanning six decades, pioneering artists are remembered and celebrated for how they tried to use video as a tool for social change

Windows on the World (Part 2) - Ming Wong, 2014. Photograph: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the Twenty-First Century

From its exterior, the industrial metal dome nestled in the woods outside Stony Point, New York, could be anything: perhaps someone is doing horticulture experiments, or maybe it's secretly a yurt. Stepping inside would reveal a different surprise: Stan VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome, an "experience machine" complete with both film and slide projectors blanketing the curved ceiling of the immersive, exuberant space with an array of color and black-and-white imagery. However, it was neither the dome or the content on its ceiling that made Movie-Drome an important development in 20th-century art - it was its unrealized connection to a global network of satellites that would beam data into Movie-Dromes around the world. As historian Felicity D Scott writes, it was "an expansion of the public sphere and tool of subjective modernization - part of a global development apparatus".

The project was never realized in its totality, due to technological constraints of the 1960s, but fast forward to 2023 and we can see that this global network of information - delivered through interactive screens - has now taken over how we experience the world. These connections are the focus of a major exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Titled Signals: How Video Transformed the World, the show examines the history of broadcast media not as simply experiments in film-making, but as a transformational media network - especially in the realm of social and political critique.

"History is being made and rewritten through video on a minute-to-minute basis. Artists have provided poetic and critical tools to navigate this emerging reality since the late 1960s," Stuart Comer, chief curator of media and performance, said. "Now more than ever, we need to elevate the alternatives they have proposed and consider how the earliest chapter of video lives on powerfully in the urgent work being made today."

Early experiments grew out of new technology - most poignantly the 1967 advent of the commercially sold Sony Portapak battery-powered camera - and a belief in the transformative potential of such technologies. But this positivity was tempered by an equal dose of skepticism, especially about the harmful effects of commercial media in the west. This tension produced a generation of "pirate" and "guerrilla" television programs, experimental, self-produced, and often produced by collectives with an activist slant.

Videofreex ran an illegal pirate television station at their compound in the Catskills and focused on the countercultural movement, producing programs such as Fred Hampton: Black Panthers in Chicago and Women's Lib Demonstration NYC. Raindance Corporations's Proto Media Primer provided instructions for users to make their own "guerrilla television".

Moma held the seminal Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television in 1974, which brought together many of the key figures, galvanizing a community and marking the beginning of the museum's video collection with acquisitions by Barbara London, then a Moma curator and pioneer in the field of video.

As video and its broadcasting networks developed, they began to usurp traditional spatial and political boundaries to infiltrate new territories with information. Nam June Paik's live broadcast Good Morning, Mr Orwell, took place on New Year's Day 1984 in New York and Paris, and was broadcast to Germany and Paik's home country South Korea. Some 25 million people viewed the simulcast, which featured live and taped contributions from Laurie Anderson, Peter Gabriel, Joseph Beuys, Allen Ginsberg, Charlotte Moorman, John Cage and Oingo Boingo.

"Artworks like VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome or Paik's Orwell may pose a dream of global connectivity that didn't get realized in the ways they thought it might," curator of painting and sculpture Michelle Kuo said. "But these works still show us an alternate path, an experience that could still inspire new kinds of networks or connectivity in the present, even decades later."

Like Paik, Gretchen Bender saw the potential of screens to reach large audiences in new places, and her 1990 installation TV Text Image was placed in a New York storefront window, a precursor to our current condition, where the public sphere takes place increasingly online and on screens; the physical world merged with the virtual.

Video, especially television, has popular appeal due to its format as well as its ability to reach large audiences in the millions. In the west, artists were mostly dealing with commercial TV, but in Asia and Latin America, they were often dealing with state media or government propaganda. Ravi Sundaram in his catalog essay Pirate Media, explains how when cheap video technologies reached India and other developing countries, they sent shockwaves through the population, and artists began making "pirate media", a condition of what Sundaram calls "pirate modernity, a gray zone between urban informality and emergent media techniques". By upending the hierarchies of media production, new publics were formed and traditional power structures challenged.

Tiffany Sia - Never Rest/Unrest, 2020. High-definition video (color, sound), 29 min. Photograph: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the Twenty-First Century

Although not operating in the context of a developing nation, we see this DIY, anti-authoritarian mentality in Tiffany Sia's 29-minute Never Rest/Unrest video taken during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Rather than splicing together spectacular moments like a news broadcast might, Sia instead took an intimate portrait of life during these protests.

The sprawling exhibition fills Moma's top floor, offering a little something for everyone in its variety of installations - every room is different. The variety of material - collected over six decades - shows the myriad ways in which artists have used and misused video and its broadcast technologies to create their own networks, insert themselves in existing networks, and overtly resist or critique them.

Like nearly every other utopian impulse of the 1960s, however, these ideas have become co-opted and entwined into paradoxical and often dark ends such as online trolls weaponizing social justice to cancel their peers, or bad actors spreading misinformation to influence foreign elections. But perhaps even these darker corners of the internet do not define us, and Kuo hesitates to call it failure. "I think it reveals that utopian and critical impulses often exist with each other - and that what might be regarded as failure is actually often open-ended experimentation."

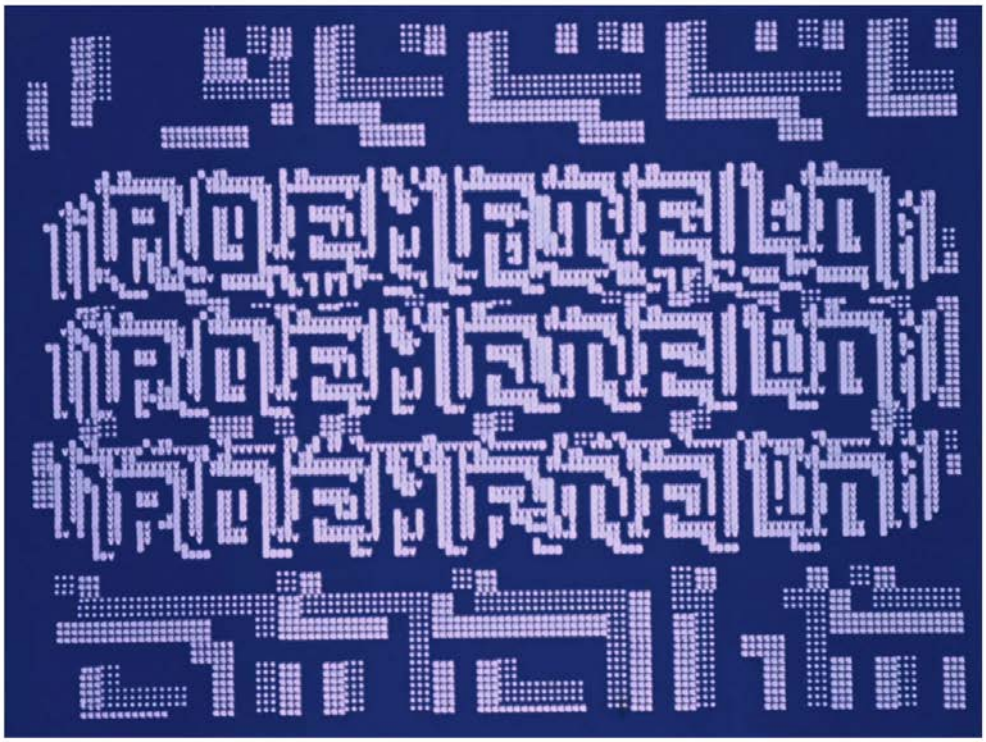
- Signals: How Video Transformed the World opens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on 5 March and shows until 8 July

ARTnews
February 17 2023

ARTnews Est. 1902

The Overlooked Art of the Computer Age Gets Its Due in a New Show at LACMA

BY TESSA SOLOMON February 17, 2023 1:41pm



Stan VanDerBeek and Kenneth C. Knowlton, *Poemfield No. 1 (Blue Version)*, 1967.
COURTESY THE BOX, LOS ANGELES

"Art will be sunk or drowned by technology," Marcel Duchamp told an interviewer in 1966, continuing that the latter was mixed up with the market and destined to destroy original thought.

Duchamp was among the most famous, but not the first, artist made anxious by the age of the mainframe. The computer had debuted a little over a decade earlier, and institutions initially appeared averse to any art made using it, even as automated systems increasingly upended visual culture.

Though it would be decades before the emergence of the personal computer, some artists swiftly recognized the technology as a means to understand the ambitions and alienation of made who alive during the mid-20th century. A new show now on view at the Los Angeles County Museum has assembled over 100 of the strange and wondrous works made in this era, arguing that rather than artistic oddities, they represent a critical chapter in art history.

"Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952–1982," curated by Leslie Jones, includes works by more than 75 pioneering digital artists, including experiments in algorithms, software, and code. Some are recognizably inspired by the early computers, like a 1965 sculpture by renowned artist Edward Kienholz, of a small device anthropomorphized by human eyes and doll legs and accompanied by instructions to treat it "with care." Others are more suggestive of a computer's innards, like Frederick Hammersley's 1969 "computer drawings," made using Art1, one of the earliest computer programs designed for artists that produced inhumanly precise geometry.

This isn't the first survey of what we now call digital art: in the late '60s and early '70s, New York's Jewish Museum and Museum of Modern Art both staged shows of artistic forays into burgeoning technology. And both had polarizing critical receptions, with the *New York Times*, for example, calling the Jewish Museum's presentation "confusing, capricious and sometimes fascinating".

But **LACMA**'s show is the most robust yet, and it takes the stance that the initial critical reception reflects less about art than humanity: that stubbornness and fear — of the unknown, of personal irrelevance — kept computer art in a category of its own.

To learn more about the show, *ARTnews* chatted with Jones via phone.

ARTnews: Why start in 1952?

Leslie Jones: I had originally decided to begin in the 1960s and '70s, but there was interesting experimental work even earlier. The year 1952 is the date of the first aesthetic objects made on an electronic, computer-like device called an oscilloscope, by the artist Ben Laposky. And it was easy to confirm 1982 as the end, as it was the year that the personal computer became widely available to people. This is art in the age of the mainframe before computers were part of people's daily lives.

Sonya Rapoport, page 4 from *Anasazi Series II*, 1977.
PHOTO © MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LACMA

When a truly experimental work like Laposky's came on the scene, using alien technology for its time, what was the response?

There was a lot of curiosity about the art but anxiety, too. [Laposky] called his art "electronic abstractions," and they were exhibited in the Midwest somewhere, but there just wasn't a huge number of people who knew they existed. It wasn't really until maybe the mid-'60s that there were more "computer art exhibitions," the first being at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City in 1963. Its heyday is probably the late '60s and early '70s. The Jewish Museum's "Software" and MoMA's "Information" didn't necessarily include work many works by early digital artists, but they did illustrate that there was an awareness of what software even was.

Part of the reason computer art wasn't taken seriously then was that there were fine artists working with it, but also scientists and engineers. This was a whole field that had access and was experimenting, but they weren't formally trained as artists. So, you get a lot of art that's not so interesting, so that may have muddied the waters for more serious artists like Manfred Mohr. He, like his peers, was embracing computer technology as a new tool to expand his practice.

So, apart from a few shows, early digital art was largely overlooked, despite its parallels to mainstream art movements like Conceptual and Op art. How do you understand this reaction?

There's a lot of hang ups in the visual art community about the artist's hand, right? Which is ironic, especially with Conceptual art, because many artists didn't personally make their own work. But you're right, there are parallels, such as the depersonalization of the creative process, which is fundamental to Conceptual art. Digital art is automatically divorced from the process because of the machine. And the Conceptualists and Op artists were using systems and algorithms, or objects based in geometric forms—all things computer artists were doing too. And after a certain point, the early digital artists just went their own way. They would exhibit in conventions focused on computer graphics, meet in very specific contexts, but were never really incorporated into mainstream discourse. That's what I'm trying to do here.

And what's to be learned when you stop treating these art forms as totally distinct pursuits and focus on the parallels?

Viewers will see the formal similarities, for sure. There's a lot of geometry and circularity and repetition of forms. I hope people learn that they shouldn't be so quick to dismiss art made with new technology—that's something that always repeats over time. I feel like a similar thing is going on with, say, NFTs and AI. Some people are saying they'll ignore it and hope it goes away. And there's some not-so-great art being made, just like in the '60s, but critics and art writers should pay attention. If an artist finds new tech worth exploring, then we should be willing to follow on that journey.

One of my colleagues writes often about AI art, how it's creating all these issues about ownership, but the whole field is too new for anyone to make the obvious judgment on it. Do you think there's any lessons gained from your research that can be applied there?

Both AI and generative art are not new. They both existed, in some form, in the '60s and '70s, so that might be eye-opening for some people. As soon as computers came on the scene, as soon as artists had access to them, they were exploring these issues.

Edward Kienholz, *The Friendly Grey Computer—Star Gauge Model #54*, 1965.

You write in the catalouge that early computer art reflected the "wonder and alienation" of the '60s and '70s. Why do you think we have this impulse — an unconscious one, maybe — to projecting ourselves onto these machines and to have these machines imprint themselves onto us?

I think any technology, when it first comes out, creates unease. The thing that's different about computer tech is that it's somewhat complex to understand. It's not like a mechanical machine, where you can see the pistons firing and get how it works. This is mysterious, and as time goes by, it only gets more complicated. But also, we have anxiety when we're not connected to it. Think about when your phone breaks. It's a sense of not having complete control of your existence.

So we're faced with these complex machines, but we still try our best to understand them, often from the best point of reference we have: ourselves. Like one of the show's artists, Edward Kienholz.

By personifying the computer, it makes it more approachable. Kienholz was being vey tongue in cheek in the way he was anticipating the personal computer, but he used humor to personify the machine to disempower or take control over it. His sculpture is a scary object, too—it's uncanny. I wouldn't want to be in a room alone with it. It taps into people's anxieties about the place of computers in their lives.

Artnet News
February 17 2023
artnet news

Shows & Exhibitions

Revisit the Dawn of the Digital Age Through These 9 Key Works From LACMA's Exhibition on Early Computer Art

"Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age" traces the how technological progress has shaped artistic practice.

Min Chen, February 17, 2023

Hans Haacke, News (1969/2008). Photo: © 2023 Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

"Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age," an exhibition gathering 100 works that illustrate how artistic practices shifted with the emergence of computer technology beginning in the 1950s, opens at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art at a fortuitous moment. Running through July 2, the show arrives as digital art, with the help of blockchain technology, has acquired new currency, and as A.I. is freshly ascendant as a tool in image-making.

But as curator Leslie Jones told Artnet News, the exhibition was some 10 years in the making. Its spark was not NFT art, but the gift to LACMA of a series of witty computer drawings created by geometric painter Frederick Hammersley in 1969.

"Being a curious curator, I wanted to know more about their context," she said. "The seed of the exhibition was about looking back on a period that I felt had been somewhat overlooked and needed to be recontextualized in relation to what was going on at the time."

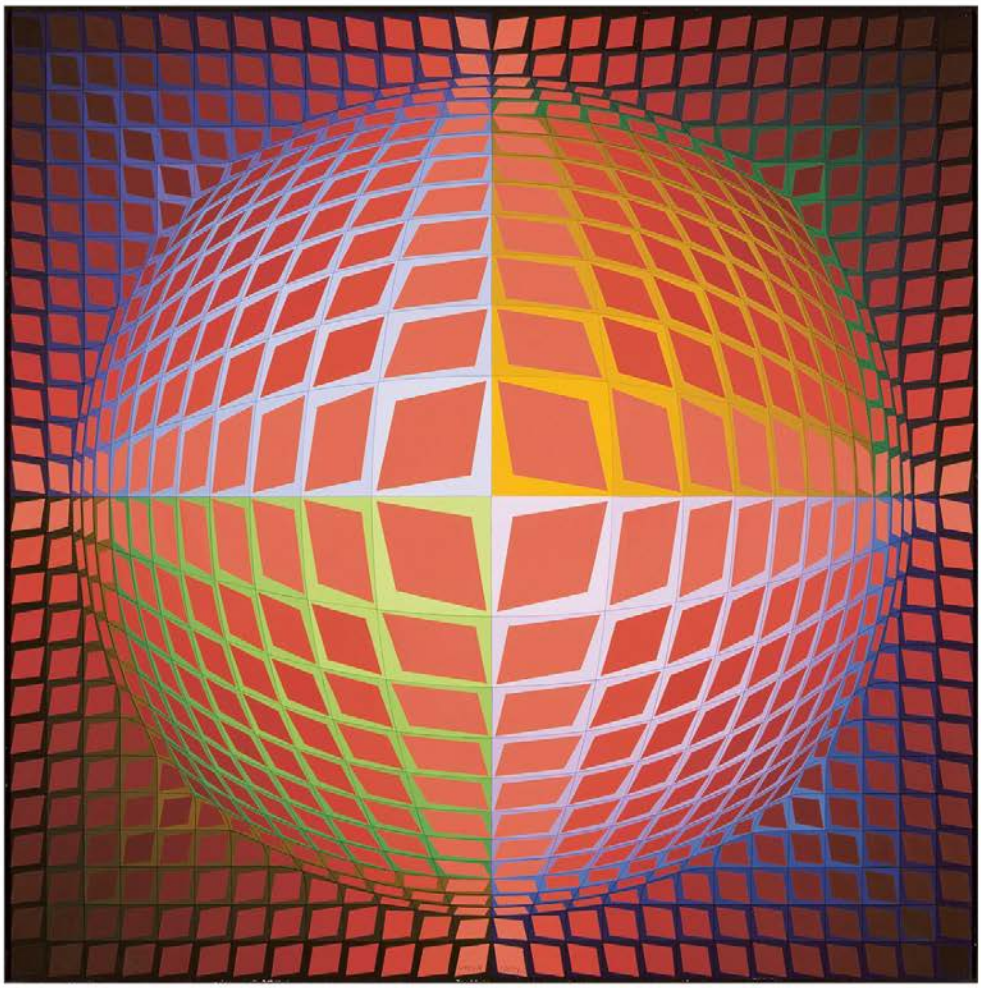
Installation view of “Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952–1982.” Photo: © Museum Associates/LACMA.

“Coded,” then, takes as its starting point 1952, when programming was in its infancy and computers were room-sized mainframes (see: HAL9000 in *2001: Space Odyssey*). However unwieldy the technology, early practitioners such as mathematician Ben F. Laposky and engineer A. Michael Noll, though not artists by practice, saw opportunities to use computational sequences to generate fine art.

Their work paved the way for the generative artists in the following decades—the likes of Vera Molnár, Harold Cohen, and François Morellet, who addressed the matter of art production systematically. Conceptual and Op art, too, owed a debt to these computational approaches, with such artists as Sol LeWitt and Bridget Riley using algorithmic calculations to determine outcomes of their work.

The exhibition’s scope ends in 1982, when personal computers arrived on the scene—closing out a period during which, Jones points out, artists had to go to some lengths to create any kind of computer art. Without home computers, they had to seek out machines at universities or corporations like Bell Labs, which were friendly to artistic experimentation. Even with access, creators had to learn to program (or find someone who could), then wait hours for the mainframes to generate outputs.

“I was just amazed by the artists’ commitment to making it happen. They just understood the possibilities and were willing to go through that,” she said.



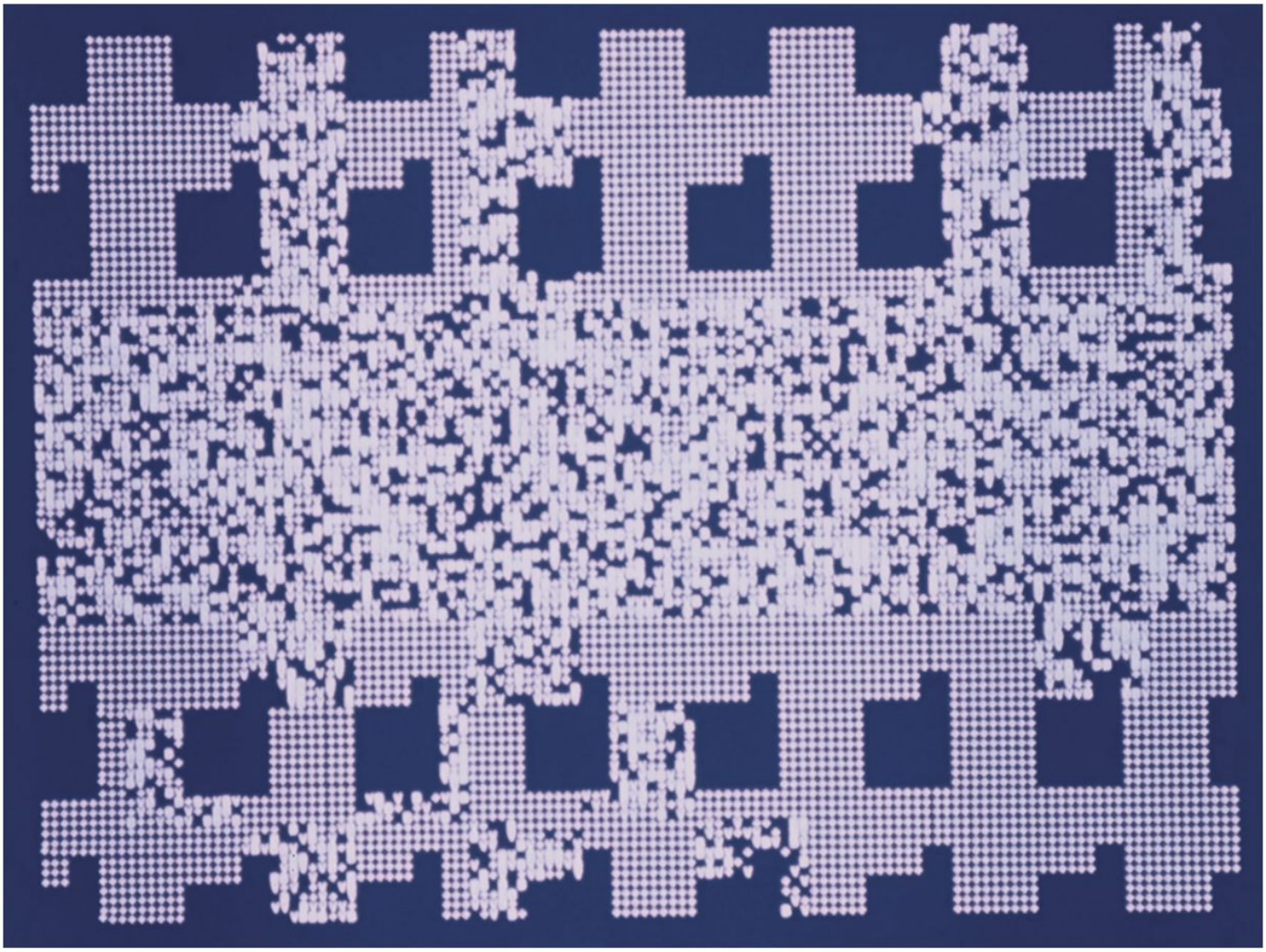
Victor Vasarely, *Vega-Kontosh-Va* (1971). Photo: © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

The show makes sense for an institution that can claim itself a role in the history of technology-assisted art. In the late '60s, LACMA initiated its Art and Technology program, which paired artists with technology companies to ideate and create cutting-edge art projects. As detailed in the resulting report on the program, the majority of these pairings—Walter de Maria and RCA, Dan Flavin and General Electric, among others—would come to naught, whether due to creative differences, prohibitive costs, or the lack of technological capabilities.

But even amid these failures, the catalog could also be read as a series of yet-to-be-realized proposals. In particular, "Coded" is revisiting Victor Vasarely's 1968 pitch to IBM to create "a lumino-cybernetic screen that can send out millions of different color combinations." The Op art pioneer reckoned there were "endless possibilities" to the project, but the corporation ultimately balked at the price tag of $2 million.

In a companion piece to the exhibition spearheaded by LACMA's Art + Technology Lab, a descendent of the Art and Technology program, Vasarely's proposal for a "multi-colored electric device" will be reimagined by new media artist Casey Reas. His interactive *METAVASARELY*, said Joel Ferree, the program director of the Art + Technology Lab, will contain "similar ideas that are in the original Vasarely proposal, but they'll be executed in a way that has more semblance to Casey's contemporary practice." The work will be on view onsite and online throughout the run of "Coded."

2. Filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek's early experiments in computer animation



Stan VanDerBeek, *Poemfield No. 1 (Blue Version)* (1967), realized with Kenneth C. Knowlton. Photo: © Estate of Stan VanDerBeek, all rights reserved, digital images courtesy of The Box, Los Angeles.

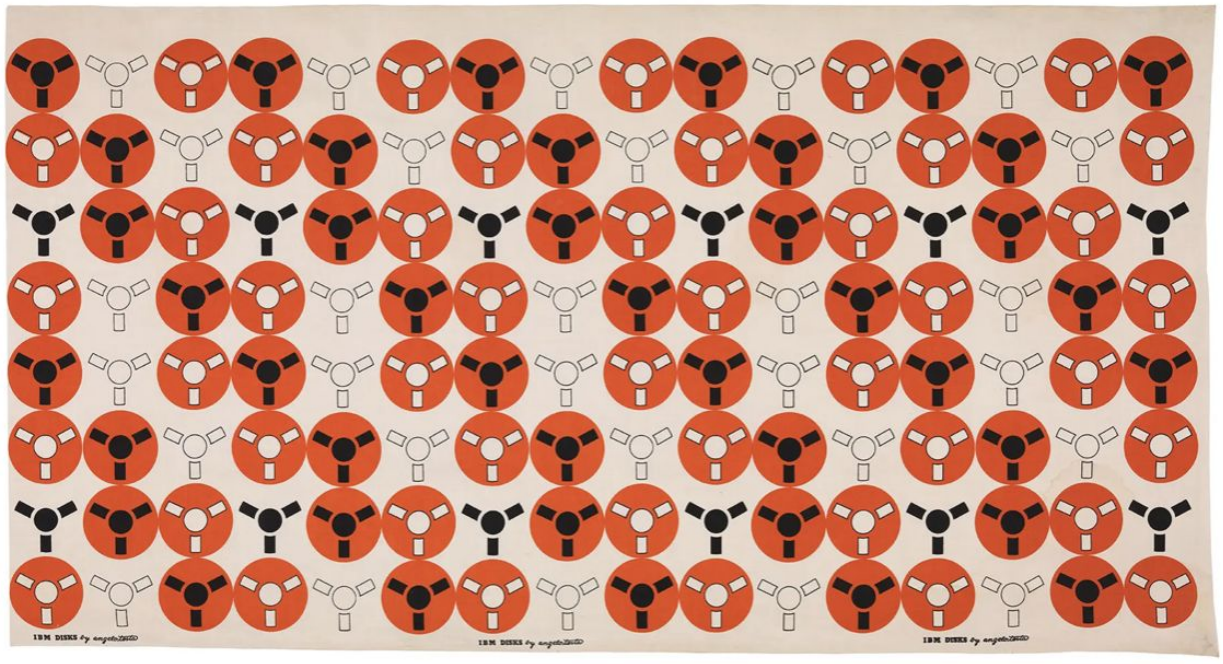
The Art Newspaper
February 14 2023

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Exhibitions // Preview

Computer art at the dawn of the algorithm: ambitious Lacma show celebrates 75 pioneering artists

"Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952-1982" exhibition at Los Angeles County Museum of Art show work generated through the mainframes of the pre-internet era



Angelo Testa's *IBM Disks* (1952–56), screenprinted on linen; in 1956 the fabric designer also translated Paul Rand's IBM logotype onto fabric

Torey Akers

14 February 2023

As the parallel worlds of artificial intelligence and NFTs (non-fungible tokens) continue to dominate art-world discourse in 2023, it is tempting to conceive of the relationship between art and technology as a project of futurity alone, defined by the kind of rampant obsolescence we associate with market trends and media cycles. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art's (Lacma) exhibition, *Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952-1982*, upends that presumption as it examines the rise of creative production in the age of the mainframe, drawing urgent throughlines between emergent coding systems and digital art as we understand it today.

In his 1986 essay *Visual Intelligence*, the art historian Frank Dietrich discussed the way scientific breakthroughs influenced artistic practice during the first 20 years of the computer art movement. "For the first time," he wrote, "computers became involved in an activity that had been the exclusive domain of humans: the act of creation." *Coded* explores the interdisciplinary underpinnings inherent to the act of creation, highlighting the artists, writers, musicians, choreographers and filmmakers producing the nascent algorithmic models we live with today.

> **There are interesting parallels between computer art and contemporaneous mainstream movements**
>
> Leslie Jones, Lacma curator

The exhibition's ambitious scope includes more than 100 objects made by 75 artists from all over the world, a number of whom are being shown at Lacma for the first time. The show's chronological point of origin is 1952, the year the first entirely aesthetic image was rendered by computer, and ends in 1982, when the personal computer usurped the mainframe as the technological power *du jour*.

The Friendly Grey Computer—Star Gauge Model #54 (1965) by Edward Kienholz

The exhibition is organised into six major sections that trace computer art's history, including work by pioneers like Edward Kienholz, whose anthropomorphic 1960s machines anticipated the rise of personal computing, and Vera Molnár, whose plotter drawings linked the industrial rise of robots with the regimented paintings of Paul Klee. Other highlights on view are renderings by Frederick Hammersley using Art1, one of the earliest computer programs designed specifically for artists, and an animated poem code written by Stan VanDerBeek, an artist who believed that computers could lead to "new ways of communicating that involve the artist in a larger matrix of machines and other people".

Computer-generated or analogue, the works on display in the exhibition cohere into a narrative of undeniable interconnectivity, organically gleaning from movements like Op art and Conceptual art to imbue their proto-virtual endeavours with meaning. The show "brings to light early digital or computer art that has long been overlooked, recontextualising it to encourage a new way of looking at mainstream art of the period", says Leslie Jones, Lacma's curator of prints and drawings. "There are interesting parallels between computer art and contemporaneous mainstream movements like Minimal, Conceptual and Op art, notably in their mutual embrace of systematic and algorithmic approaches to art making."

Coded also coincides with a presentation facilitated by Lacma's Art + Technology Lab. This two-part interactive experience will function both as an homage and response to Victor Vasarely's unrealised proposal for the museum in 1971. The Conceptual software artist Casey Reas's *METAVASARELY* will be available online concurrent with the display of a new work of his at Lacma (9 April-2 July).

• *Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952-1982*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, until 2 July

Hyperallergic
July 14, 2022

HYPERALLERGIC

Film Previews

A Series Spotlights NY's Underground Art and Cinema in the Early 1960s

Focused on the years 1962–1964, a program by Film at Lincoln Center pairs with a Jewish Museum exhibition and a survey at Film Forum.

Billie Anania July 14, 2022

A still from *Breathdeath* (1963) by Stan Vanderbeek (photo courtesy Film at Lincoln Center)

The 1962 formation of the New American Cinema Group was a pivotal moment in art history. For the first time, United States filmmakers took control over their own work, representing a significant departure from Hollywood's creative and legal constraints. "We don't want false, polished, slick films," the group declared in their manifesto. "We prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive."

This month, three Manhattan art spaces are celebrating New York's contributions to this movement with two comprehensive film series and an exhibition. *New York, 1962–1964: Underground and Experimental Cinema* focuses on a three-year period of features, documentaries, and shorts that went on to influence generations of indie filmmakers. The program by Film at Lincoln Center pairs with a Jewish Museum exhibition tracing its influence on artists of the time, complemented by a more global survey at Film Forum. A trailer released today, included below, samples some of the highlights of the dynamic program.

The Brooklyn Rail
July - August 2021

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Every Wall is a Door

By Steven Pestana

teamLab, *Universe of Water Particles, Transcending Boundaries*, 2017. Installation view in *Every Wall is a Door*, Superblue Miami, 2021. Sound: Hideaki Takahashi. © teamLab. Courtesy Pace Gallery.

In 1966, new media pioneer Stan VanDerBeek wrote an essay for the journal *Film Culture* outlining his utopian vision of intermedia "experience machines," computational, spatialized moving images. Technological innovation, he felt, had outpaced the human capacity to digest its effects. To cope with our quickly changing world, a new, shared vocabulary was necessary and artistically cultivated experience would be instrumental to the process.

VanDerBeek's program incorporated ideas borrowed from the relatively nascent disciplines of ecology and cybernetics. To this, he added his own interest in immersive experience, collective authorship, and the possibility of creative agency in the audience's experience. While VanDerBeek was not the first to envision experience as a medium proper, his realm of inquiry nevertheless established themes which remain vibrant in new media's discursive landscape.

teamLab is an interdisciplinary collective of over 400 "ultra-technologists" formed in Tokyo in 2001. It's tempting to frame them as heirs apparent to VanDerBeek's vision. Relying on devices familiar to cinema and theater such as darkened rooms, outsized projection, and spectacle, teamLab aims to make visitors' participation integral to the fruition of their artworks in the service of "democratizing" art. Their monumental interactive digital installation at Superblue Miami is titled, with precision, *Flowers and People, Cannot be Controlled but Live Together - Transcending Boundaries, A Whole Year per Hour* (2017), and merges with a second installation, *Universe of Water Particles, Transcending Boundaries* (2017). A wall-length mirror reflects the space upon itself, enveloping visitors in a visually sensuous, expansive playground of illusion. Everything moves. Flower petals blossom and accumulate or languidly drift away, responding in real-time to participants' motions. Larger-than-life luminous, stylized flora scale the walls. Glowing, flowing streams swirl underfoot, receding into darkness. A dreamy instrumental soundtrack shimmers through the speakers.

teamLab's populist mission is not lost on its audience. Selfies are snapped among some guests, while others sit back to observe how their presence evolves the scenery. The seductive *mise en scène* induces a potent forgetfulness that the lush surroundings are actually a giant, technologically enhanced black-box.

The installation is part of a group show, *Every Wall is a Door*, Superblue Miami's inaugural exhibition. A massive new venue, Superblue considers itself a next-generation art space that aims to pay overdue homage—and resources—to large-scale, immersive artwork. The exhibition follows a preset route allowing guests to linger and explore (for the most part), but not return or skip ahead to other installations. While this might seem restrictive, the progression is an effective curatorial means of introducing an assortment of experiential poetics.

Es Devlin, *Forest of Us*, 2021. Installation view in *Every Wall is a Door*, Superblue Miami, 2021. Photo: Andrea Mora.

A counterpoint to teamLab's sensory saturation is James Turrell's (b. 1943) *AKHU* (2021). Those acquainted with Turrell's output might recognize the sedate white chamber as an iteration of his "Ganzfeld" series, environments which utilize high-chroma light to distort the viewer's visual perception. With an LED-halo color-cycling so gradually that it approaches stillness, even space and time are rendered ambiguous. An aperture onto *AKHU*'s antechamber, viewed from within, is no less captivating. Although drenched in static white light, it appears to subtly shift tonalities. The illusion is our mind's creation, bypassing conscious will; our lack of perceptual agency is not a shortcoming but a central component of the work and fascinating in its own right.

The last piece in the exhibition's sequence is the London-based stage designer Es Devlin's (b. 1971) installation *Forest of Us* (2021). Before entering, visitors first gather in a vestibule for a short video montage. A voiceover describes the movement of air through bronchial passageways. Alternately majestic and frenetic imagery draws parallels between instances of fractal branching in nature. The message seems to be that we are both part and reflection of nature, a fact that we ought to remember. Just beyond the screening room, Devlin's recursive, curvilinear mirror-maze awaits. Winding corridors, stairwells, and super-bright white lights infinitely reflect one another in countless directions. Cinematic sci-fi synths drift throughout the space, accompanied by the icy resonance of slow, deep breaths. Once viewers engage, the maze's thematic relationship to the introductory film becomes more tenuous, if not forgettable. However, Devlin's pristine execution makes up for the disconnect. To date, the majority of Devlin's projects have been in the realm of theatrical design, working collaboratively with high profile clients like Louis Vuitton, U2, the London Olympics, Kanye West, and Beyoncé. *Forest* benefits from Devlin's show-stopping eye for image-making, attention to spatial choreography, and exquisite production value.

Stan VanDerBeek's "experience machines" would attempt to resolve some of the tensions of our era by establishing a new collective memory. Superblue, too, positions itself as a catalyst for change. With the goal of provoking "new and transformative ways of understanding ourselves and our relationship to the world," Superblue offers alternative modes of art making and experience. Ranging from high-tech razzle-dazzle to fully analog immersion, the installations in *Every Wall is a Door* walk a tightrope between illusion and reality, memory and forgetting, will and surrender. The true test of Superblue will ultimately rest not in the artworks, but with the viewer. While "immersive art experiences" are more popular and accessible than ever, the continuum of phenomenal encounters doesn't end in the white cube or the halls of a museum. If Superblue's patrons leave with the realization that *any* kind of art (or even the world of everyday life), is no less immersive, then Superblue will have succeeded in elevating its visitors' awareness to new heights of aesthetic sensitivity.

Hyperallergic
October 21, 2019
HYPERALLERGIC

ART

A Father and Daughter's Art in Conversation Across Six Decades

This exhibition of works by Stan and Sara VanDerBeek shows how both artists span traditional boundaries between media and engage similarly intangible concepts: spirituality, the mutability of time, memory, and space.

Diana Stoll October 21, 2019

Sara VanDerBeek, "Baltimore Dancers Twelve" (2019), digital C-print, 20 x 15 3/4 inches. Edition 1 of 3 (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

ASHEVILLE, North Carolina —*VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* at the Black Mountain College Museum+ Arts Center in Asheville, North Carolina, brings together works by the late experimental filmmaker (and polymath) Stan VanDerBeek and his daughter, photographer (and fellow polymath) Sara VanDerBeek, who is also the exhibition's co-curator. Although their careers never coincided —Stan died in 1984, when Sara was seven — the show identifies areas of conceptual and visual overlap between father and daughter, and feels very much like a collaboration between artists.

Growing up in the shadow of a pioneer of "expanded cinema" (a term he invented), Sara VanDerBeek has managed, strikingly, to establish her own firm voice as a creator. Her multivalent work — combining photography, sculpture, and installation — has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2010), the Hammer Museum (2011), and the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (2015), among other institutions. Yet her output, including these successes in her own right, has inevitably been touched by her fataher's creative legacy.

Stan VanDerBeek took some of his earliest steps as an artist at Black Mountain College. Sara VanDerBeek and her co-curator, Chelsea Spengemann, are deeply immersed in the Stan VanDerBeek Archive (of which Spengemann is the director), and the exhibition is rich with archival materials that illuminate many of the ideas he began formulating at BMC. After arriving at the school in 1949, he wrote poems, studied painting with Joseph Fiore, and explored photography under the guidance of Hazel-Frieda Larsen (later Archer). The exhibition includes VanDerBeek's photographs of dancers at BMC that make stunning use of silhouette, cropping, and long exposure, anticipating some of the radical techniques he would apply as his explorations into visual media broadened. Later, he would collaborate extensively with some of the luminaries whose names are still closely associated with the school, including John Cage and Merce Cunningham.

Stan VanDerBeek, "Untitled" (1950, printed 2008), silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 inches (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

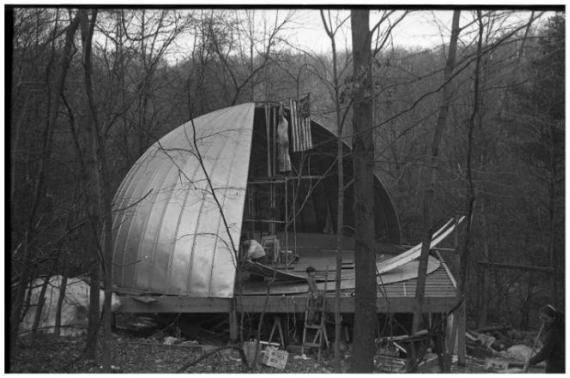
Sara VanDerBeek, "Baltimore Dancers Six" (2012), digital C-print, 6 x 8 inches (image); 16 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches (frame). Edition 3 of 3 (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

VanDerBeek began his experimental film work in the 1950s, not long after leaving Black Mountain. His films and videos often incorporate wildly eclectic imagery — combining found footage, animation, still imagery, and riotous soundtracks — all moving at an exhilaratingly frenetic pace; a paradigmatic example is his 1963 tour de force Breathdeath, on view in this show. VanDerBeek observed that he was simply following the rhythm of his times. In the 1968 documentary film VanDerBeekiana: Stan VanDerBeek's Vision, he declared: "Culture is moving into what I call a 'visual velocity.' Sometimes I wake up and think to myself: It looks like it's going to be a 60-mph day." In an e!ort to cram as much experience as possible into the dizzying moment, in the mid-1960s he invented his Movie-Drome, a vast, dome-shaped audiovisual laboratory built in Stony Point, New York, in which multiple film projections could be experienced simultaneously. Investigating the intersections of art, technology, and communication, he understood the power of television and foresaw the then-nascent potential of computers, fostered by stints as artist-in-residence at Bell Labs, MIT, and NASA.
Among his films featured in this show are two untitled 1965 collaborations with dancers; these were eventually used as projections accompanying Variations V, a multimedia performance project by Cage, Cunningham, and David Tudor. In one — with the privileged access that only film or physical intimacy can offer — we see up close Cunningham's gloriously gnarled feet and watch him move like an animal, graceful and frantic, across his rehearsal room.

It is in the realm of dance that the resonances between Stan and Sara VanDerBeek's work are most immediately apparent in this exhibition. Drawing from her father's archive, Sara incorporated some of his images of BMC dancers in her 2008 project Four Photographers. She subsequently pursued this theme, photographing dance students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where her father taught in his later years. Her ongoing series Baltimore Dancers explores the interplay of light and body. Layered color images are boosted with digital interference in recent additions, recalling her father's psychedelic video and film experiments.

"Like my father, I feel like a bridge," the younger VanDerBeek said in a talk before this show's opening. The two artists span traditional boundaries between media, and they engage similarly intangible concepts — spirituality, the mutability of time, memory, and space. Yet while Stan was a maximalist, Sara is decidedly a minimalist — her diptych "Roman Stripe IV" (2015), a pair of monumental C-prints, evokes the meditative visuals of Agnes Martin or the purposeful linear trajectories of Frank Stella. Two other photographs here, "Roman Woman VIII" and "Roman Woman XI," depict fragments of Classical sculpture, a recurring theme in her oeuvre, in blasts of high-contrast electric hues.

Sara VanDerBeek, “Roman Stripe IV” (2016), diptych; 2 digital layered C-prints, each: 96 7/8x 48 7/8 inches (framed), overall: 96 7/8 x 100, 3/4 inches. Edition 1 of 3, 2 APs (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)



Stan VanDerBeek’s Movie-Drome (1963–65) under construction in Stony Point, New York (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

Stan VanDerBeek, still from *Breathdeath* (1963), 35mm film transferred to video, black and white, sound, 14.33 min. (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

In such works, Sara VanDerBeek engages freely — as her father did— in all parts of history, from the ancient to the future. In this way, too, they are both bridges.
The exhibition also highlights instances of poetic alignment between the two artists. One gallery wall is lined with nine figure studies by Sara VanDerBeek, layered C-prints in seductive neon colors, their titles invoking the rising moon and the setting sun. Nearby on the floor a white cylinder lies on a bed of cloth: her "Moon" (2015). Overlooking them is a small painting made by Stan VanDerBeek ca. 1955, "Untitled (Lune Light)": a full moon in a deep blue sky over a simple landscape. Here, as throughout this show, bodies in space —sculptural, filmed, photographed, painted; dancing, abstracted, celestial — are fundamental to the artists' bodies of work.

VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek continues at the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center (120 College Street, Asheville, North Carolina) through January 4, 2020. The BMCM+AC's 2019 "ReViewing" conference took place at University of North Carolina Asheville's Reuter Center, September 20–22; the focus of the symposium was Stan VanDerBeek, and the keynote speakers were Sara VanDerBeek and Chelsea Spengemann.

Sara VanDerBeek, "Setting Sun VI" (2019), two layered digital C-prints, 20 x 14 1/2 inches (image), 20 1/2 x 15 inches (frame) (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

Stan VanDerBeek, “Untitled (Lune Light)” (ca. 1955), paint on wood panel, 10 3/8 x 5 7/8 inches (image); 12 3/8 x 7 7/8 inches (frame) (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

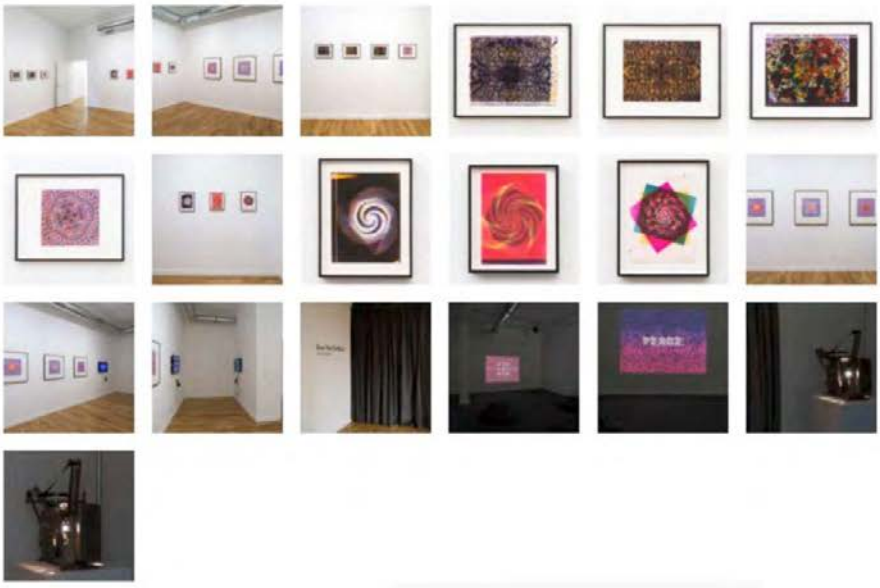
Stan VanDerBeek, “Untitled” (1950, printed 2008), silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 inches (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

contemporaryartdaily.com
October 15, 2018

Contemporary Art Daily

Stan VanDerBeek at DOCUMENT

October 15th, 2018



Artist: Stan VanDerBeek

Venue: DOCUMENT, Chicago

Exhibition Title: Poemfield

Date: September 14 – October 27, 2018

Stan VanDerBeek, *Poemfield No. 7*, 1967–68. 16mm film, color, sound, 4:10 min., dimensions variable 1/6, 2 AP.

Full gallery of images, press release and link available after the jump.

Images and video courtesy of DOCUMENT, Chicago

Press Release:

Sights and sounds, the changing illusion of the world in which we live, and the world that lives only in the mind, are the basic materials of film creation. The full flow of color, sound, synthesized form, plastic form, light and picture poetry have in no way begun to be explored in man's range of experience.

–Stan VanDerBeek, "Re:Vision," The American Scholar 35, no. 22 (1966): 340.

DOCUMENT is pleased to present *Poemfield*, Stan VanDerBeek's first solo exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition will present a 16mm film installation of *Poemfield no. 7* (1967-68), a digital projection of the film *Symmetricks* (1972), and a selection of works on paper (1973-83).

VanDerBeek's *Poemfields*, the artist's most well-known series of computer-generated films, are complex, multilayered moving tapestries of abstracted images, colors, visuals, texts, and sounds. Fascinated with the computer's ability to generate text on a screen, VanDerBeek established an "image-based poetry language." For this series, he collaborated with computer scientist Ken Knowlton at AT&T Bell Labs beginning in 1964. Using an IBM 7094 computer and BEFLIX (short for "Bell Labs Flicks"), a computer graphic programming language that Knowlton conceived in 1963, VanDerBeek and Knowlton created eight Poemfields films between 1966-71. Each film combines the artist's own poetry with a range of digital illustrations. Since studying under poet M.C. Richards and composer John Cage at Black Mountain College, VanDerBeek incorporated collage-like practices of chance and simultaneity, experimenting with representations of text and poetry in cinematic time.

The poetry of *Poemfield no. 7* presents a thought-provoking message, one that maintains its political relevance in 2018. VanDerBeek's poem ends: THERE IS NO WAY TO PEACE; PEACE IS THE WAY; NO MORE WAR. Movements 1 and 4 of John Cage's composition Amores comprise the soundtrack; this same composition premiered at the historic performance of Cage's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943. The synthesis of text, pattern, and sound in *Poemfield no. 7* conveys a bizarre sense of foreboding, a quirky yet urgent uneasiness. Some words appear and then dissolve on the screen so quickly that one must focus intently to capture the phrase in its entirety; VanDerBeek anticipated the blink-and-you-miss-it effects of newsfeed overload and image overstimulation.

Symmetricks invites a slightly more meditative viewing. While artist-in-residence at the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies, VanDerBeek experimented with computer-animated drawing to explore the visual effects of rapidly tracked drawn line, symmetrical patterns, and flickering images. White forms pulse, shrink, expand, and mirror each other against the black screen, and the contrast subtly suggests colors as Symmetricks progresses. One reflects on their own interpretation of the cinematic Rorschach test upon the film's completion.

VanDerBeek was a pioneer in the growing fields of "movie art" and "Expanded Cinema" during the 1960s and 70s. His multimedia practices forecasted many facets of later iterations of contemporary art–network aesthetics, Internet art, graphical user interfaces, and appropriations of desktop computing. Rather than employing a camera to traditionally capture images, VanDerBeek made use of the computer as an abstract notation system for making movies. He wrote pictures and visually manipulated language. VanDerBeek challenged the formal paradigms of film and moving images, adopting a collaborative, pluralistic, and multisensory approach to filmmaking that resonates with today's prevalence of multimedia art and the feedback loop of everyday digital life.

Link: Stan VanDerBeek at DOCUMENT

Tags: Chicago, DOCUMENT, Stan VanDerBeek, United States

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http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2018/10/stan-vanderbeek-at-document/

The Brooklyn Rail
February 7, 2018

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Negotiating Gender, Labor, and Authorship: *Thinking Machines: Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959-1989*

by Banyi Huang

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART | NOVEMBER 13, 2017 – APRIL 8, 2018

In what ways have machines reconfigured or reconsolidated pre-existing social hierarchies, human relations, and cultural production? *Thinking Machines: Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959–1989*, currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art, takes such pressing questions and presents them through a historical lens by bringing together a selection of artworks produced using computer programs and embodying machine-like thinking. The most thought-provoking takeaways lie in the exhibition's critical conceptualization of gender, labor, and authorship at the forefront of technology.

Lee Friedlander. Boston, Massachusetts, 1985. Gelatin Silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. E.T. Harmax Foundation. ©Lee Friedlander. Courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

Divided into historical segments, artworks are displayed alongside artifacts that epitomize stages of technological advancement: IBM punch cards (mid-1950s), the Olivetti Programma 101 (1965), and Apple's 1980s Macintosh series. While computers originated from nuclear-defense and were further developed by militaries, corporations, and hierarchical power structures, they were also adapted by artists and researchers in open and fluid ways. *Thinking Machines* highlights, for example, how computerized languages gave conceptual artists tools for overturning traditional notions of authorship and radically pushing chance operations in art making.

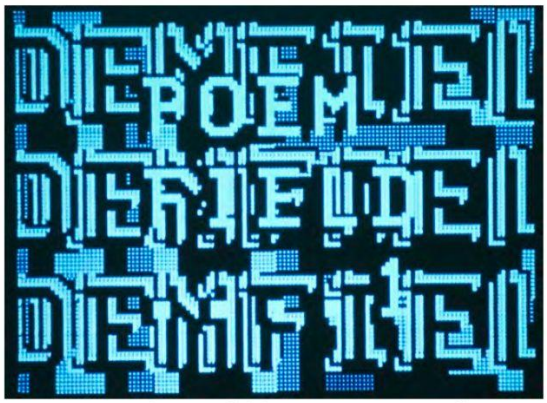
nstallation view of Thinking Machines:Art and Design in he Computer Age, 1959–1989. The Museum of Modern ırt, New York, November 13, 2017–April 8, 2018. ◌2017 The Museum of Modern Art. Photo by Peter ıutler.

HPSCHD (1969), a collaboration between composers John Cage and Lejaren Hiller, culminated in a multi-media event featuring harpsichord solos, computer-generated tapes, and dazzling visuals. To produce the scores, Cage and Hiller sampled classical repertoires and fed them through a specialized program modeled on the *I-Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination text. On display are Cage's handwritten scores along with a diagram that shows it was the program's logic-flow that simulated chance. Regardless of how orgiastic and immersive the final performance seemed, it was a controlled chaos.

Just as Cage relied on the technical expertise of his collaborators and access to the ILLIAC supercomputer, Fluxus artist Alison Knowles worked with James Tenney to generate her poem *A House of Dust* (1967). Tenney, then a composer-in-residence at Bell Labs, used the programming language FORTRAN to generate seemingly arbitrary combinations of words. The poem, printed on flimsy graph paper, seems like a relic of a Duchampian moment in which radical improvisations were relegated to machines. The impersonal structure of the poem, however, undermines the intimate gender dynamics we often attribute to Tenney's collaborations with Carolee Schneemann.

In contrast to such an analytical presentation, Stan VanDerBeek's computer-animated films are characterized by psychedelic styles. They testify to a significant leap in the computer's emerging function as a media machine: it not only processed information, but also stored, edited, and displayed information as media. Such functionality, which began to emerge in the 1960s, offered a powerful means for artistic experimentation.

Personal computers did not hit the mass market until the 1980s, and some artists in the show did not have access to government or corporate-sponsored research facilities. Instead, they mimicked computational thinking by placing controlled restraints on the body. Two iterations of *A la Recherche de Paul Klee* (1970–71) by Hungarian-born artist Vera Molnár are hung adjacently: one is a plotter drawing, while the other was made entirely by hand. Based on a system that Molnár calls "machine imaginaire," the drawings were made following rigorous steps that aligned the artist's body with computerized inputs and outputs, in a way that anticipated the thorough coordination of the hand



Stan VanDerBeek, *Peomfield No. 1*, 1967. 16mm film transferred to video (color, silent), 4:45 minutes. Realized with Ken Knowlton. Courtesy of Estate of Stan

with digital screens in editing software like Photoshop.

VanDerBeek and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Photo by Lance Brewer. © 2017 Estate of Stan VanDerBeek.

It is impossible not to mention the contributions of Lillian Schwartz, an important female computer artist embedded at Bell Labs from 1968 to 2002 despite lacking acknowledgement as an official employee until two decades after her arrival. She was only given a solo show (at Magenta Plains) in 2016. Her belated recognition from corporations and the art world reveals the gender bias deeply ingrained in a system that erroneously distinguishes design, craft, and modern art. Although VanDerBeek and Schwartz shared many stylistic traits—they both worked with programmer Ken Knowlton—the perception of their artistic labor earned them unequal recognition in art history. The former was active in avant-garde circles unhinged from corporate interests, blending genres of cinema, theater, and immersive environments; Schwartz created equally hybrid films, optical effects, and art-historical analyses, and yet she was enclosed within a computer lab where she served merely as a "computer graphics consultant."[1] Schwartz's works are unexhibited, albeit acknowledged in a wall text, at MoMA's show.

The issue of gender at the intersection of computing and art-making is directly addressed by Beryl Korot's multi-media installation *Text and Commentary* (1976–77). Occupying the center of the gallery, the work features hanging tapestries, pictographic scores, and a five-channel video of the artist weaving. Korot recognized the buried connections between weaving, computing, and feminine labor. The Jacquard Loom (1801) based its weave on patterns automatically read from punch cards—it was the first computer prototype in human history. Similarly, Ada Lovelace, a figure both canonical and overlooked, was credited for writing the first computer algorithm for Charles Babbage's unrealized Analytical Machine (1830s). No less important is the role played by mid-twentieth century women programmers, whose jobs involved manually feeding information into ENIAC machines and debugging codes. Long before programming became a lucrative and desirable profession, these women's labor was deemed secondary and clerical. As one sits encased in the security of the hand-woven textiles, watching the artist's hands deftly operating the threads, it becomes apparent that to acknowledge the erasure of women from this history is to recognize the female body as the very first digital machine.

If Korot highlights the invisibility of female labor, Lee Friedlander's social-documentary series *At Work* (1985–1986) demonstrates how the computer's so-called democratization (brought by its commercial availability and software technologies) isolates subjects from the products of their labor. Commissioned by MIT, he photographed technicians working at their desktop monitors. By zooming in on the workers' blank stares—directed at screens not visible to the audience—Friedlander captures the changing social landscape defined by alienation and bored inebriation.

Thinking Machines broaches serious issues related to the history of computing and its influence on art production: long before computers became household products, artists were already negotiating problems of gender, labor, and modes of collaboration brought on by information and communication

technologies. Increasingly, we perceive through machines, think programmatically like machines, and expand our horizons by reflecting on social hierarchies and limitations through them. In a way, these artists demonstrate that Donna Haraway's cyborg,[2] while born out of science fiction, was always and already deeply embedded in social reality—whether visible through Korot's loom, Molnár's "machine imaginaire," or bored office workers. Yet, while the show illustrates how machines have automatized, obfuscated, or transfigured labor, it nevertheless continues the subordination of women's labor under a computer's generalized capacity for creativity. As gender and racial inequalities become especially pronounced in the age of AI and machine learning—when algorithms pick up the cultural-linguistic biases fed to them by humans—the renegotiation of women's place within this short yet complex history is a daunting yet necessary task.

Notes

Rebekah Rutkoff, "Painting by numbers: Rebekah Rutkoff on the art of Lillian Schwartz," *Artforum International* 55 (2016).
In a canonical essay, Haraway rejects deeply ingrained dualisms between humans and animals, machines and organisms, calling for non-essentialized coalitions based on hybrid affinities rather than identity. See: Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1984).

CONTRIBUTOR

Banyi Huang

BANYI HUANG is a contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.

Artforum
January 2017
ARTFORUM

Stan VanDerBeek, *Movie Mural*, 1968, 35-mm slides, hand-drawn scroll, slide projectors, overhead projector, multiple 35-mm and 16-mm films transferred to video, sound. Installation view. Photo: Chandra Glick.

"Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016"

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

INSIDE THE LUMINOUS ROOMS of "Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016," numerous screens, sounds, and curatorial proposals compete for attention, bleeding into one another in an expansive and ambitious venture. As curator Chrissie Iles states in her catalogue essay, "This is not a show about cinema," nor is it a show about immersion per se. It is, however, many other things: an exhibition of conceptual sprawl that skips around from the historical avant-garde to the internet and in between, skimming across animation, digitization, synesthesia, and interactions between the body and technology—all while testifying to the substantial and persistent challenges in successfully displaying the moving image in a museum setting.

In the exhibition's historical anchor, Edwin S. Porter's two-minute film *Coney Island at Night* (1905), the Dreamlands amusement park is illuminated in the darkness, foregrounding the connection between the cinema and turn-of-the-century fairground entertainments as experiential technologies of shock and sensation. Indeed, although *Coney Island at Night* is the only explicit gesture in "Dreamlands" to early cinema, the notion of exhibitionist spectacle—a key characteristic that differentiates the pre-1907 period ("the cinema of attractions," as Tom Gunning defined it) from the voyeuristic cinema of narrative integration that would develop after—is strong throughout. Pre-, anti-, and postclassical cinema join together, united in their shared emphasis on bodily address and the rejection of storytelling. This makes for some strange bedfellows: The notion of the "attraction" resonates rather differently in Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973, than it does in the dancing anime avatars of Hito Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun*, 2015, or the lo-fi 3-D of Trisha Baga's *Flatlands*, 2010. And yet one can discern in this genealogy a proposition as to what the history of cinema might look like if it expunged the literary to pursue instead alliances with music, sculpture, painting, and, yes, amusement parks and shopping malls.

Why spurn narrative? It has, after all, been a major component of artists' engagements with the moving image in the last quarter-century, to say nothing of a wider history of cinema. Perhaps Iles has renounced it out of a questionable if widespread conviction that narrative leads to an inherent spectatorial passivity, out of a desire to challenge its historical dominance, or as a wager that its teleology renders it better suited for exhibition in the movie theater. (Though "Dreamlands" does offer an extensive series of screenings in the Whitney's black-box theater, as well as an off-site program of expanded-cinema events, these are not under consideration here.) Whatever the motivation, "Dreamlands" pits the excluded term of narrative against a tactile, spatialized experience of media in which the conventions of linear viewing and linear perspective no longer apply. In Josiah McElheny's *Projection Painting II*, 2015, reworked footage from Maya Deren's unfinished 1951 film *Ensemble for Somnambulists* is projected on a framed, glass-covered, low-relief prismatic surface so as to be distorted beyond recognition. Multiple screens create engulfing surroundings that overturn cinematic frontality, as in Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie Mural*, 1968, Alex Da Corte and Jayson Musson's *Easternsports*, 2014, and Dora Budor's *Adaptation of an Instrument*, 2016. Taken as a whole, the exhibition itself enacts these gestures at a meta level, as the visitor is set to wander within an eighteen-thousand-square-foot audiovisual phantasmagoria.

If "Dreamlands" conceives of its visitor's body as pleasurably adrift in a technological wonderland, the representations of the body found within particular works suggest something very different. "Dreamlands" consistently returns to the figures of the automaton and the cyborg, positioning them as exemplary of a gendered encounter between technology and humanity that fixates on the body of the woman as a site of anxiety and desire. This line of the exhibition begins with the figurines of Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, 1922, here anachronistically yet seductively presented in a candy-colored made-for-television performance from 1970. It continues through Syd Mead's early 1980s designs for *Blade Runner*'s world of replicants, Lynn Hershman Leeson's cyborgs, and the many iterations of the anime character Annlee in Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999–2002), a science-fiction parable of uncanny embodiment and intellectual property. A twenty-first-century commodity-character devoid of interiority, Annlee was purchased cheaply by the artists for use in a series of works by collaborators including Rirkrit Tiravanija (*Ghost Reader C.H.*, 2002) and Liam Gillick (*Annlee You Proposes*, 2001), with all nine of the resulting videos on display here. (Missing are the many nonvideo works associated with the project.)

The sprinkling of *No Ghost Just a Shell* videos throughout the space also figures as the telos of a third proposal: "Dreamlands" foregrounds the contemporary ubiquity of animation and the increasing move away from the contingencies of lens-based capture. The miraculous *acheiropoieton*—the image produced without the intervention of the human hand—has given way to the nonindexical animated image, now dominant after its longtime marginalization. Computer-assisted imaging techniques proliferate, instituting a regime in which every pixel is available for specification. "Dreamlands" points to this shift, cutting across analog and digital technologies to suggest a genealogy of the moving image founded in the anarchic freedoms and fantasies of movement untethered from gravity and photography alike. The interest in synesthesia and visual music found in the three-screen reconstruction of Oskar Fischinger's *Raumlichtkunst* (Space Light Art, 1926/2012) extends through the preparatory drawings for Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) to Jenny Perlin's *Twilight Arc* (2016), a hand-drawn 16-mm animation exploring the history of the color organ. Probing the industrial determinations of the animated image like *No Ghost Just a Shell*, Mathias Poledna's *Imitation of Life*, 2013, is an enchanting 35-mm homage to 1930s Disney. It points at once to the animistic pleasures of what Sergei Eisenstein called the "plasmatic" transformations of the animated image and to the labor of production. Ian Cheng's live simulation *Baby feat. Ikaria*, 2013, renders three chatbots conversing as a swirl of ever-mutating abstract shapes on a vertical screen leaning against the wall.

In its buzzy atmosphere of screen-saturated distraction, "Dreamlands" suggests that we are to view the flight into what Iles calls an "interplanar cinematic environment" as a kind of liberation, an exciting advance, or at least an enjoyable experience that stimulates the whole body with images often unfettered by any adherence to physical reality. There is an established tradition of claiming an oppositional value for the haptic visuality frequently on view here; film scholar Laura U. Marks, for instance, aligns the distanced legibility of the optical regime with Cartesian fantasies of mastery, and the proximate sensuality of the haptic with an ethics of intimacy, contact, and embodiment. But what happens when the haptic becomes hegemonic, as it has in this era of touch screens, VR, motion sensors, and ubiquitous multimedia environments?

This is just one of several crucial questions the exhibition raises but never addresses. Is the cyborg a threat to human authenticity or does it offer a powerful emblem of a nonessentialist feminist politics? And what are the implications of the anthropocentric perfections of CGI replacing photographic capture as a dominant mode of worldmaking? "Dreamlands" is little concerned with such sociopolitical stakes. If any position can be discerned, it is a blithe adherence to the well-worn rhetoric of emancipation from the disciplinary regime of the traditional cinematic *dispositif*—a stance that without doubt has long been in need of serious revision, particularly since it fails to take account of the fact that new media propose new means of training the sensorium. Even if issues of gender, surveillance, and financialization very occasionally peek through in individual works in the show, "Dreamlands" is ultimately formalist in emphasis.

The exhibition is interested most in novel reconfigurations of the apparatus for their own sake and hesitant to confront their larger resonances. But how could it, given its gallimaufry of themes? Iles's landmark 2001 survey "Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977," also at the Whitney, was a major intervention that brought artists such as McCall and Paul Sharits to belated prominence and set an international agenda for the years that followed. In the time that has elapsed since, the moving image has achieved unprecedented recognition as an art form, in no small part due to Iles's efforts. Especially given the new demands of this changed landscape, it is unfortunate that "Dreamlands" abandons two interrelated strategies that served Iles so well in "Into the Light": painstaking research and a sharply honed focus. It's not for nothing that "Less is more" has become a cliché. "Dreamlands" attempts to chart a terrain so mammoth—extending far beyond the institution's American mandate—that the rationale for the selection of works and the relationships between them are at times tenuous. And yet many pieces share at least one thing in common: They have recently been on view in the New York area (some previously at the Whitney). Is Rose Hobart a cyborg? Hardly. But why else would Joseph Cornell's film be included? (And why presented so awkwardly?) In "Dreamlands," everything connects with everything else—even when it doesn't—in an unwieldy manner that tends to flatten distinctions that might better be highlighted.

There are several possible exhibitions latent within "Dreamlands," any one of which could have been very rich. The show's remarkable title is an evocative condensation of associations, bridging psychic life, popular entertainment, commodity capitalism, and public experience. This nexus is precisely what makes the moving image so fascinating as an art form—but doing it justice means understanding the disassembly and reassembly of cinema as more than just an opportunity for formal play.

"Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016" is on view through Feb. 5.

Artforum
January 31, 2017
HYPERALLERGIC

A Multimedia Jungle of Moving Images

The Whitney Museum's *Dreamlands* gathers a century of immersive moving image art, cutting ac and technology.

After Oskar Schlemmer, "Das Triadische Ballett" (Triadic Ballet, 1970), 35mm film transferred to video, color, sound, 29 min (courtesy Global Screen, Munich, produced by Bavaria Atelier for the Südfunk, Stuttgart, in collaboration with Inter Nationes and RTB); Director: Helmut Amann; Choreography and costume designs: Oskar Schlemmer, 1922; Artistic advisors: Ludwig Grote, Xanti Schwinsky, and Tut Schlemmer (© 1970 Bavaria Atelier for SWR in collaboration with Inter Nationes and RTB)

Installation view, Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 28, 2016–February 5, 2017, showing Stan VanDerBeek, "Movie Mural" (1968) (photo by Ronald Amstutz)

Stan VanDerBeek's "Movie Mural" (1968) is right around the corner from "CROSSROADS." An early experiment in multichannel film and video installation, "Movie Mural" features 10 projectors splashing looping and flashing images of all kinds onto seven screens and the walls around them. It might be tempting to see in "Movie Mural" something like the *contemporary condition of the image* — a sort of rudimentary Tumblr-scape or a glitched-out Times Square. But its positioning in *Dreamlands* gives its significance another turn. Occupying a leaky hallway between several rooms, with sound and light pouring in from every opening, "Movie Mural" is best characterized not by immersion, but by distraction. Riley and Gleason, for example, are still in earshot, inviting us linger a little longer among mushroom plumes and atomic tidal waves.

Observing this hectic scene (one among several others in the show), we're introduced to a theme that runs to *Dreamlands*' core: there's no such thing as immersion without distraction. A review in the *Wall Street Journal* begrudges the latter, noting that "some works feel lost in [*Dreamlands*'] dense, at times cacophonous labyrinth" — a sentiment echoed by critics elsewhere. Doubtless, *Dreamlands* isn't readily allowing of contemplative appreciation of many of its individual works. Though this may be an indication of mediocre curatorial practice elsewhere, in *Dreamlands*, it feels very much like a deliberately manufactured effect. Here, the ghost of Coney Island's Dreamland can be discerned in full force: if the show is packed too tightly with light and sound, it's exactly as an exhibitionist, fairground-style cinema of attractions would be. More than a nod to a forgotten relic of popular entertainment, *Dreamlands*' chaos is also reflective of a psychological state. The spaces between each artwork are animated with an ambient clamor, one analogous to the constant rustling of our always distracted, ever connected 24/7 time. This energy is broadcast in Lorna Mills's *Ways of Something*, a playful, epic work that runs John Berger's famous BBC documentary through the mesh of our weird, anxious, and sensory overloaded ecosystem.

Artnet news
June 13, 2017

artnet news

The 10 Most Extraordinary Artworks at Art Basel Unlimited 2017

Here are the standout pieces in this year's edition of the gargantuan art exhibition, curated once again by Gianni Jetzer.

Andrew Goldstein & **Julia Halperin**, June 13, 2017

With its colossal artworks, gleaming astonishments, and elegantly dressed dealers guarding darkened grottos of digital delight (i.e. screening rooms), Art Basel's Unlimited section resembles nothing so much as Aladdin's Cave of Wonder, where treasures pile upon treasures to overwhelming effect. This year, artnet News' Julia Halperin and Andrew Goldstein explored the massive trove, seeking out the artistic lamps that, when inspected, yield the greatest payoffs.

STAN VANDERBEEK
Movie Mural (1965–1968)
The Box

Stan VanDerBeek is an artist who hasn't quite gotten his due, and his room-size multimedia installation at Unlimited serves as an important reminder of just how much he did first. The US artist—a pioneer of what would later be called "expanded cinema"—began using computers to make art in 1965. He is a precursor to any of the many contemporary artists who create installations by projecting a mash-up of film excerpts, original footage, advertisements, and photographs onto multiple screens. (VanDerBeek started doing it in 1958.) He also has a hand in performance art history: *Movie Murals* like this one served as backdrops for performances by Merce Cunningham and Carolee Schneemann.

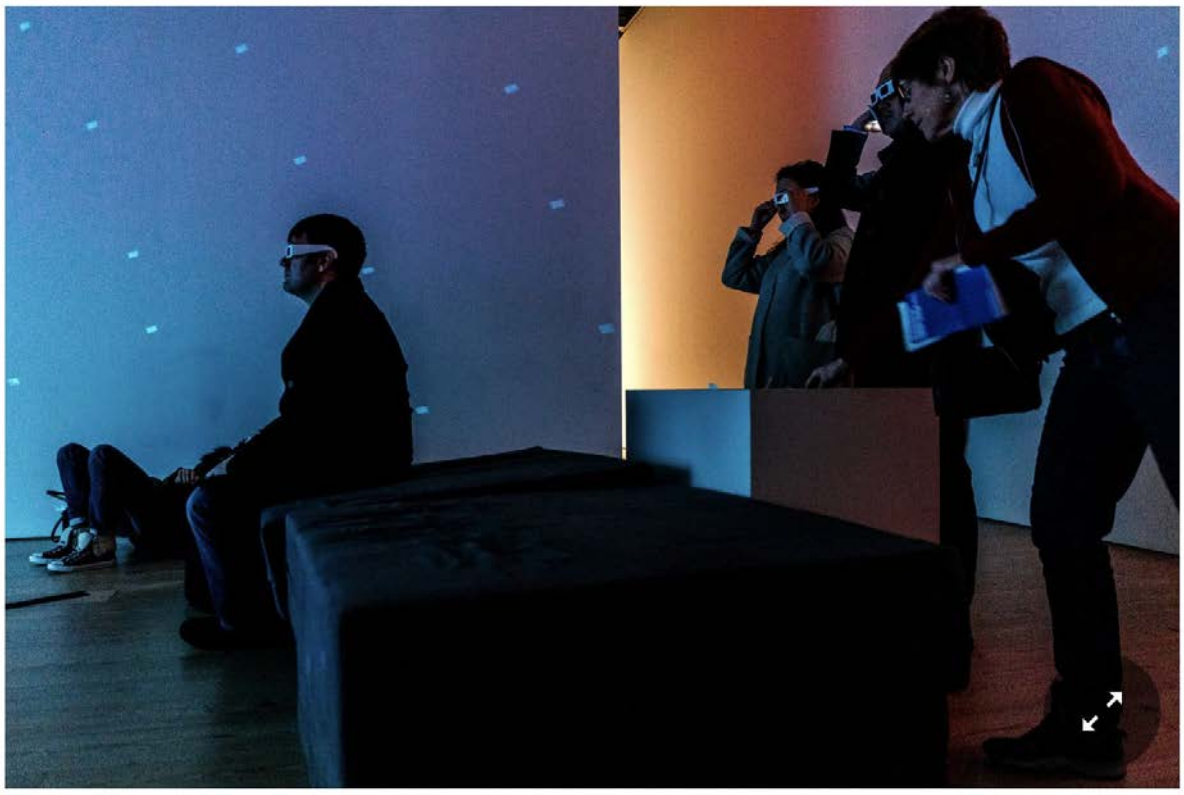
THE BOX

The New York Times
December 1 2016

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Diving Into Movie Palaces of the Mind at the Whitney



Visitors experiencing "Flatlands" by Trisha Baga in "Dreamlands" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibition explores the immersive nature of film. Jake Naughton for The New York Times

By Roberta Smith

Dec. 1, 2016 5 MIN READ

When the movie camera emerged around the turn of the 20th century, it quickly became the miracle that never stopped giving. It attracted scientists, the news industry and entertainers. It generated its own forms of commerce, wealth and celebrity and, for a while, inspired its own architecture, the luxurious movie palace. It was itself the focus of constant innovation, from the advent of sound, color and 3-D, to digitalization, which let smartphones and other devices incorporate both filmless cameras and small screens — hand-held movie palaces. And from the very beginning, creative people of all types grasped the cinema as an artistic outlet that would transform traditional storytelling and popular culture while giving a new focus to the international avant-garde. That group soon set about taking liberties with all aspects of the miracle: the camera, film and projector and the ways they could be manipulated to alter experiences of time, light, space and self.

Stan VanDerBeek's "Movie Mural" (1968). Jake Naughton for The New York Times

The interaction of art and cinema throughout the 20th and 21st centuries progresses fitfully across "Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016," an ambitious sprawl of an exhibition that has taken over the Whitney Museum of American Art's vast fifth floor — a space whose flexibility is once more impressively demonstrated.

Beautifully designed, with generous corridors, the show avoids being a daunting succession of black boxes, although the sound is not well balanced, and quieter works, many displayed on wall monitors in the halls, can be drowned out. It is informative, filled with diverse pleasures, rewards hours of viewing time and reflects a commitment to film in all of its forms maintained by no other New York museum. But making it all cohere is another thing.

"Easternsports" by Alex Da Corte, which includes monologues and dialogues by Jayson Musson. Jake Naughton for The New York Times

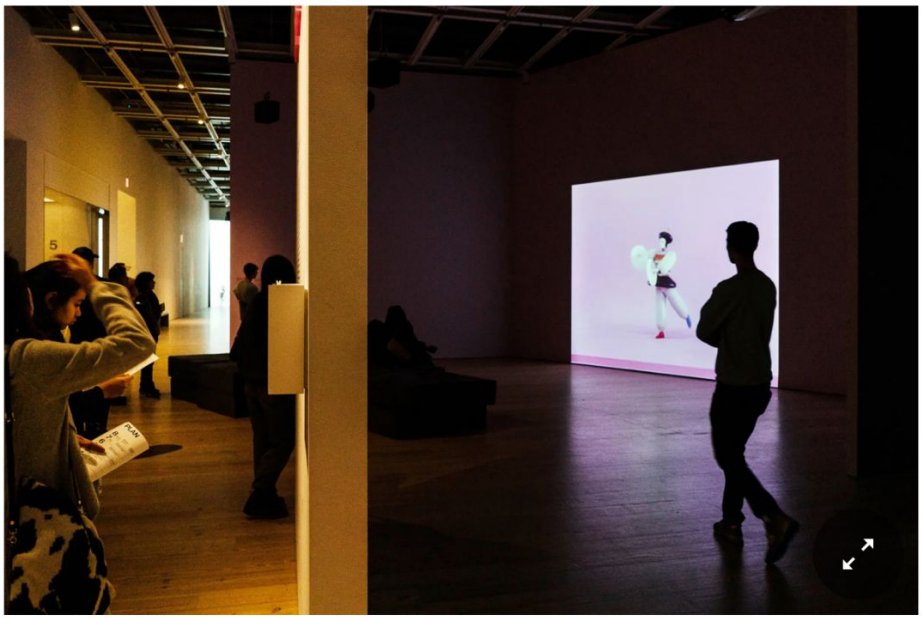
"Dreamlands" presents the work of more than 30 artists born between 1870 and 1993, starting off strong and then unraveling. It includes a handful of avant-garde films made before 1930; a slightly larger group from 1940-80, especially the 1960s and '70s. But a majority of works date from 2000 and are often arcane, ineffective or not especially innovative.

In the catalog, the Whitney curator Chrissie Iles, who organized the show, sees her inclusions as dismantling the cinematic givens of "projection, apparatus, film, the frontal rectangular screen, darkness, immobility, cinematography, linear narrative" to give priority to "the senses, the eye, immersive space, the body and the all-surrounding image."

A visitor watching Jud Yakult's "Destruct Film" (1967). Jake Naughton for The New York Times

How often the work achieves this may depend on your definition of immersive. As mine is probably somewhat literal, stressing the disorienting, body-enveloping, all-surrounding kind, I was often disappointed. There simply weren't enough strong examples. There was almost no reference to video games or virtual reality, arguably the most immersive of recent developments. It took me a while to see that Ms. Iles defines immersive with more nuance to include concentration and psychic absorption, some of it achieved in old-fashioned frontal rectangular formats, or in very intimate terms. That's signaled by Joseph Cornell's "Rose Hobart" (1936), a mesmerizing, 20-minute blue-tinted version — no larger than a small painting — of only those parts of the Hollywood movie "East of Borneo" that feature its female lead.

“Dreamlands” starts with a bang: a 1977 film re-creation of Oskar Schlemmer’s “Triadic Ballet” (1922), all blaring music, marionette choreography and bright bulbous costumes that turn the dancers into toys. Initially presented in a theater on a monochrome boxlike stage, it has the projecting intensity of a modernist, almost abstract film.



On the wall, a 1977 film recreation of Oskar Schlemmer’s 1922 “Triadic Ballet.”

Jake Naughton for The New York Times

Nearby the short “Coney Island at Night,” from 1905 by Edwin S. Porter, presents the classic dyad of film: the play of light against dark. It is captured in the wedding-cake filigree of the fairground’s dark structures elaborately trimmed in lights. It still thrills and feels new, proving perhaps that beauty — and celluloid? — is always alive. After that comes “SpaceLightArt,” a triptych from 1926 by the great Oskar Fischinger, an artisanal wizard who made abstract color films. He used strips of clay and swirled liquids that alternately evoke computers and the cosmos, and they were combined with music in environments he staged in interwar Berlin, pursuing, he said, “a happening of the soul, of the eyes.” In 1936, he relocated to Hollywood and worked for Disney, drawing designs for “Fantasia” that were never used. Some are included here and equally reflect his visionary instincts.

Film's light-dark pairing recurs throughout the show, including in Anthony McCall's "Line Describing a Cone" (1973), an installation that progressively outlines a circle on the wall that, when complete, gives the projector's white cone of light a startling tangibility (with the help of some atmospheric haze). Next door is Bruce Conner's "Crossroads," from 1976, a symphonic ode, in grisaille, to the beauty and horror of the 1946 underwater nuclear test at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific; its overwhelming scale is by definition immersive. Farther along, Frances Bodomo's enchanting "Afronauts" of 2014, a D.I.Y. 13-minute film based on the true story of some citizens of the newly independent Zambia who decided in 1969 to try to beat the United States to the moon. Here, black and white merge into lunar silver.

Hito Steyerl's "Factory of the Sun," which was a hit at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Jake Naughton for The New York Times

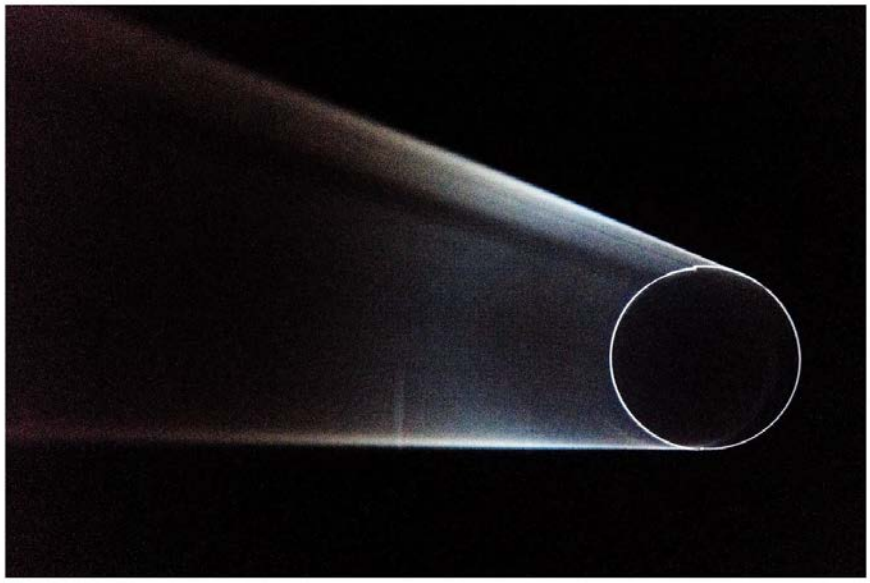
Among other immersive high points is Stan VanDerBeek's "Movie Mural" (1968), a floor-to-ceiling massing of slide and film projections with the scale of a walk-by drive-in movie. The result is a jumping, roiling collage that's both crazed and encyclopedic.

Although it is something of a period piece, Jud Yalkut's "Destruct Film," from 1967, deserves mention as the show's most physical environment: Its floor is strewn with pieces of film (walk on them, handle them, hold them to the light), while its walls blink with projected movies that include the Fluxus deities Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik in performance.

Frances Bodomo's "Afronauts." Jake Naughton for The New York Times

Two recent pieces meet the show's immersive billing with fairly total environments. Hito Steyerl's brilliant, Tron-like "Factory of the Sun" was a hit at the 2015 Venice Biennale. It weaves together corporate malfeasance, international intrigue and an astounding hip-hop stylist, and was partly shot at a ruined American listening station in Berlin, a satire edged in ominousness in the era of fake news.

Alex Da Corte's three-hour "Easternsports," an elaborate surround of four videos, adds robotic performers to his over-the-top arrangements of banal products. Meanwhile, a series of brilliant monologues and dialogues, by the artist Jayson Musson and rendered mostly as subtitles, rove sardonically through art, life, spirituality and the lack of it.



Anthony McCall's 1973 installation "Line Describing a Cone." Jake Naughton for The New York Times

Among the pieces descending from Cornell's intimism, I recommend Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Room of One's Own," a miniature installation whose tiny screens feature a woman confronting either a male intruder or the male gaze in general. And Terence Broad's "Blade Runner — Autoencoded," which immerses Ridley Scott's film in its own cloudy, prismatic atmosphere, leaves the dialogue as the primary tracking device.

Some works don't seem developed; others are just impenetrable mind games. Mathias Poledna's "Imitation of Life," a meticulous creation from scratch of a Disney-style animation with a singing donkey, is both homage and conceptual joke, but mainly virtually indistinguishable from the real thing.

Viewers focusing on Hito Steyerl's "Factory of the Sun." Jake Naughton for The New York Times

Ms. Iles is one of the most skillful, erudite and ambitious curators in her field, but "Dreamlands" seems confused by her desire to accommodate both a large viewing audience and also to reach a smaller, more informed in crowd. On the side of such specialization, she has included all of the AnnLee videos. Those started in 2000, when the French artists Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno bought rights to a Japanese manga character, named her AnnLee, made short videos about her, then invited other artists to do likewise.

The nine resulting videos are united here, appearing throughout the show, usually compromised by ambient noise. Seeing them together reveals their sameness: Most artists didn't move beyond AnnLee's minimally depicted, passive-waif persona and endless self-reference. (Is it by chance that one of AnnLee's homonyms is ennui?) She is filled in only by Melik Ohanian, who gives her physical solidity and dance moves, and especially by Liam Gillick, who turns her into a gleaming 3-D goth vixen who sets off electrical storms wherever she goes. She promises less to immerse than to bury us.

4 Columns
December 2, 2016
4Columns

Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art

Andrew Uroskie

The Whitney Museum's sprawling new show surveys a long, complicated relationship.

Hito Steyerl, *Factory of the Sun*, 2015. High-definition video, color, sound, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery. Photo: Sarah Wilmer.

Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016, *the Whitney Museum of American Art, 99 Gansevoort Street, New York, through February 5, 2017*

. . .

The sheer breadth of *Dreamlands* belies snap judgments. Featuring over one hundred artists whose works span more than a century, curator Chrissie Iles's ambitious, sprawling exhibition contains everything from traditional cartoon animation to 3-D environments, assemblage film to interactive AI. The Whitney's entire fifth floor is filled with work, and twenty-five additional days of screenings and performances take place in the museum's third-floor theater, and off-site at the Microscope Gallery and the Knockdown Center in Bushwick. These performances and screenings extend the scope and impact of the main exhibition in innumerable ways, providing context and elaboration for the show's principal themes.

Dreamlands will inevitably be compared to Iles's relatively delimited *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964–77* (Whitney, 2001), but it more closely resembles Kerry Brougher's expansive surveys *Art and Film Since 1945* (Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) and *The Cinema Effect* (Hirshhorn, 2008)—broad attempts to assay cinema's

irrevocable transformation of modern perception and subjectivity.

The complicated relationship between cinema and modern art has long constituted a vexing problem for historians and critics, in part because cinema cannot help but overflow its bounds, not only appropriating other practices, but continually leaking out into the domain of cultural life more generally.

This fluidity and heterogeneity are precisely what fascinates Iles, as we see immediately upon entering and encountering a wall-sized video projection of *Triadic Ballet* by the Bauhaus multimedia artist Oskar Schlemmer. It is a provocative choice with which to begin the exhibition: a 1922 choreography of mechanical movements in an abstracted space, here presented in a filmed re-performance from 1970 and recently digitized for exhibition.

Is this a work of dance, film, or video? To what historical period do we assign it? The complexity of such questions serves to succinctly encapsulate experimental cinema's distinctly non-linear genealogy: the manner in which so much of the 1920s avant-garde would be rediscovered by artists of the postwar period, just as intermedia practices of the 1960s and 1970s have been rediscovered by artists since the late 1990s.

On the opposite wall, Edwin Porter's *Coney Island at Night* (1905) presents an almost unedited recording of the famous Dreamland park in which space is similarly abstracted: the obdurate solidity of architecture dematerialized into spectacle through over a million incandescent lights.

Porter's film is silent; across the room we overhear a third instance of documentation: a recording of Neil Armstrong recounting his first steps on the moon in Pierre Huyghe's video *One Million Kingdoms* (2001). A ghostly young girl travels through a third abstract landscape: a computer-generated visualization of the astronaut's voice. Part of the larger project *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999-2002), Huyghe's work is but one of eight pieces in the exhibition featuring Annlee, a Japanese manga character he and fellow artist Philippe Parreno purchased and made freely available for collective appropriation.

The three works in this opening room—made with film, video, and the computational image—trace cinema's technological past and future, while addressing several of its most pervasive effects and concerns: the dissolution of a sense of place, the changing character of documentation, and the transformation of the self through the creation of alternate phantasmatic realities.

At its best, the exhibition facilitates these kind of thoughtful

juxtapositions. Rather than individually curtained black boxes, walls are often left half-open, sight-lines and sound-spill seeking to provoke new associations and correspondences. It is a curatorial strategy echoed in the reconstruction of Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie Mural* (1968), the show's largest and most complex audiovisual installation.

Stan VanDerBeek, *Movie Mural*, 1968. Multiple 35 mm and 16 mm films transferred to video, with black-and-white and color slide projections. Image courtesy estate of Stan VanDerBeek. Photo: Andrew V. Uroskie.

Ektagraphic slides and digital projectors together form a living montage of still and moving imagery across a wall of screens.

Art historical and photojournalistic imagery collide with the artist's own works of animated collage, videographic dance, and computational poetics. And at the center of this maelstrom, the image of a death's-head moth on a spider web remains fixed by an overhead projector. That projector poignantly marks the limits of historical reconstruction, having originally served as a means by which VanDerBeek could draw and paint on projected transparencies during an ever-changing performance.

This model of environmental, multi-projector performance was pioneered four decades before in such works as Oskar Fischinger's *Raumlichtkunst* (*Space Light Art*, 1926/2012), on view nearby. Painstakingly reconstructed by the Center for Visual Music from films more than half a century old, this three-screen video installation is a kinetic abstraction of psychedelic color and intensity, contrasting geometrically thrusting bars with centrifugally collapsing folds, as central images of the cosmos evoke the infinite.

Fischinger's contemporary Kurt Schwerdtfeger was similarly enmeshed in ideas of kinetic abstraction, and an extraordinary performance of the artist's *Reflektorische Farblichtspiele* (*Reflecting Color-Light-Play*, 1922/2016) took place off-site at Brooklyn's Microscope Gallery. First, Schwerdtfeger's projection apparatus had to be reconstructed: a kind of color organ using an array of stage lights and colored gels to variously illuminate a translucent scrim from behind. A fiberboard stencil with cut-out

shapes and adjustable sliding panels was then placed between the lights and the scrim. While one operator controlled position, color, and the number of lights shining on the scrim, two other operators moved the panels back and forth over the cutouts like the opening and closing of an aperture. Over six "movements," the basic shapes of six stencils were modulated into seemingly endless variations by means of spatial displacement and a constant iteration of form and color.

As is inevitable with a show of this size, questions will be raised as to the criteria by which certain artists were included or excluded, as well as the rationale for staging certain works as installations within the gallery, while grouping together others within supplemental screenings. This seems only appropriate in an exhibition designed more to provoke and question than to stage a particular polemic.

Even as contemporary media art has become increasingly ubiquitous, historically canonical works like VanDerBeek's *Movie Mural* or Schwerdtfeger's *Reflecting Color-Light-Play* are very rarely exhibited; they are typically consigned to archives or storage vaults and are only vaguely accessible through documentation. Evading the financially inflationary forces of the art market, the restoration and exhibition of these works is a labor of love for curators, preservationists, and museum boards.

In gathering such a polyphony of voices past and present, the installations, screenings, and performances in *Dreamlands* offer a welcome corrective to the art market's myopic focus on the present.

Andrew V. Uroskie is the author of Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art *(University of Chicago Press, 2014). He serves as Associate Professor of Modern Art and Media at Stony Brook University in New York, where he directs the MA/PhD Program in Art History & Criticism. His new book project* The Kinetic Imaginary *was awarded a 2016 Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant.*

The New York Times
June 1, 2015

The New York Times

Review: Stan VanDerBeek at Andrea Rosen Gallery

By ROBERTA SMITH JUNE 1, 2015

Projected on four walls of a small space, Stan VanDerBeek's experimental 16-millimeter films (transferred to video) form one of the best shows in Chelsea right now. They also create a pulsing environment that increases our understanding of this pioneering, experience-oriented artist, who died at 57 in 1984.

Made between 1966 and 1971 as part of his "Poemfield" series, these short films were "realized," as the credits say, with Ken Knowlton, a computer programmer and physicist at Bell Labs. Mr. Knowlton wrote an early animation program that enabled Mr. VanDerBeek to create fields, patterns and words in moving, glowing dots of color — although the process involved quite a bit of analog work as well (and the results often evoke fast-moving cross-stitch embroidery). The films captivate, flooding the mind, eye and ear with sometimes psychedelic color; wordplay; antiwar sentiments; and interesting audio, including jazz and the music of John Cage. The poems emerge fitfully. "Crying is an edge," pulses "Poemfield No. 3." The elliptical punch line follows several minutes later: "But a cutting edge."

"Poemfield No. 1," seen here in multicolored and blue-and-white versions, emphasizes shorter utterances: "Words," "The Space Between Things" and, eerily, "Falling Towers." "No. 2" and "No. 7," which are alternately screened on the gallery's south wall, often exude mandalalike compositions, while the patterns of "No. 5" are layered over tinted footage of sky divers. "While falling — free-falling," it intones.

These films feel very contemporary, but in fact they connect all over the map of postwar art — to Concrete poetry, the choreography of Merce Cunningham, Conceptual Art's use of language — and painting too. Mr. VanDerBeek's 1963-66 installation "Movie-Drome," a dense collage of films, slides and drawings projected inside a dome, caused a stir when exhibited at the New Museum in 2012. This show provides another tantalizing glimpse of his achievement.

Andrea Rosen Gallery 2

544 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through June 20

A version of this review appears in print on June 5, 2015, on page C22 of the New York edition with the headline: Stan VanDerBeek.

Artforum
2014
ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Stan VanDerBeek

THE BOX
805 Traction Avenue
September 13–October 25

View of "Stan VanDerBeek: Poemfield," 2014.

Even now, the electronic mandalas and digital cross-stitch ofStan VanDerBeek's "Poemfields," 1966–71, projected onto the gallery's felicitously high walls, flow with hypnotic, immersive energy. It's difficult to imagine what early audiences, unaccustomed to computer graphics, must have made of them or, as VanDerBeek would have put it, how they *experienced* them. Digital patterns pulsate and scroll as words appear singly and in pairs; gnomic phrases materialize from the high-key geometric flux, then dissolve back into it, blurring distinctions between background and foreground, text and image. VanDerBeek produced these bewitching short films—on view is *Poemfield No.1–No.3*, *No.5*, and *No.7*, the first of which has been restored in high-definition and exhibited here for the first time—with Bell Labs engineer Ken Knowlton using Beflix, a first-generation graphics programming language that worked by generating dense mosaics of keyboard symbols and type. The series marks a shift for VanDerBeek, a once-underground filmmaker, toward what he called an "expanded cinema" and the beginning of an intense period of collaborative experimentation conducted at the porous edge between high art and advanced telecommunications. VanDerBeek worked in emergent media with a revolutionary zeal, but he was also ambivalent, convinced that technology was dangerously outpacing humanity's understanding of its uses and consequences. It's worth remembering that VanDerBeek's artist residency at Bell Labs—the epicenter and incubator of the Information Age—amounted to an emergency intervention: In 1965, the artist called for urgent research into an "international picture-language" capable of connecting the world in a satellite-linked "culture-intercom." The "Poemfields" were meant as prototypes for this new computer-enabled medium of optical communication, one short "step away from mental movies," as VanDerBeek wrote of them, "samples of the art of the future."

— *Alexander Keefe*

THE BOX

The New York Times
July 19, 2012

The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Technology Advances, Then Art Inquires

'Ghosts in the Machine' at the New Museum

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Ghosts in the Machine , at the New Museum, features some 140 works, including "Movie-Drome," a mix of projected films, slides and drawings on the walls of a hemispherical room, by the filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek. More Photos »

By ROBERTA SMITH

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If "Ghosts in the Machine," an ambitious, multitasking, somewhat austere exhibition at the New Museum were itself a machine, it would have lots of moving parts, but not all of them would be performing with equal efficiency.


Slide Show

'Ghosts in the Machine'

Walking through this enormous show, which has been orchestrated by Massimiliano Gioni, the museum's associate director and head of exhibitions, and Gary Carrion-Murayari, its curator, can call to mind one of Marcel Duchamp's lesser-known quips. In a 1963 interview in Vogue, cited in Calvin Tomkins's 1996 biography of him, Duchamp claimed that the aesthetic life span of an art object — what he called its "emanation" — "doesn't last more than 20 or 30 years." Referring to his most famous painting, the 1912 "Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2," he added, "I mean, for example that my 'Nude' is dead, completely dead." Mr. Tomkins suggests that his subject was half-joking, but only half.

The New Museum show repeatedly proves Duchamp about half right. As smart and thought stirring as this exhibition is, it is also a little short on living, breathing artworks, and slightly overloaded with rather stale ones and other objects and diagrams that, altogether, function primarily as interesting period pieces or historical artifacts.

In the catalog Mr. Gioni writes that the show was not conceived as "a classic historical survey" but as a "cabinet of curiosities." Casting a wide net and moving quickly and a little capriciously across time and national boundaries, it sets out to examine some of the artistic reflections of our machine-haunted, technology-dependent era, especially in the second half of the last century. It is far less interested in bringing together established masterpieces than in using unfamiliar artworks to shed light on a machine-infested terrain that is as social and psychological as it is visual. The exhibition contains just enough powerful art — including some surprising resurrections — to pull it off.

The show's mixture of marginal art movements and neglected objects ranges from 1960s Op Art paintings by Bridget Riley and Julian Stanczak to a reconstruction of Wilhelm Reich's notorious Orgone Energy Accumulator from 1940; sitting in it was supposed to unblock the flow of life energy. There are constant swings among decades, allowing you, for example, in the museum's lobby, to peruse "The Way Things Go," the brilliantly witty 1987 video of chain reactions involving ordinary objects by Peter Fischli and David Weiss that is often likened to the creations of Rube Goldberg, and then go upstairs and study some drawings

from the 1930s by Goldberg himself, sharpening your appreciation of the analogy. There are works by machine-obsessed outsider artists, healers and mental patients, including a series of suspended wire constructions by the self-taught American sculptor Emery Blagdon (1907-86), who thought they could cure illness. One of the show's few dips into the premodern era is an 1810 engraving based on the delusional drawing by James Tilly Matthews, an Englishman who is generally considered the first person to receive a diagnosis of schizophrenia, that depicts his domination by a machine he called the Air Loom.

A majority of the show's roughly 140 artworks, diagrams and related objects date from the mid 1950s to the mid-'70s — the halcyon years of postwar art and, not coincidentally, the beginning of the technological blossoming in which we currently find ourselves. The machine theme means that the show largely avoids the period's dominant styles — especially Pop and Minimalism — favoring the more science- and technology-focused tendencies that they overrode or shunted aside. These include not only Op Art but also Kinetic art and what might be called op-kinetic hybrids, pursued in particular by little-known Italian artists. There are also several computer-generated films and a cache of wan computer-made drawings. This show repeatedly reminds you that every major scientific advance has artistic repercussions, artists who see it as the basis for something new and revolutionary, a way to go beyond conventional notions of touch, authorship and personal expression (even though it sometimes seems that the baby has been discarded with the bath water).

The largely abstract Op and kinetic works are balanced by profusely image-based efforts that predate Pop's embrace of popular culture, or dissent from its emphasis on painting while also presaging 1980s appropriation art. These include two impressive resurrections of almost-never-seen works: "Man, Machine and Motion," a large, rather stilted but nonetheless proto-Pop labyrinthine photo installation from 1955 by the British artist Richard Hamilton, and "Movie-Drome," from 1963-66, by the American avant-garde filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek. A dense, hallucinatory mix of projected films, slides and drawings splayed across the walls of a hemispherical room — originally a converted silo in Stony Point, N.Y. — it saw action fewer than five times. An enthralling rediscovery suggestive of a cross between an animated Rauschenberg silk-screen painting and the Internet's deluge of images, it is a tantalizing rediscovery.

Duchamp is of course one of the show's foundational presences, represented by a 1959-60 reconstruction of "The Large Glass" from 1915-23, one of modernism's earliest and certainly most significant depictions of the machine in art. Its subtitle — "The Bride Stripped Bare by

Her Bachelors, Even" — highlights the eroticized fusion of machines and humans that is one of the show's underlying themes. Next to it stands a frightening bedlike structure inspired by the implement of torture central to Kafka's 1919 short story "In the Penal Colony." Complete with an overhead array of needles, it executed its victims by inscribing their crimes on their bodies and was commissioned by the influential Swiss curator Harald Szeemann for his 1975 Duchamp-inspired exhibition "The Bachelor Machines." (Prior exhibitions about the machine are among this one's subthemes.)

In another gallery you'll come across "Crash!," a short film that the British science fiction writer J. G. Ballard made with Harley Cokeliss in 1971 (more than 20 years before the release of David Cronenberg's Ballard-based feature of the same name, without the exclamation point). A meditation on the car as the central form and fantasy of modern society — and on the car crash as a kind of wish-fulfillment or consummation — it is both insightful and noticeably dated, especially in its juxtaposition of scenes of a car moving through a carwash and close-ups of a woman showering.

As usual, the stronger works provide built-in criticisms of their neighbors. On the third floor, for example, the rather clinical inertness of the Hamilton photo installation is pointed up by "The History of Nothing," a 12-minute film from 1963 by Eduardo Paolozzi, another proto-Pop artist working in Britain, that will be new to most viewers. Combining drawings, engravings and photographs with a grinding, spluttering sound track, it depicts a dreamlike urban landscape with a personal intensity that leaves the Hamilton in the dust, while suggesting a missing link between Max Ernst's collages and the 1968 animation of "Yellow Submarine."

On the second floor most of the mechanized kinetic works and the eye-buzzing Op reliefs and sculptures keep the eye busy without giving the mind enough to do. Some feel like precursors to nothing so much as screen savers. Exceptions include a piece by the French-Argentine artist Julio le Parc in which big black-and-white moiré circles amusingly suggest woozy eyes, and a small, sweetly solemn motorized aperturelike wall piece in painted wood by the Belgian Pol Bury. More convincing, however, is the straightforward kineticism of Hans Haacke's 1964-65 "Blue Sail" — a big square of blue chiffon held aloft by the blowing of an electric fan — and Gianni Colombo's small, dark 1968 walk-in environment, "Elastic Space." It surrounds the viewer with a luminous, attenuated grid of white cord that is gently stretched this way and that by a quietly whirring motor. Standing inside this work is like inhabiting something akin to a living organism, a friendly, encompassing, unified ghost-machine.

"Ghosts in the Machine" continues through Sept. 30 at the New Museum, 235 Bowery at Prince Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-1222, newmuseum.org.

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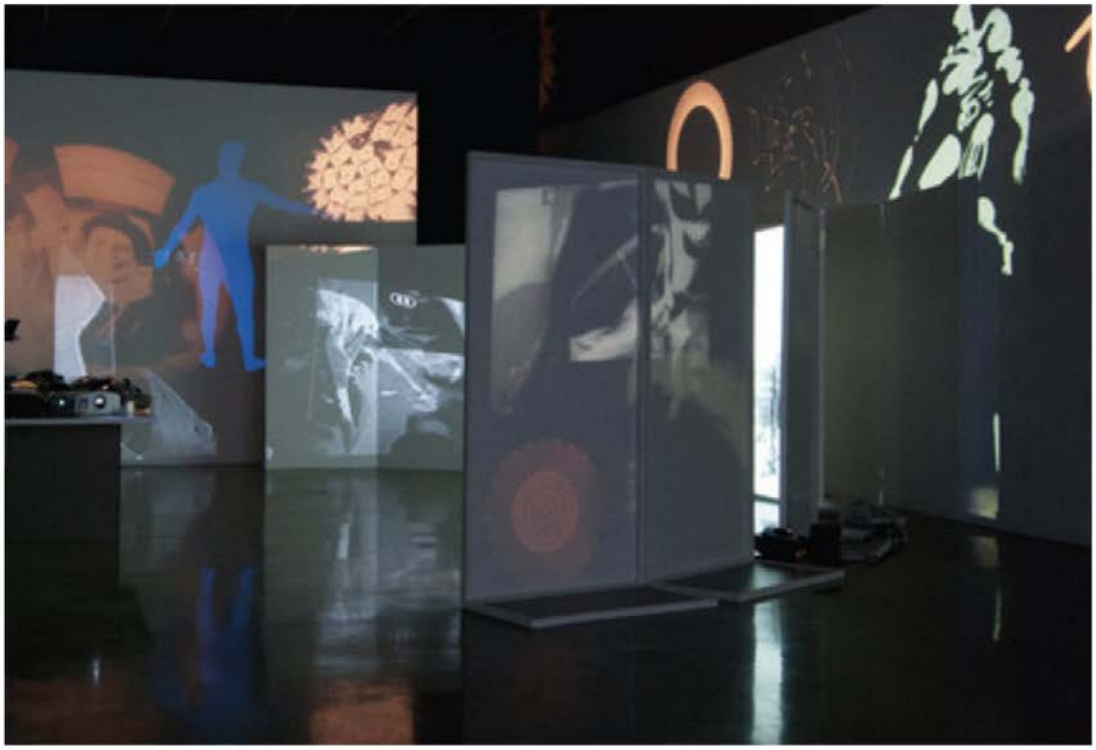

Stan VanDerBeek, *Movie Mural*, 1968/2011, mixed media. Installation view, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, 2011.

Stan VanDerBeek

STAN VANDERBEEK remains best known for the experimental films he made during the 1950s and '60s, which placed him at the forefront of avant-garde cinema. This first retrospective exhibition of VanDerBeek's work, co-curated by João Ribas and Bill Arning, offers the chance to more broadly consider his visionary engagement with the postwar communications revolution. Indeed, seeing this much of his work together makes it seem both utterly contemporary and oddly quaint. VanDerBeek's use of multiscreen projection and his transformation of the white cube of the modernist gallery into the black box that dominates so many large-scale exhibitions today mark him as a harbinger of art's current obsession with moving images. But the many formats he used—including 16-mm film, slides, broadcast television, fax machines, and mainframe computers—are outmoded in the age of new media, lending the exhibition a not entirely unpleasant, if slightly musty, whiff of retro-chic obsolescence. The utopianism that underlies his technological restlessness has aged less well. His work fits better with the technophilia of the mid-'90s and the first wave of Net art than in today's atmosphere of heightened technological skepticism.

VanDerBeek, who died in 1984 at age 57, didn't live to see the rise of the Web, but his writing is a strong precursor to the celebration by *Wired* et al. of global, rhizomatic computer culture that proliferated during the original Internet boom. This exhibition is named after one of his most farsighted essays, "Culture: Intercom," published in 1966 in *Film Culture*, in which he anticipated many of the ways we now interact with online images. In it he calls for the development of a "non-verbal international picture-language" that would be delivered via a "culture-intercom," where, through the push of a button, the world's treasures would be instantly available. VanDerBeek's notion of an international picture-language is in line with the long-standing modernist dream of a visual Esperanto that would facilitate cross-cultural exchange and greater understanding among the whole of humanity. In the essay, copies of which are displayed in the show, he describes vast data banks, accessible from anywhere on the planet, where groups of people effortlessly share audiovisual information regardless of national boundaries.

VanDerBeek's own approximation of a culture-intercom was far more spectacular than some push-button gadget. From 1963 to 1965 he operated a "Movie-Drome" in his backyard in upstate New York. He simultaneously projected an encyclopedic variety of films and slides across its planetarium-like interior in shows designed, he wrote, to allow the audience to "grasp the flow of man." The Movie-Drome was the most ambitious realization of his multiprojection work, but he made numerous similar pieces. These include *Movie Mural*, 1968/2011, the exhibition's centerpiece, which has been re-created from notes and photographs of its original installation. Video projectors, speakers, chattering slide carousels, and an overhead projector are arrayed across a table, with several more projectors sitting on the floor. These beam a multitude of images over three freestanding walls arranged in a semicircle. The images—including a film on the history of cinema, figurative drawings, and a slide-show world tour of architectural and sculptural monuments—spill out onto the surrounding gallery walls as if the work were unable to contain its own excess of information. The reconstruction here made me wonder precisely how much the work had been updated for the show; it looks sensational and perhaps all too contemporary in its engulfing disarray. Yet there is no doubt that by building on the mnemonic atlases and imaginary museums of previous generations, VanDerBeek was one of the first artists to foster an experience of sensory overload that audiences now take for granted.

During his lifetime VanDerBeek received the most acclaim for his single-screen films, and they remain among his best works. This is especially true of his collage films, whose formal ingenuity is matched by their anarchic humor. The exhibition features a large selection of films, transferred to video, some of which were screened in their original format in several evening programs. As well known as he was for these films, his video work has never been recognized; the exhibition importantly begins to redress this. It features the most extensive collection of materials ever assembled on *Violence Sonata*, 1970, the artist's remarkable two-channel television broadcast on civil rights and the threat of nuclear Armageddon made for the Boston station WGBH. Several of his other videos are screening along with the films, though the exhibition misses the opportunity to bring together his many other television and video projects. The side-by-side projection of four of his "Poemfields," 1966–71, is an important hybrid exception. Made with the use of a mainframe computer in collaboration with Kenneth Knowlton at Bell Laboratories and transferred to film and then video, these works feature poetic texts written by VanDerBeek and are among the earliest instances of computer animation. Their ever-shifting patterns of pixelated colors, with scores by Paul Motian and John Cage, offer an unparalleled example of psychedelic high modernism in an experimental format usually missing from histories of video art or avant-garde film.

VanDerBeek was a humanist at heart. He held fast to the utopian notion that, given proper artistic guidance, technology would free humanity instead of destroying it. This was a common failing among art and technology boosters during the '60s, inasmuch as it paradoxically ascribes too much individual agency to both men and machines while ignoring the subtleties of institutional structures, identity politics, and social networks. To his credit, VanDerBeek was more sensitive to these issues than many of his contemporaries, as seen in his engagement with race and gender in *Violence Sonata*. This exhibition provides a welcome chance to remember an artist who grappled with the early promise of postwar communications technologies and to consider him in light of the world today, where global communication circuits lead to uncharted risks as well as unexpected revolutions.

"Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom" travels to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, May 14–July 10.

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January 2009
ARTFORUM

Stan VanDerBeek

GUILD & GREYSHKUL

When Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984) wrote in a 1961 manifesto ("The Cinema Delimina—Films from the Underground") that artists were increasingly "abandoning the logics of aesthetics, springing full-blown into a juxtaposed and simultaneous world that ignores the one-point-perspective mind, the one-point-perspective lens," he could well have been describing the vertiginous presentation of this retrospective of his own work. In the main space, three film loops, six 35-mm slide projections (three looped and three still), and an image of a collage were projected on screens clustered in front of one wall, their sound tracks cacophonous. Forty-seven framed collages lining the opposite wall, photocopies of a mural by VanDerBeek, and a two-channel video completed the display.

Abolishing any pretense of sustained, individual viewing, the show's seventeen short films, spanning 1957 to 1972, were projected alongside *Found Forms*, 2008, a "multi-projection film performance" presented in 1969 and reconfigured here. The montagelike installation could have been fractious and heavy-handed, but instead served as an intimate demonstration of VanDerBeek's layered compositional strategies and seemed to argue, as he did, that people can take in, associate, and categorize an excess of simultaneous imagery—here both moving and still, amusing and harrowing. Sara and Johannes VanDerBeek, cofounders of the gallery and established artists in their own right, organized the show, and their initially distracting yet ultimately analytical and resolute layout captured the innovative spirit of their father's multifaceted work.

For *Found Forms* (the most complicated and structurally ambitious of the pieces), an "electronic assemblage" of newsreels and miscellaneous footage was projected on a central screen flanked by slide projections of figurative sculptures and journalistic photos documenting contemporary conflicts; completing the multiscreen composition were computer-generated mandala-like drawings that slowly rotated to the left and right. As the nonsynchronous groupings of images repeated their circuit, a haunting photograph of battered civil rights activists might have found a recombinant reading with, say, a Grecian torso and sumo wrestlers. Sports and entertainment snippets intercut with war footage further conveyed VanDerBeek's mordant vision of an increasingly volatile and interconnected world in which images of armed conflict, political protest, and ritual celebration readily mingle with vehicles racing at top speed, absurd feats of human strength, fashion shows, hurricanes, and the occasional dancing bear. Although a forerunner to multichannel installations and searchable image databases, *Found Forms* is perhaps most reminiscent of Aby Warburg's anachronistic *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1924–29, in its penchant for delirious cataloguing and cross-referencing of gestural expression and figurative similitude.

Alongside the installation were VanDerBeek's short films (a mix of stop-motion animation, live-action scenarios, and found footage), which made him a central figure in the avant-garde cinema scene of New York in the 1960s. The comic style of VanDerBeek's films recalls not only the knockabout farce of Dadaist filmmakers like René Clair and Hans Richter—and, in turn, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Georges Méliès—but also Max Ernst's episodic collage narratives, Harry Smith's esoteric animations, and Joseph Cornell's found-footage reveries. *Breathdeath*, 1963, is a particularly potent example: A riff from the song "I Put a Spell on You" propels a *danse macabre* of collage sequences in which a human foot slips out of Nixon's mouth, a newspaper announces US SKY BOMB A SUCCESS, Marilyn Monroe's face is blackened into a death mask, an elegant couple dining are superimposed over footage of a firebombed building, and Chaplin's head splits in two to reveal a billowing atomic mushroom cloud. A seeming influence on such divergent collage projects as Terry Gilliam's animations for Monty Python's *Flying Circus* and Martha Rosler's "Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful," 1967–72, VanDerBeek's work shows him to be a fascinating figure in need of more extended presentations and critical reconsideration.

—*Fionn Meade*

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Art in Review

Oct. 10, 2008

STAN VANDERBEEK

Guild & Greyshkul

28 Wooster Street, SoHo

Through Oct. 18

Stan VanDerBeek (1927-84) was an experimental filmmaker, animator, computer graphics pioneer, painter, photographer, collagist and poet who was ahead of his time and died far too young. He was globalist in his thinking way before the present internationalist moment. He believed that aesthetics and science could fruitfully merge, an idea being borne out by the Internet. He nurtured an avid faith one lost at present in the potential of art to change, for the better, the way people everywhere felt, acted and thought.

VanDerBeek was as much a systems programmer of the utopian imagination as he was a maker of stand-alone objects. But objects are what we have left of him; and there are many, many of them. We are fortunate that two of his children, Johannes and Sara VanDerBeek, artists and two of the founders of the Guild & Greyshkul gallery in SoHo, have begun the task of retrieving and conserving those objects and reconstructing his vision.

The show they have assembled cuts a wide swath through more than 30 years of work. The material ranges from beautiful little paintings done in the 1950s, when VanDerBeek was studying at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, to his zany Dadaist film animations of the 1960s, which look at once futuristic and antique and were produced while he was collaborating on projects with Allan Kaprow, Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer in New York.

Later, at M.I.T., he used developing computer and communications technologies to create multipart interactive pieces that partly existed in virtual time and space. His ultimate goal was to create immersive, consciousness-altering art environments around the world. The Movie-Drome he built at his home in Stony Point, N.Y., for the all-over projection of films was a prototype for these.

He would probably have enjoyed the sampler format of the current show, which has projections, collages and paintings wherever you look. More tightly edited exhibitions focusing on single aspects of his art surely lie in the future, as, one assumes, does close attention by museums. Meanwhile, we can savor this generous and seriously considered tribute, a rough-cut of a notable career. **HOLLAND COTTER**

Art in America
January 2009

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Stan VanDerBeek: *Found Forms*, 1969/2008, 16mm film, 35mm slides and transparency projections; at Guild & Greyshkul.

STAN VANDERBEEK
GUILD & GREYSHKUL

Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984) is usually remembered as an experimental filmmaker, but this summary label is ultimately too confining for his wide-ranging creativity. An expanded understanding of VanDerBeek's achievement was recently proffered by two of his children, Sara and Johannes, who discovered a long-neglected trove of his writings, paintings, collages and projected images last year. They mounted a fragmentary survey of their father's work at Guild & Greyshkul, a gallery they cofounded along with Anya Kielar.

Before he acquired basic filmmaking and animation skills while working on the set of a children's television program, VanDerBeek studied painting at Black Mountain College in the 1950s. The rear room of the gallery contained dozens of his early oils, all rather thinly painted on small wooden panels and displayed in neat rows on long shelves. Centralized orbs are recurring motifs, and often appear to hover like suns above distant horizons. But some of the paintings combine circular forms with purely abstract marks and resemble Adolph Gottlieb canvases in miniature.

Most of the show occupied a larger, darker and noisier room, where assemblages—VanDerBeek's fundamental format—dated between 1957 and 1968 and 47 framed collages were hung salon-style on a large wall. Piecing together fragments of human bodies, facial features, domestic interiors and car parts from magazine clippings and other found photographs, VanDerBeek concocted wacky, scale-defying mechano-morphs clearly indebted to Dada. These collages were ultimately used as stop-motion frames for the numerous black-and-white animated movies that VanDerBeek created during the same period. Seventeen of those 16mm films (transferred to DVD) were projected on the opposite wall.

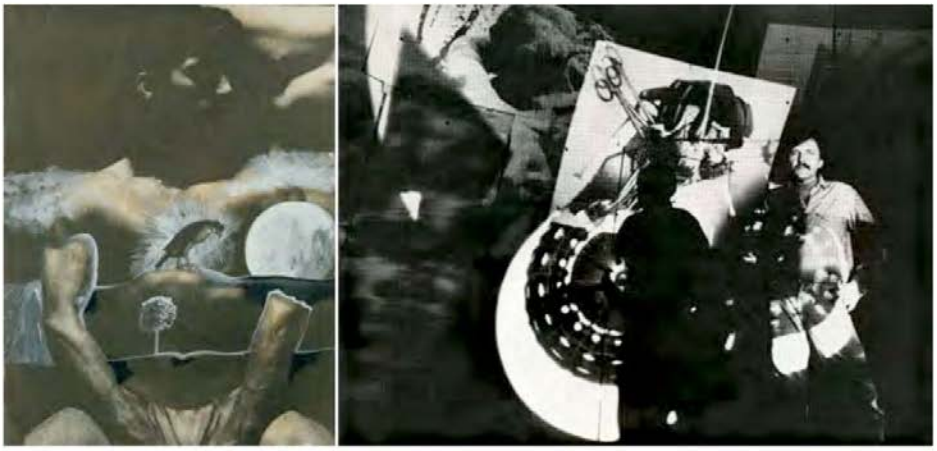
The centerpiece of this show was an approximate restaging of a "multi-projection performance" that VanDerBeek produced for the Intermedia Festival in Tokyo in 1969. Eight visible projectors (one for 16mm film, another for overhead transparencies and six for 35mm slides) cast a variety of still and moving images onto a bank of slightly overlapping movie screens and the blank wall behind them. A large, central silhouette of a standing man anchored the clustered projections, while numerous satellite images appeared at varying speeds and intervals, never fully conforming to the boundaries of their target screens. Though wildly diverse, many of the flickering images (which included pictures of civil rights protestors, Vietnam War footage and psychedelic abstractions) bore the stamp of the 1960s. Yet the larger significance of this immersive environment seemed to be VanDerBeek's prescient concern with media saturation and technological interconnectivity. Indeed, among a selection of his writings displayed on tables in the rear room, one typewritten poem read: "technology/may be/only a symptom/of the/impossibility/of people/to deal with/one to one/relationships."

—Matthew Guy Nichols

Artforum
September 14, 2008
ARTFORUM

Sara VanDerBeek

09.14.08



Left: An untitled collage from See Saw Seems, 1965, black-and-white film in 16 mm, 8 min. Right: Stan VanDerBeek in his Movie-Drome, 1963–65. Photo: R. Raderman.

Artist Sara VanDerBeek, who, with her brother, Johannes VanDerBeek, and Anya Kielar, owns Guild & Greyshkul gallery, is the daughter of experimental filmmaker and animator Stan VanDerBeek, who died in 1984. Guild & Greyshkul presents an exhibition of Stan VanDerBeek's work from September 13 to October 18.

THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING our father's estate and putting together this exhibition has been intensely emotional and very exciting for both Johannes and me. When he passed away in 1984, only a few months after an initial diagnosis of cancer, there were no instructions regarding how his artworks should be cared for or organized. Everything was piled up in his office, and it was eventually split up among various family members. Only recently, as the administrative aspects of handling the estate have become too difficult for our mother, and as our father's first wife asked us to handle the artworks in her possession, have we realized the scope of what he kept. It turns out that much of what went into making the films and multimedia installations remains extant, but not much has been done to organize it. We spread everything out in the empty gallery this summer and began to piece it together, a process made difficult by the fact that sometimes only photographic documentation remains to guide us in reconstructing moving-image and three-dimensional artworks. To that end, I describe some of these works as "approximations."

Johannes and I initially decided to present an overview of our father's career, but now that we've installed the exhibition, we realize that it focuses on his involvement with language—in particular his desire to create a means of universal communication using images. There are many early works, from the 1950s and early '60s, some of which an audience familiar with his work might not know. The show includes a twelve-part series of paintings from around 1956 that combines small images with words and seems to us to mark the beginning of his experimentation with animation. With certain works like the fax mural and Violence Sonata [1969], the show touches on his experiments with then-new technologies, which occurred with increasing frequency from the late '60s until his death, but which we realized could constitute another show in itself.

One challenge is presenting this work in a gallery context. While he was collegial with a wide range of people—from scientists and computer programmers at places like MIT and Bell Labs to artists like Claes Oldenberg and Jim Dine, who is the main performer in a film we're exhibiting—he remained most closely involved with the experimental-film, -media, and -animation communities. He never worked with a commercial art gallery during his lifetime, and the majority of the items he chose for his CV were performances, screenings, multimedia events, and residencies. This is, like everything else, a problem compounded by the facts that we're his children and that we have very different ideas about how to present the work than he might have had. Finding that balance has been both a challenge and a pleasure.

Some decisions were easier than others. For example, we're presenting a whole wall of collages, most of which our father signed and dated, which indicates to us that despite the fact that he used them in animations, they are themselves finished artworks. Making his animations was such a time- and work-intensive process that I can't imagine many such collages survived, and he would want to present the ones that did, whether as artworks or as concrete documentation of that process. Something I really enjoy about seeing these works together with the films is the shift in scale: They are all quite small, especially in comparison with how large the images become when projected onto a wall.

All this, of course, bears on my own art. Earlier this summer, I went away from New York and came up with an idea for a large multipart photographic work. When I returned and was laying out one of my father's fax murals, I realized that the gathering of different framed images that I had imagined must have been directly influenced by him. The re-presentation of images from his archive that I had done in earlier photographs of mine also crops up in his work: He not only used found imagery but reappropriated images from his earlier work in later pieces. Symbols and themes—hammers that hit people on the head in comical ways, forks flying through the air and poking people in the eye, using images of eyes to direct viewers' attention—recur through his films.

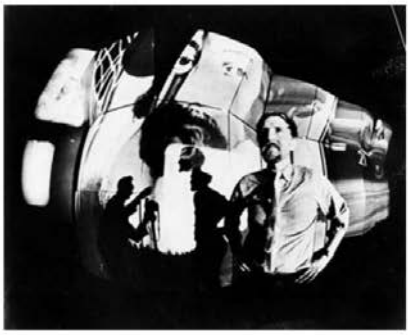
We hope that the way we've organized the exhibition will allow artists working today to connect with our father's practice. He was also an incredible writer, and we're presenting some of that material, along with drawings, on tables in the gallery. His utopian desires—the Movie-Drome [1963–65], the fact that he lived for some time on a piece of land owned by an artists' cooperative—and his wry take on contemporary politics seem particularly relevant today.

— As told to Brian Sholis for http://artforum.com/words/

Rhuzine
October 2 2008
RHIZOME

Art Keeps On Slipping Into the Future

by Marisa Olson
2008-10-02



Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984) shares with artists like Josef Albers, Aldous Huxley, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and Buckminster Fuller the legacy of having developed their practice at Black Mountain College, the creative mecca where these and other thinkers pushed the edges of visual art, music, literature, technology, and consciousness. His experimental films of the 1950s blurred dada collage and science fiction, and he was an early adopter of both analog processes and computer animation, establishing for him a godfather-like position in the origin-narratives surrounding new media. His often rough aesthetic anticipated glitch-fetishism by several decades and drove the surrealist aesthetic into new territory; yet this is not to say that his works didn't go down smoothly. (The internet is full of video evidence of his colorfully dreamy proliferations.) The artist is currently the subject of an exhibition at New York's Guild & Greyshkul gallery, where one can see VanDerBeek's contribution to the proto-history of digital copy-and-paste stylistics in the form of *real* copy-and-paste collages and his own reworkings of his early films. Much of the work in the show, including a "faux mural" he transmitted electronically to international venues, in 1970, was made in his days at MIT, where his immersion among scientists and engineers had a clear impact on his art. VanDerBeek had a futurist and almost cosmological approach to his work and was one of those artists known for spouting beautiful witticisms about finding universal modes of expression that transcended media and the confinement of traditional forms. At the end of the day, he also reminded us that "Art is the artifact of reality (not taken for granted)." - Marisa Olson

The Village Voice
October 1 2008

Stan VanDerBeek at Guild & Greyshkul; Diana Al-Hadid's 'Reverse Collider'; Josef Koudelka at Pace MacGill

by R.C. BAKER
October 1, 2008

The charming absurd: From Stan VanDerBeek's Breathdeath, 1965

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GUILD & GREYSHKUL GALLERY

In 1966, Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984) presciently wrote: "It is imperative that we quickly find some way for the entire level of world human understanding to rise to a new human scale. This scale is the world." Four years later, from his studio at MIT, he faxed a wall mural of ghostly handprints and advertising snippets to venues all over the world—a brash precursor of the PDFs zipping around today's Internet. This computer-graphics pioneer could paint with the verve of Max Ernst—check out the surreal '50s landscapes topped by black suns in the rear gallery—and draw with the passionate clarity of Ben Shahn, as in a bold ink sketch of three gesturing hands. Allying a gift for collage with insightful absurdity, VanDerBeek's animated films, some of which are projected simultaneously in the gallery, are by turns charming and startling: The silverware in *Dance of the Looney Spoons* (1965) gambols to a percussion soundtrack, fork tines twisted like Hell's own bad-hair day; similar abstract squiggles explode from Nikita Khrushchev's mouth in 1960's *Achooo Mr. Kerrooschev*. Such mordant burlesques prefigured Monty Python's spasmodic cartoons by years. In manifestos, films, and kinetic computer animation, VanDerBeek sought a universal means of communication, but he didn't live to marvel at the Web's promise of worldwide connectivity (or be disappointed by its blaring tribalism). His work's invigorating clash of sounds and images reaches back to the bittersweet provocations of Dada and the Beats while keenly foreshadowing our own cacophonous age.

The Village Voice
October 1 2008

Los Angeles Times

CULTURE MONSTER BLOG

Review: Stan VanDerBeek at the Box

APRIL 3, 2009 12:30 AM PT

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Since opening its doors in 2007, the Box has supplemented its thoughtful contemporary program with periodic exhibitions devoted to underexposed pockets of recent art history, particularly from the 1960s and '70s. Barbara T. Smith, Wally Hedrick and John Altoon have all been featured, as well as collaborative video artists David Lamelas and Hildegard Duane.

The current show presents the work of experimental filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984). Combining film, video, collage, drawing and several re-created multimedia installations, it is an ambitious undertaking — apparently the first of its kind to appear in Los Angeles — and a rousing tribute to the artist's radically multifarious output.

Born at the dawn of mass culture and media, VanDerBeek had a ravenous appetite for images and a prescient fascination with the interlocking layers of technology that define and circumscribe contemporary cultural experience. He filmed images, drew them, painted them, cut them out, spliced them together, animated them, photocopied them, even faxed them in one case, all with a giddy rigor that makes the work feel as fresh as anything you'll find in a gallery today.

The collages, which date from the mid-'50s through the early '80s, are especially enchanting. Here one sees the artist literally churning through the mess of visual stimulus that modern culture had become, drawing connections, illuminating idiosyncrasies, crafting strains of visual poetry through an astute process of juxtaposition and layering. In turns playful, elegant, jarring and crass, they provide an intimate glimpse into joyously frenetic sensibility.

-- Holly Myers

The Box, 977 Chung King Road, L.A., (213) 625-1747, through April 18. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays.

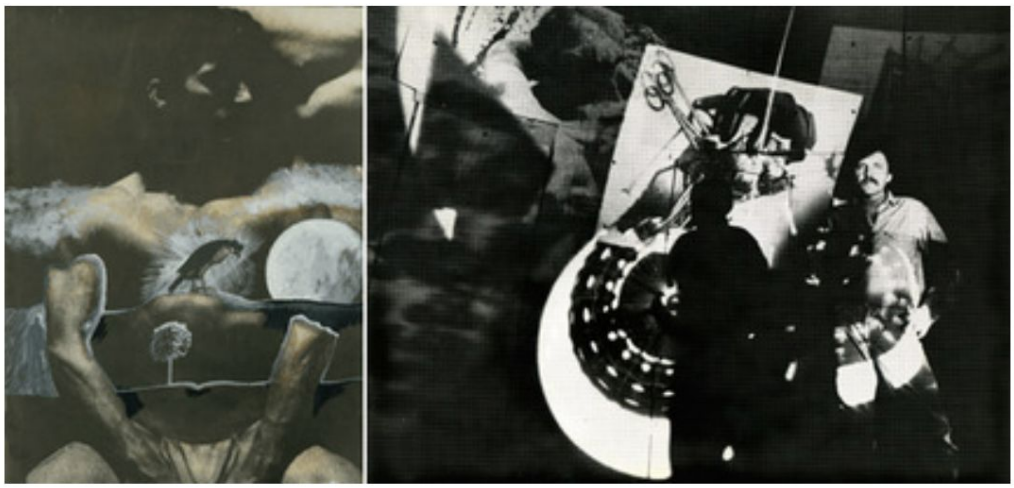
Artforum
September 14, 2008
ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

SARA VANDERBEEK

Artist Sara VanDerBeek talks about her father, Stan VanDerBeek

September 14, 2008



Left: An untitled collage from *See Saw Seems*, 1965, black-and-white film in 16 mm, 8 min. Right: Stan VanDerBeek in his *Movie-Drome*, 1963–65. Photo: R. Raderman.

Artist Sara VanDerBeek, who, with her brother, Johannes VanDerBeek, and Anya Kielar, owns Guild & Greyshkul gallery, is the daughter of experimental filmmaker and animator Stan VanDerBeek, who died in 1984. Guild & Greyshkul presents an exhibition of Stan VanDerBeek's work from September 13 to October 18.

THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING our father's estate and putting together this exhibition has been intensely emotional and very exciting for both Johannes and me. When he passed away in 1984, only a few months after an initial diagnosis of cancer, there were no instructions regarding how his artworks should be cared for or organized. Everything was piled up in his office, and it was eventually split up among various family members. Only recently, as the administrative aspects of handling the estate have become too difficult for our mother, and as our father's first wife asked us to handle the artworks in her possession, have we realized the scope of what he kept. It turns out that much of what went into making the films and multimedia installations remains extant, but not much has been done to organize it. We spread everything out in the empty gallery this summer and began to piece it together, a process made difficult by the fact that sometimes only photographic documentation remains to guide us in reconstructing moving-image and three-dimensional artworks. To that end, I describe some of these works as "approximations."

The New York Times
April 25 2008

The New York Times

Museum and Gallery Listings

By The New York Times
April 25, 2008

ART

'THE HUMAN FACE IS A MONUMENT' Titled after a 1965 movie by the underground filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek (1927-1984), "The Human Face Is a Monument" is a lively group show at Guild & Greyshkul that could be subtitled "And Glossy Magazines Are a Feminist Gold Mine."

May Wilson (1905-1986) is represented by several little-known collages from the late 1960s, whose latticelike layering of images create a kaleidoscopic mix of voyeurism, patterning and interior. In Sarah Charlesworth's "Figure Drawings," a work initiated 20 years ago, 40 small, individually framed figurative silhouettes mostly sculptures catalog poses, gestures and meanings.

Dana Hoey's latest, possibly transitional, work contrasts different female roles and the passage of time in loose-limbed quilts of images. Sara Greenberger Rafferty uses pictures of fried eggs to accent the absurdity of some of the roles women play. In a 1982 video Martha Rosler dismembers an issue of Vogue magazine, verbally and unaided by scissors. And, finally, "The Geeks 2008," right, a large new work by Anya Kielar, uses fabric, paint and inkjet prints to create pale female silhouettes that invoke both a Greek chorus and the alert, sharp-elbowed women of Picasso's "Demoiselles D'Avignon."

The New York Times
December 3 1979

The New York Times

GOING OUT Guide

Dec. 3, 1979

EAST TO WEST Production, of the handmade, flat-weave kilim, or tribal rug, is an ancient art of many, highly personalized variations as practiced by. the nomads of Afghanistan, Turkey and most of Central Asia. A new, extensive display of Turkish prayer kilims has just opened at the Nur Oriental.Gallery (695-2302), 1 West 30th Street. It will run through the month, with visting hours 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. Mondays through Saturdays.

Two programs can be attended for the price of one tomorrow at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Avenue a East 75th Street. At 4:30 P.M., Masami Teraoka, the artist, will discuss the museum's display of her watercolors. Museum admission is $2, but is free on Tuesdays after 5 o'clock.

From 6 to 8 P.M. there will be the final presentation of “Steam Screens” by Joan Brigham and Stan VanDerBeek, in which computerized film images are projected on moving waves of live steam.

Last call for “Japanese Buddhist Paintings From Western Collections,” on view through Sunday at Asia House Gallery, 112 East 64th’ Street. Hours until Saturday are 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. on Thursday to 8:30 and on Sunday from 1 to 5 P.M.

Johannes and I initially decided to present an overview of our father's career, but now that we've installed the exhibition, we realize that it focuses on his involvement with language—in particular his desire to create a means of universal communication using images. There are many early works, from the 1950s and early '60s, some of which an audience familiar with his work might not know. The show includes a twelve-part series of paintings from around 1956 that combines small images with words and seems to us to mark the beginning of his experimentation with animation. With certain works like the fax mural and *Violence Sonata* [1969], the show touches on his experiments with then-new technologies, which occurred with increasing frequency from the late '60s until his death, but which we realized could constitute another show in itself.

One challenge is presenting this work in a gallery context. While he was collegial with a wide range of people—from scientists and computer programmers at places like MIT and Bell Labs to artists like Claes Oldenberg and Jim Dine, who is the main performer in a film we're exhibiting—he remained most closely involved with the experimental-film, -media, and -animation communities. He never worked with a commercial art gallery during his lifetime, and the majority of the items he chose for his CV were performances, screenings, multimedia events, and residencies. This is, like everything else, a problem compounded by the facts that we're his children and that we have very different ideas about how to present the work than he might have had. Finding that balance has been both a challenge and a pleasure.

Some decisions were easier than others. For example, we're presenting a whole wall of collages, most of which our father signed and dated, which indicates to us that despite the fact that he used them in animations, they are themselves finished artworks. Making his animations was such a time- and work-intensive process that I can't imagine many such collages survived, and he would want to present the ones that did, whether as artworks or as concrete documentation of that process. Something I really enjoy about seeing these works together with the films is the shift in scale: They are all quite small, especially in comparison with how large the images become when projected onto a wall.

All this, of course, bears on my own art. Earlier this summer, I went away from New York and came up with an idea for a large multipart photographic work. When I returned and was laying out one of my father's fax murals, I realized that the gathering of different framed images that I had imagined must have been directly influenced by him. The re-presentation of images from his archive that I had done in earlier photographs of mine also crops up in his work: He not only used found imagery but reappropriated images from his earlier work in later pieces. Symbols and themes—hammers that hit people on the head in comical ways, forks flying through the air and poking people in the eye, using images of eyes to direct viewers' attention—recur through his films.

We hope that the way we've organized the exhibition will allow artists working today to connect with our father's practice. He was also an incredible writer, and we're presenting some of that material, along with drawings, on tables in the gallery. His utopian desires—the *Movie-Drome* [1963–65], the fact that he lived for some time on a piece of land owned by an artists' cooperative—and his wry take on contemporary politics seem particularly relevant today.

— As told to Brian Sholis

The New York Times
December 9 1972

The New York Times

Screen: Stan Vanderbeek's Underground Shorts

Retrospective Offered At the Film Forum

By ROGER GREENSPUN

A good demonstration of the kind of service that a small independent movie theater can perform is offered by the 15-year retrospective of Stan Vanderbeek's work that opened last night at the Film Forum.

Of course, Vanderbeek lends himself to such treatment. Of the 11 films on the program, the longest ("You Do," made in 1971) runs for only 12 minutes. But it is always valuable to see what has been going on in an artist's mind over a long period of great productivity. In this case, I only wish that more had been going on.

Stan Vanderbeek, born in 1931, belongs in the middle generation of the independent American cinema, and he has long been one of its best-known film makers. I suspect that a good many New York moviegoers who may never have heard of underground film know something of collage animation solely through a slightly famous and very funny "no smoking" trailer that Vanderbeek did about 10 years ago for the Bleecker Street Cinema.

The Program

FILMS BY STAN VANDERBEEK: MANKINDA, 10 minutes; SKULLDUGGERY, Part 2, 5 minutes; SEE SAW SEEMS, 10 minutes; SUMMIT, 12 minutes; PANELS FOR THE WALLS OF THE WORLD '64, 8 minutes; POEM FIELD #8, 5 minutes; OH, 10 minutes; YOU DO, 12 minutes; VIDEO SPACE, 6 minutes; SYMMETRICKS (COMPUTER FINGERPAINTS) '72, 6 minutes; WHO HO RAYS, 7 minutes. At the Film Forum, 256 West 88th Street. Showings Dec. 8-10 and 15-17, 8 P.M.

15 Years Are Covered in Valuable Show

Collage animation, an animation of previously drawn or photographed pictures, is probably Vanderbeek's most widely seen specialty. But he is a very active experimentalist in film-making (and film projection, as in his bubble-shaped Movie-Drome, built at Stony Point, N.Y.), and the Film Forum show includes various kinds of computerized animation, as well as two films, "Summit" (1963) and "Video Space" (1972), that combine live actors and dancers with animation.

The problem is that, for all the experimentation, there seems to have been relatively little growth in personal vision. Despite its exploitation of new electronic technology, "Who Ho Rays," made in 1972, is if anything safer and less inventive than "Mankinda," made in 1957, very nearly at the start of Vanderbeek's career.

But at least one of the recent films, "Symmetricks," an elaboration of brilliant white lines and flashes against a black background, made in collaboration with Wade Shaw at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is very good. And "Poem Field #8," one of several films made together with the computer scientist Ken Knowlton in the mid-1960's, has an agreeable decorative agility that suggests considerable delight in the medium.

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My favorite, however, is an early film, "See Saw Seems" (1962). It is full of graceful transformations by which, for example, a footbridge becomes an eye that opens to a path that leads to a glowing flower that becomes a body that becomes a gentle landscape, and so on and on. It is all like a pleasant footnote to surrealist art. And it is perhaps in such a minor, by no means dishonorable, position that Stan Vanderbeek belongs.

Barenboim's Baton Adds Fascination

By RAYMOND ERICSON

Daniel Barenboim, whose only week of subscription concerts with the New York Philharmonic this season began on Thursday night, had set up what looked like a conventional program. There was Haydn's Symphony No. 86 in D, Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite and Tchaikovsky's "Pathetique" Symphony. Mr. Barenboim, however, has a way of not making anything sound conventional, and the concert turned into a fascinating, occasionally exhilarating experience.

As one of the Paris symphonies, the Haydn work was not all that familiar. It is a beauty, and the conductor kept within stylistic bounds, not treating it to some of the extreme tempos he used later on. He gave it a special tonal richness by the care with which he had chords played and instrumental color stressed.

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The "Firebird" Suite was the one Stravinsky first drew from his ballet, in 1911, and it is not played as often today as those that the composer put together in 1919 and 1945. The excerpts do not make as well-balanced a sequence, ending, for example, with Kashchei's Dance. But the original scoring, kept from the ballet, is wonderfully lush. Mr. Barenboim had a fine time with the music, searching out its extravagant color, stretching the lyric themes, heading torrentially into Kashchei's Dance.

His reading of the Tchaikovsky symphony went from one emotional extreme to another. For the most part it was convincing and exciting, because he has a built-in rhythmic sense that keeps the music together. Some things worked — an extraordinarily long pause before launching into the first movement's second theme, a very slow tempo for the final movement's second theme. Others did not — a too hasty accelerando near the beginning of the first movement, a flattening out of the five-four rhythm of the second movement, which made it sound heavyhanded.

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Mr. Barenboim's emotional involvement in the score was infectious, particularly since he remained in control of that involvement. The Philharmonic responded to his conducting demands not always with glossy perfection, but with a stunning virtuosity to remind one how good an orchestra it is.

Dance: Debut for 8 Mice

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

Informed sources let it be known before the 578th New York City performance of George Balanchine's production of "The Nutcracker" on Thursday night at the State Theater that eight white mice would be added to the battle scene between the seven-headed mouse king and the nutcracker. This turned out to be true.

That and the fact that Herr Drosselmeier appeared to be friendly town councillor responsible for the whole business by giving little Marie the unlikely Christmas gift of a nutcracker, is an acting rather than a dancing role. Shaun O'Brien is a veteran in the part but his interpretation on this occasion was unusually effective. Never has the transition between reality and Marie's dream visions had such an appropriate phantasmagoric at-

The New York Times
July 4 1971

The New York Times

Television

When It Works, It's Art— When It Doesn't, Well...

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

TELEVISION as art? Now there's a thought to set many a tooth on edge. "Oh sure," says the devotee, "you mean that 'Civilisation' series and stuff like that there"—stuff like those occasional specials that serve, with all due solemnity, carefully measured portions of theater or opera or needlepoint.

Not quite. There are, it seems, an increasing number of people who are interested in developing the artistic potential of the television screen itself. They insist that television can be something more than a neutral conduit for carrying journalism, movies and various existing forms of the performing crafts. Many of these people are working outside professional television studios, displaying their videotape wares in an odd assortment of lofts and storefronts across the country. Some, however, have managed to infiltrate the tight little island of on-the-air TV. And, as a recent trip to Boston revealed, a surprising number of the infiltrators can be found in the studios of WGBH.

As Boston's contribution to the noncommercial Public Broadcasting Service (the "fourth network," if you will), WGBH has been exemplary in developing along the lines drawn up for educational television by the 1967 Carnegie Report. The thrust of that report was on local programing and the nurturing of local talent. Then if a program was considered of broad enough interest to be shown outside the community, the station could offer it to other stations. Each program would have access to "interconnection." Networking, as such, was not part of the original concept.

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Networking, however, is very much a part of the present PBS structure. And the number of WGBH contributions to that structure are second only to New York's NET. Julia Child's "The French Chef" is perhaps the outstanding example of a locally developed program that climbed to national fame. "Masterpiece Theater' and its first-rate imports from the BBC is an equally outstanding example of a series groomed specifically for the network.

Meanwhile WGBH is attempting to keep a steady focus on local programing. A good deal of its regular product is innovative. In "public affairs," for instance, the station has devised "The Reporters," functioning as a kind of mini Nader's Raiders within the community, and "Catch 44," an unfiltered half-hour forum that provides for a broad spectrum of local groups. Some of the product is ordinary, occasionally quite ordinary. This tends to fall into the "talking head" category, what Goodman Ace has called the interview-inshallow.

Then there is the remarkably active category of television as art. It's television as art, of course, when it works. When it doesn't work, it's simply experimental television. In any case, the commitment of WGBH to TV as an artistic medium has an impressive history, starting in the late 1950's with a weekly series called "Laboratory" and its attempt to give just about any member of the production staff a chance to test new techniques. In 1964 producer-director Fred Barzyk invited anyone at the station to create abstract imagery for a jazz sound track, and five short pieces were presented as "Jazz Images."

"What's Happening, Mr. Silver?", aimed at young people and featuring a collage style new for television, snared a large local-program budget in 1967. And that same year WGBH received a three-year matching grant of $275,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation to support an Artist-in-Television project. Artists in different fields were invited to join the station's staff members in collaborative work. In addition, the station established a close relationship with the Massachusetts Council for the Humanities, which continues to support pilot programs demonstrating new TV approaches to subjects in the humanities.

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There has been a steady flow of special projects and the results, as might be expected, have ranged from the experimentally interesting, if not befuddling, to the brilliantly successful. Among the latter is "City/Motion/Space/Game," a 1969 Rockefeller project that displayed dancer-choreographer Gus Solomons Jr. in the context of a "word score" by Mary Feldhaus-Weber and an electronic city-noises sound track by composer John Morris. All of the sights and sounds were assembled by producer Rick Hauser and director Peter Downey.

Like some other projects at the station, "City/Motion/Space/Game" was broadcast simultaneously over the two WGBH outlets in Boston—Channel 2 and UHF Channel 44. Both the audio and visual aspects were transmitted on two separate signals. Solomons, who is also an architecture graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was seen dancing in the multi-leveled Boston Prudential Center, the Public Gardens, a junkyard and a bare TV studio.

As the superbly realized images cascaded from each TV screen, the "word score," clipped from a series of interviews with Solomons, conveyed the dancer's thoughts on his life and his art, each overlapping and forming a personal world in which "my content is motion." With the clean-cut, almost severe lines of the production uncannily reflecting the orderly, architectonic processes of Solomons' mind, the program is a dazzling example of television as art.

For television as pure experiment there is "Video Variations," a collaboration between WGBH with producer-director Barzyk and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to test ways of making symphonic music visually more interesting on television.

WGBH, which for years had been

CAMPUS CONFRONTATION — Shots ring out and a student demonstrator falls wounded among his horrified companions in "A Continual Roar of Musketry." The Emmy-winning drama, starring Hal Holbrook, is being rebroadcast on "The Bold Ones" in two parts, tonight and next Sunday at 10 on NBC.

televising live concerts of the Boston Symphony, supplied the project with producers, directors, equipment and eight artists from outside the station. Each artist was given a limited budget to be spent, after consultation with WGBH personnel, in any way he saw fit for his particular project. Using everything from pulsating abstractions to glimpses of protest demonstrations, the results are not particularly successful. Some are curiously enslaved to the rhythm of the music being used, others are little more inventive than a typical light show at a rock concert.

Stan Vanderbeek, using an excerpt from Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2," did create an effectively erotic visual accompaniment. And Nam June Paik, with part of a Beethoven piano concerto, achieved a rare injection of wit, dotting his contribution with the image of a grand piano going up in a grand blaze of fire.

If not quite in the category of television as art, the project is hardly without value. As in any experimentation, its importance for the future is immeasurable — for the artists involved getting TV experience, for the producers and technicians, and, with the inevitable co-opting of usable bits and pieces, for the production of nonexperimental programs at WGBH and TV stations throughout the country.

It is, in short, precisely the type of work that should be strongly encouraged in television. It usually isn't, particularly in commercial television. Public television, then, does have an important obligation and has been fortunate enough to attract a number of executives aware of that obligation. NET's director of cultural programing, Curtis Davis, is one outstanding example. WGBH's general programing director, Michael Rice, is another.

Rice, whose background includes degrees from Harvard and Oxford, is openly enthusiastic about the concept of television as art. He recently has been instrumental in setting up the WGBH Television Dance Workshop, "a new venture to invite three different choreographers here, each to become acquainted with what television can do, then to design and work on the production of an original dance conceived specially for the medium."

It all, then, seems rather simple. Aware and concerned executives make for adventurous and provocative programing. Again, not quite. Experiments can be costly. Their appeal can also be limited to a rather narrow audience. That is the main reason they are scarce on commercial television. So, one must ask, what is the outlook for continuing experimentation on the fourth network of public television?

But that's another story, one that will be explored here next Sunday.

The Village Voice
January 2 1970

the village VOICE

the village VOICE, *January* 22, 1970

THANKS FOR THE ZONKERS

dance JOURNAL

by Jill Johnston

Arrive Cambridge January 12 for the VanDerBeek tv show at Boston's educational tv station WGBH. Stan is doing "Violence Sonata" long in preparation. I think he's interested in violence. I go to their house on Martin Street. Here's Johanna the sunny. She's been feeding hordes of people every night she says. So we're into the kitchen. Here's Max the beautiful monster. He's 10. His straight streaky blond hair is longer and falling into his face too. He looks like Johanna. He yells MAH HAH FAT TIT TOT HOLY SNOT or something. Johanna says that's what he calls her. And here's August aged 12 same blond hair but down to the waist. She looks like Stan. Same eyes. Cerulean blue cut with a slate pale white blue of a washed out sea. She's the passive cool side of his Nordic Viking. Stan is all energy and intensity. I never understand what he's talking about. If he were mounted on his steed he'd look as though the world were too small for his ambitions. He looks it anyhow. I think that's what he sort of talks about too. But I see mostly the master craftsman sucking up images in a grand plagiarism from all the media, then spitting it back out into that eye shattering montage of his. This "Violence Sonata" might be a parody of his own style. He does violence to the ordinary image. He does violence to the passage of ordinary time (if ordinary means anything). Who was Damocles who owned a sword? Who is Max who is charging into the kitchen? LADYS YERPLE DERPLE SPLIT TIT. And we go on yakking. She isn't grieving for the world and she's reasonably happy about herself. She doesn't tell me any new dreams. Too busy feeding people. She goes off to the tv station with some stuff for Stan. I snooze a bit, beyond August and her girlfriend giggling in the kitchen. I get up make a pitcher of bloody marys for Johanna and me and a pretty redheaded Sue. Then ensues many domestic complications about eating and baby sitting and transportations. They want me to drive someplace pick up two people but the car is stuck in gear So they do that and I stay help August haul big tv set down three kinds of stairways to a neighbor's house so they can all catch the dual channel event at home on stations 2 and 44. Now we're driving to WGBH. Lots of people in the foyer waiting to be admitted. We push inside through hanging opaque plastic strips. They tell us to join a line on the right. I see two karate men in white down the hall. Into their act. Now a gun shot. Damn. Now they ask me to please put out my pipe—too many explosives in the building. I'd like to leave. Some dogs are barking. Live or tape. I'd like to leave. But we're walking upstairs and at the top a Statue of Liberty in chains next to a dummy in a trunk. If Max were here he'd be yelling DINCK GREEN IN BETWEEN LADYS WEEN. Now into a big room adjoining the main projection room. A dummy hanging by the neck. Some of Stan's images up around the walls. I'm holding my ears. No gun shot. And we're into the studio proper with a full audience seated and standing in theatre convention facing two tv sets situated between three big screens. Everybody waiting. On left screen see projection of front page LA Times headlined "Battle in Skies, Yanks fight MIGS near Hanoi" and photo of chaplain with praying soldiers and a dimly superimposed crucified Christ. Center screen the audience is being projected as picked up by roving aisle cameras. Now an amplified pulse beat. And a count down for the 9 o'clock show. TV sets begin working. "Violence Sonata" realized by Stan VanDerBeek. Image: piano. Man axes the keys the innards the works. End of piano. Enter live announcer sits up front on table to chat amiably about how they're having a workship (or shit or shop) and how you can choose from your own simul-casts what to look at by going from channel 2 to 44, riding your own audio up and down he says and if you have children at home you don't want to view the violence to toddle them off to bed. The karate men appear on elevated area perpendicular to center screen. Jab grunt jab ugh. Off. Headline projection: Pope Fears Blind Violence. Audio fragments of gun fire, rock hits. And the visual collage collision is full blasting now on the five screens. Stan's special paced style. Blink eye fast. Familiar images except almost all here connected by violence or the fruits thereof the socially understood images typing the more you want to kill them. That was in reference to the family as the basic unit of violence. MAH HAH FAT TIT TOT etc. Max makes a lot of noise. Maybe he still takes a bottle to bed. And a teddy bear or something. And August is mild and demure. But she was all flushed up there a moment standing in the kitchen doorway up loud telling Johanna she TOLD MAX TO KEEP THAT FUCKING BALL AWAY FROM THEM with her arm rod-stretched in the direction of the trouble and that was all, she was gone in a flash. Sirens. March music. War commentaries. Napalm statistics. Politicians shaking fists over tables. Heaps of dead bodies in wheelbarrows. Mao. Kennedy. Johnson. Iwo Jima. Hiroshima. Bombs away. So forth. I'd like to leave. The announcer wants everybody's opinion on violence. The audience is violent on the subject of violence "Today he stumbled from his bed with thunder crashing in his head." However remote over the hills and far away the beast may wander . . . I'm downstairs now in the foyer wrapped up ready to go. Everybody agitated. Lots of good talking tonight, they'll have. Some blood was spilled too. I didn't mention the intermittent live action in front of the screens. At the end two actors sliced through the right and left screens, a white and a black man, and the white one did something to his left hand. Many peoples stood up to define violence. There's good and bad violence. Or violence is within you. Or violence is without you. And there'd be a low roar when someone denounced the State or

dance JOURNAL

Continued from page 30

violence in his coffee . . . And we're driving back to Martin Street for the party. Here's Max at the door. WHERE'S MY MOTHER? I'M GONNA SOCK'ER I'M GONNA KILL'ER. And a chubby man standing in the living room is quoting for his friends the Times quote of a definition of aggression: a cannibal who eats another person when he isn't hungry. The kitchen is filling up with thirsty people. Johnson slicing up pickles. Sue cutting up another salad. Stan surrounded by admirers. August dancing. Max on his second beer. Max dancing. Max yelling. I'm tired and looking for a bed. I'm looking at Max's punching bag sharing its wall bracket with some clothes on hangers because he changed rooms with his parents and left the bag behind. I'm going to bed. I wake up and eat seven screaming yellow zonkers. That's a new kind of popcorn. Now we're collected in the kitchen again for coffee. We have a fine talk and probably don't understand each other at all. I think Stan is interested in violence. I know he'd like to see all the tv stations transformed into theatre spaces and forums for ideas. He's all energy and intensity. His movies look like him. Same speed. Same focus. The Nordic Viking media man invader. Who was Damocles who owned a sword? Who is Max who is charging down the hall. HAIRY HINIE LADYS YERPLE DERPLE SPLIT TIT TOT HOLY SNOT, so long you beautiful monster. So long Stan, Johanna. Thanks for the show and the bed and the zonkers.

by Sheldon Renan

New York
E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.
1967

STAN VAN DER BEEK

Stan VanDerBeek
Born 1931, New York, New York
Lives Stony Point, New York.

Stan VanDerBeek is the Tom Swift of the underground, an inventor of processes and approaches. He is also a collagist, a collisionist, and like George Méliès, whom he claims as godfather, an illusionist. His earliest films, such as *What Who How*, are animated collages, his midway films, such as *Breathdeath*, are collages of film technique, and his latest works, including the environmental Movie-Drome, are collages of media.

He is a collisionist because he likes to bring disparate elements together at high speed, cut-outs of cars, pictures of politicians, pin-ups from *Playboy*, and so on, and give them some new meaning in the resulting crash. He is an illusionist because everything in his films is always changing into something else, cars into carnivorous creatures, hands into birds, and so on. The tone of his films has always been blackly humorous, and increasingly there have appeared overtones of social comment.

VanDerBeek graduated from a science high school in New York and went for a short while to Cooper Union to study architecture. In 1952 he went to the Black Mountain School of Art, not going to classes, but tending the school farm and working on painting and calligraphy. He had the use of a camera there, and so made "mythical" movies with a group of dancers. These movies were planned, performed, and photographed, except that there was no film in the camera. Nobody could afford film.

For two years following Black Mountain, he made flip books. Then he got a job doing backgrounds for a children's television program called *Winky Dink and You*. Part of the program's equipment was an animation stand and camera. VanDerBeek would come back late at night and tell the night watchman he had some work to do and would then use the camera and stand to make his first films. He was fired after six months (for being non-union) but continued for a year after that to return to the studio at night to tell the watchman he had late work to do. In this eighteen-month period he made *What Who How* (1955) and *Visioniii* (1955), both animated collages, plus four unnamed studies (1955–56) that involved both collages and time paintings. Later he made *Mankinda* (1956–57), which was a time painting, that is, a painting seen happening as it happens, combined with a poem and calligraphy. And he continued his collage animation work with *Yet* (1957), *Strect Meet* (1957), *Astral Man* (1958), and *Ala Mode* (1958).

By 1958 he was set up with techniques and facilities and began photographing vast amounts of material, usually shooting much footage around a particular idea. Then he would just "slice a film off like a sausage." He is still editing this material. Out of it has come *Wheeels #2* (1958–59), *Wheeels # 1* (1958–61), *Wheeels # 4* (1958–65), *Dance of the Looney Spoons* (1958–65), *Revenge of the Looney Spoons* (1958–65), and *Science Friction* (1958–65). He also worked at this time on a prototype for his later expanded-cinema presentations, *Three-Screen-Scene* (1958). In all of these films he used illustrations from magazines and advertisements for collage materials, making the inanimate animate, the large appear small, one object turn out to be another object, and so on.

His next step was to develop an apparatus that allowed him to combine live footage and collage animation, synchronized, on one film. His first such film was *Achoo Mr. Kerroochev* (1960), in which a cut-out of Nikita Khrushchev sailed over various newsreel events as they took place. This process became standard with many animated VanDerBeek films, including *Skullduggery Part I* (1960) and *Part II* (1960–61). Certain footage, such as a subjective view of a bare bosomed lady making a landing on an aircraft carrier, was used in several films. At the same time, too, he made *Black and Whites, Days and Nights* (1960), an animated cartoon of line drawings over a sound track of dirty limericks.

VanDerBeek also began to do live-action photography. He shot a large amount of footage recording Happenings by Claes Oldenburg and Allen Kaprow. The only work edited so far from this is the short *Snapshots of the City* (1961), of an Oldenburg work. He made the slapstick *Croquet Quacks* (1962–), and *Summit* (1963). *Summit*, a political satire on a meeting between Khrushchev and Kennedy, featured another technique, one possibly not used since Len Lye was animating in England, the manipulation of live actors with an optical printer. This allowed VanDerBeek to orchestrate their movements and to cause comical reverses of action and so on.

Breathdeath (1963–64) is VanDerBeek's most ambitious single-projector film. It is an antiwar film dedicated to Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, and a compendium of VanDerBeek technique to that moment. It has scenes such as a picture of Richard Nixon with a foot suddenly coming out of his mouth, people dancing with little skeleton heads animated over their faces, a time painting painted on his wife's face, and blood pouring over a newspaper full of hydrogen bomb headlines.

In 1964 VanDerBeek received a Ford Foundation grant and, while working on his older style *A Damn Rib Bed* (1964–65), began to branch out. Given an animation camera with which it was possible to make dissolves, he made three films that were essentially loops, starting in one place, dissolving through a series of transformations, and dissolving back to that original place. These included *See Saw Seems* (1965–66), *If You Say So* (1965–66), and *Snow Show* (1965–66). He made an animated line loop in 35mm, called *Night Eating* (1965), reduced it to 8mm and made a cartridge out of it for tiny portable projectors. He made *Fluids* (1965), and *Phenomena* (1965), which used several layers of "zip tone" in motion to create optical patterns. He produced the simple *Facescapes* (1965) and *The Human Face Is a Monument* (1965), the content indicated by the titles. He made *The Life and Death of a Car* (1962–) and *Kar Bop* (1962–), which added live action of cars in motion, photographed with a special 180-degree distortion lens, to previously shot footage.

He was at this time becoming more and more involved with expanded cinema and working as an adjunct to dance works. For a Merce Cunningham dance piece, he made the three-screen *Variation 5* (1965), which included shots of Cunningham dancing, the astronauts floating in space, and Nam June Paik's electronic television distortions. He did *Sight* (1965) for a Bob Morris dance work, and photographed Yvonne Rainer's *Room Service* (1965). He made *Pastorale: Et Al* (1965), which is photographed portions of a dance combined with a dance by dancers carrying little movie screens, on which is projected the film dance, this done by Elaine Summers and Bert Supree.

VanDerBeek has been especially involved with multiple projection pieces. He calls them "movie-murals" and "newsreels of dreams." They were done in anticipation of the dome he built at his home in Stony Point, the Movie-Drome, an environmental movie theatre with all surfaces to be covered by projected images. He put on his first multiple-screen presentations at the New Cinema Festival in 1965, at the Film-makers' Cinematheque. One was *Move-Movies* (1965), a "choreography for projectors" in which there were two projectors facing the stage, plus five portable projectors being carried around the theatre by assistants. Parts of the work were shown on the audience itself. Another was *Feedback # 1* (1965), which used five slide and motion picture projectors and two sound tracks in a sort of movie mix.

VanDerBeek's movie-murals are part of a plan to develop a new visual language that could be used to communicate broad concepts of existence among all the cultures of the world. He calls this plan *Culture Intercom* and wants all the governments of the world to build movie-dromes like his own, to connect these through satellite television stations, and to allow them to exchange "images" so as to speed communication between cultures and to bring them some better and more immediate understanding of themselves and of each other. He sees a race between world destruction and world communication, with the lack of the latter accelerating the former.

VanDerBeek is presently editing a live-action film of country hi-jinks by Claes Oldenburg and crew, *Birth of the American Flag* (1965–). He has done for CBS "an electronic collage" with videotape called *Panels for the Walls of the World # 1* (1965). He has also made two computer-generated films, *Collide-oscope* (1966) and *When in the Course of* (1966–).

He has continued with various other activities while his film work has remained central, and a recent exhibition of his work listed the following: calligraphy, stills, paintings, polaroid constructions, sculpture, rollings, wooden boxes, and collages. He is also interested in architecture, having built both his house and the Movie-Drome.

VanDerBeek: Master of animation

By ROBERT CHRISTGAU Photographs by Leonard Lipton

The conventional animator is the prisoner of Mickey Mouse. He is bound by the tradition of the transparent cell.

Stan VanDerBeek will have none of that. Because he doesn't find reality very interesting, Disney's version of *cinema verité* seems to him an insult to the possibilities of the craft. VanDerBeek's craft is great. He is the master of slapstick—the black humorist of the superreal. His films are dream landscapes of terrifying wit. A Model A Ford trundles over the contours of a playboy nude, Dick Nixon glares sullenly at us and a black foot emerges from his mouth, a blood-red steak shapes itself into a mouth and chews the air as a bomb passes overhead.

VanDerBeek lives with his wife and two children in a do-it-yourself airplane hangar which he built in the New York exurbs after urban demolition projects chased him out of three successive New York City lofts. He supports himself however he can, making some money on his films, teaching, writing, and lecturing, and for the last year on a $10,000 Ford Foundation grant. For a man who isn't interested in reality, he's peculiarly immersed in junk. He is surrounded by contemporary detritus of all kinds, especially old magazines, bought or borrowed, seldom read but always looked through. These artifacts are the stuff of his art. "My films are a kind of tribal encyclopedia," he says, "an appraisal of what exists."

About ten years ago, VanDerBeek was an art student at the now-defunct Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where many of the finest American artists, writers, and composers once taught or studied. Seeking a mode of expression in which perceiver and work were more intimately involved, he turned to set design. A year later he got a job with a New

Stan, the dome, and junk.

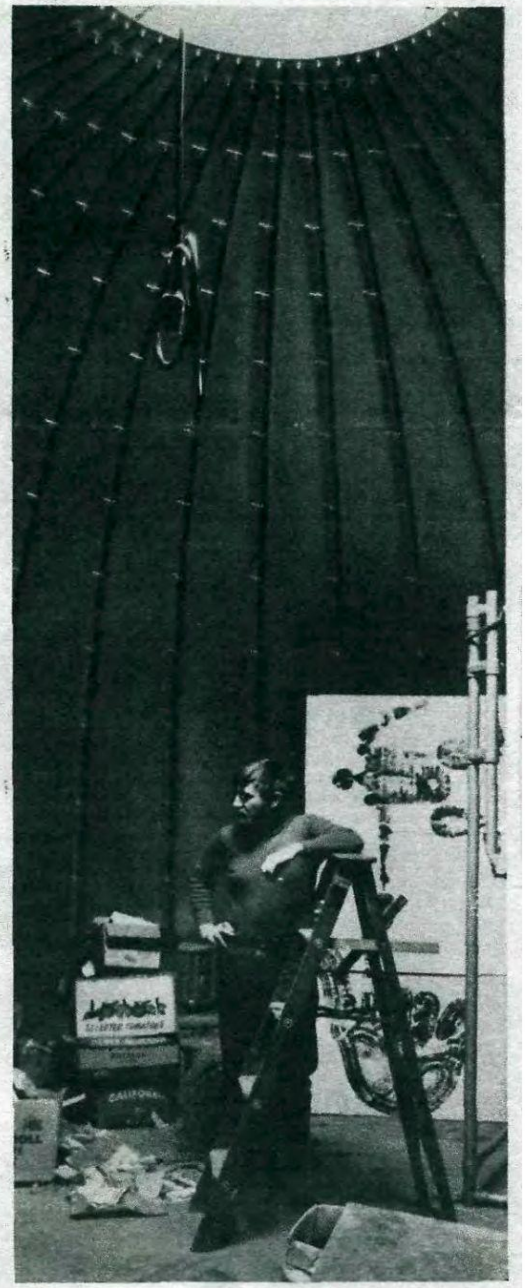
sional facilities at his fingertips, he began to do animation.

At the time, he knew next to nothing about film. Ten years later, he knows a great deal, learned through a grinding empirical process of trial and error. Unlike other creators of "underground movies" (a term which he originated), VanDerBeek is passionate about technique. Usefulness is a central concept here: to achieve an effect, he will undergo whatever technical torture is necessary, and with good grace. When the need arises he invents techniques and improvises methods. His films are as much the product of dedicated craft as they

VanDerBeek's first contribution to his craft was his invention of the animated collage. Collage, which is essentially the art of making pictures out of bits of other pictures, originated in the '20's, as a reaction to the welter of mass-produced graphic material that was just beginning to inundate the world. VanDerBeek's idea was to make the collage move, so that the cut-out Model A moves over the reclining nude just as Snow White glides peacefully through the lovely forest.

But there are differences. When the Disney team does Snow White, they set the picture of the lovely forest on the animaframe, successive pictures of Snow White on clear plastic cells, each one a cunning variant on its predecessor, placed over the background scene. Hopefully, Snow White will look just like a real person, only prettier. VanDerBeek can't do this, and if he could he wouldn't want to—he's working in collage. The wheels on his Model A are stationary and there is nothing he can do to make them turn around. He is not trying to simulate reality, but rather to suggest a super, dream reality. The Playboy nude and VanDerBeek's lovely forest is set on the board as background, the Model A on the swell of her vernal hip. Click-click.

Explaining the studio-theater construction.



Within the MovieDome.

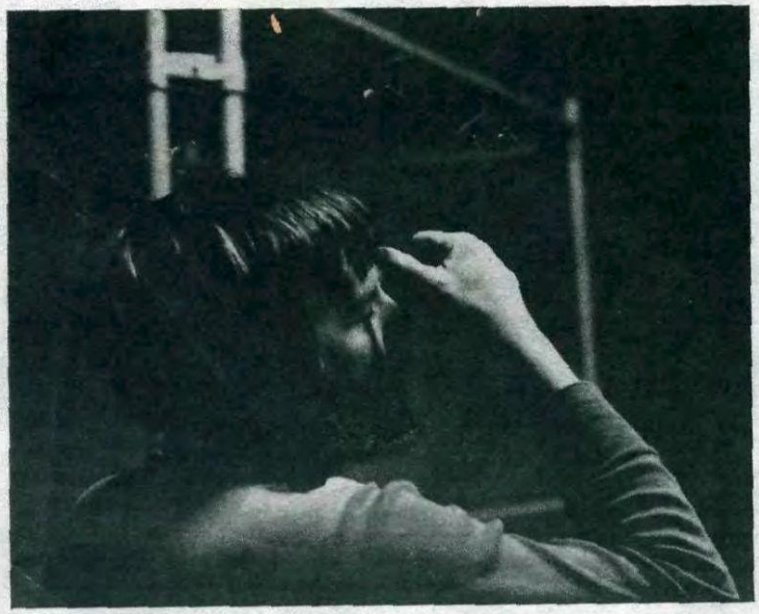
two frames, and the Model A is moved a little. (Knowing how much to move the subject, VanDerBeek says, requires an "abstract sense of time" which can only be acquired by long practice.) The click-click again, and so on across the frame. The over-all effect, partially because VanDerBeek customarily shoots two or three frames at a time, and partially because what moves within the frame is static within itself, is jerky, unreal. Our national fetishes move together on the screen, the past confronts the present, and the whole thing seems rather ridiculous. Perfect!

VanDerBeek's other major innovation was to draw right on the animation board. This is an old idea—in documentaries about the great march westward, for instance, the symbolic line of progress inching across the country was probably done on the board—but VanDerBeek was to put it to some startling uses. In *Mankinda*, a "visual poem," words grow on the screen and change before the viewer's eyes into other, related words, while the drawings which illustrate the poem also grow and change. In *Days and Nights in Black and White*, a friend of VanDerBeek, Anita Steckel, sings her own limericks while totally unrelated VanDerBeek drawings pop out on the screen, grow and disappear.

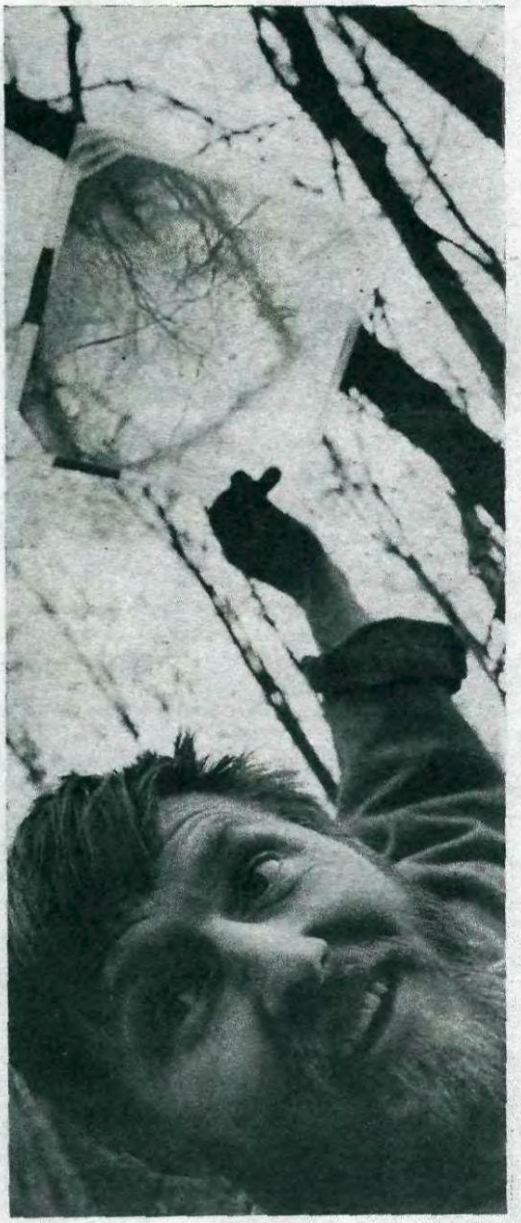
Always the graphic artist, VanDerBeek never allows his sound track to dominate the visual part of his movie. It's his feeling that talk was the death of cinema, allowing narrative to replace "a language of image that was never consolidated or really worked out." His heroes are Georges Méliès, the cinematic magician who invented every basic camera trick, and the great silent comics Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Many of his movies have atonal scores by his friend Jay Watt. One film, *Phenomenon*, an experiment in abstract optical effects done on the Ford Foundation grant, is intended for use with any sound track, or none at all.

Because he works simultaneously on

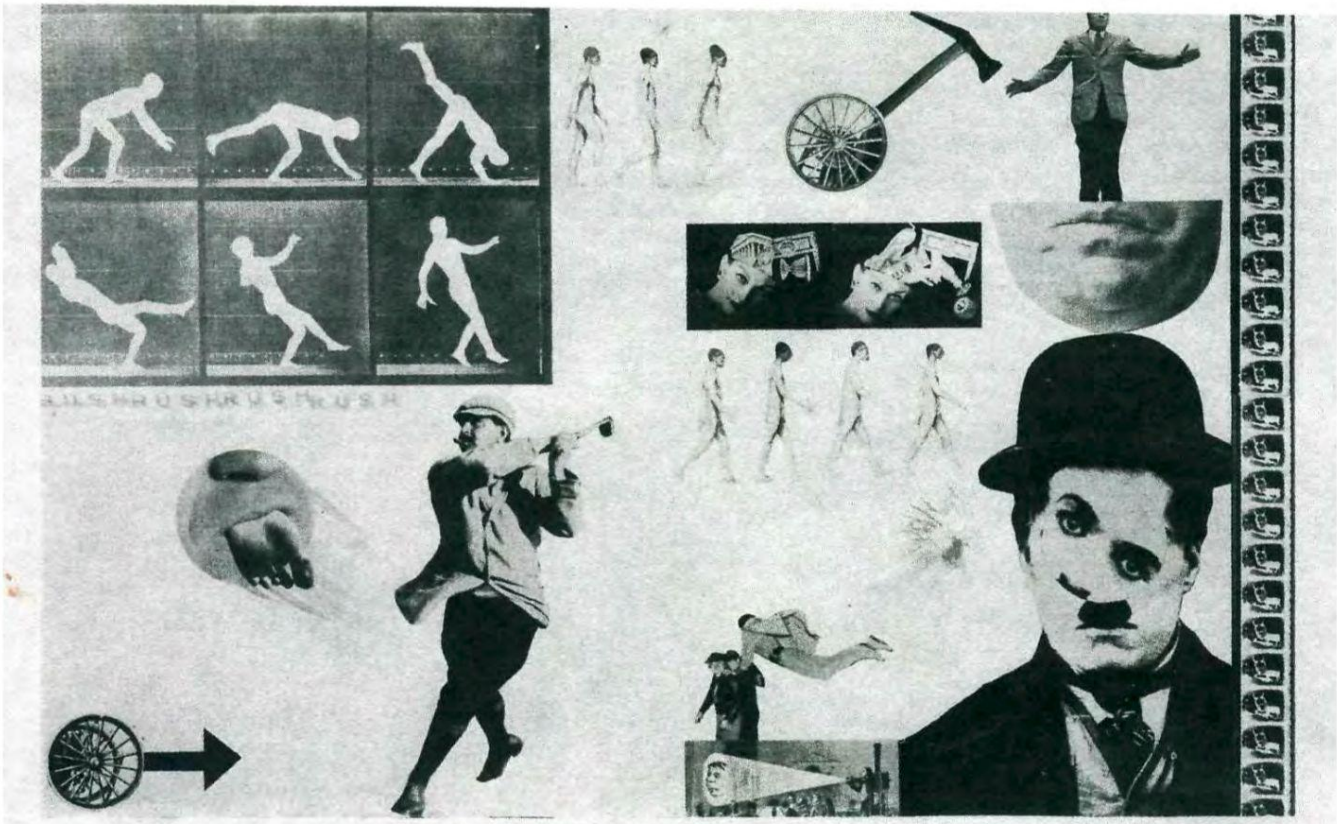
A gift of flowers from his son Max.



In the half-a-globe and beyond.



The forest in the field lens.



VanDerBeek created this collage to suggest the feeling of some of his films.

many different projects, the elapsed time between the conception of a VanDerBeek film and its completion is frequently very great—*Wheeeeeeels*, an eight-minute collage film about automania, took nine years to make. By 1959, however, VanDerBeek had done enough work in straight collage to know that the technique alone did not satisfy him. He felt the need for the introduction of live action.

VanDerBeek had his first go at live action when he attempted to film "happenings," semi-spontaneous theatrical events in which everyone present participates, by artists like Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg. He decided that it was impossible to translate the improvisatory quality of the happening to film. Another solution was the intercutting of miscellaneous film clips —the cinematic counterpart of the graphic material of the collages—with straight collage sequences. Thus VanDerBeek did an *Achoo, Mr. Keroochev*, a take-off on the Russian strongman.

But what VanDerBeek really wanted was to superimpose collage material directly onto "found" live-action footage, thereby achieving an effect falling between the mundane simulacrum of the newsreel and the fantastic, jerky world of his collages. He upset the natural inclination of his audience to accept one unthinkingly and reject the other as irrelevant. Double-exposure would have been the easy solution, but VanDerBeek recognized this as no solution at all. The over-all effect of double-exposure is almost invariably one of vagueness, exactly the opposite of the immediacy VanDerBeek was after.

The solution was a machine called the aerial printer, which uses condensers to project an image on which animated material can be superimposed. The combined image-over-image is then refocused inside the animation camera. The only trouble with aerial printers is that they cost about $35,000, so VanDerBeek made one, using a piece of groundglass in place of the condensers. Projecting his live action frame by frame on the rear of the glass, and moving his collage material on the front of the glass, he achieves perfect superimposition of collage on live action. In VanDerBeek's first use of the printer, *Skullduggery*, the heads of celebrities appear on moving bodies in the background—Winston Churchill becomes a bull, or Adolf Hitler a tightrope walker over the Alps. The effect is both funny and powerful.

Having succeeded in undermining the famous and transmogrifying the mundane, VanDerBeek's next move was to do a job on the whole human race. The specific targets of *Summitry*, shot in 1961 and completed in 1962, are Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy. New technique allows VanDerBeek a much wider satirical range. *Summitry* is his first live action film, but it is live action with a difference—animated live action.

"I wanted to make a live action film that treated actors in a certain comic, puppet-type styles where they were almost real but obviously not," VanDerBeek says. "It's the whole photoreality idea, where they look real enough, as in collage animation, but there's something off, and yet you're carried away by the whole sense of reality. This is what's happening to us in life. Life has a sense of reality but if you stop to examine any one detail of it you know it's more than real. It's super-real. It's surrealism."

The animation of live action is usually done by pixillation, a stop-motion process using actors. A 15-minute film like *Summitry* would take about two weeks to shoot in pixillation. VanDerBeek had three days, in a theater space offered him by a friend whose play had flopped. The film was shot in color, an afterthought which cost him a day of shooting time as he dashed all over New York ferreting out outdated Ektachrome. Color had to be, though—there was a beautiful red-and-white flag backdropping the stage and VanDerBeek

16-mm Bolex for his live shooting, with sculptor Addison Bray as Khrushchev and actor Bob Folley as Kennedy, he made the film. The principals talk over a table (the film was shot silent with a squeaking sound track added later); suspicious at first, then conciliatory, finally furious, so furious that Kennedy drags a huge bomb in from offstage. Khrushchev, curious, helps him launch it. The brilliant animated sequence that follows was shot in 35-mm. The bomb travels over a world which seems at first ridiculous, then suddenly ominous. There is a terrifying series of quick-cut photographs from Nazi concentration camps. The whole sequence is tinted yellow for extra eerieness (getting a lab to tint a color film to get rid of flesh tones was such a harrowing experience for VanDerBeek that he has vowed to make his own laboratory printer and never depend upon those "Mongolian idiots" again). Finally, the bomb returns to the summit and destroys its own perpetrators.

But VanDerBeek wanted to animate more than the final sequence. He sees us as the inheritors of a mechanical age, removed from natural experience. That's why he's fascinated with junk, dead machinery which seems almost viable in decay, and with the vicarious, second-hand life which the flood of contemporary graphic materials implies. Khrushchev and Kennedy had to move as puppet-machines not only because as potentates they were the tools of forces much greater than themselves, but because they were men in a world of machines. So VanDerBeek, himself on the strings of economic necessity, had to improvise a means of animating them.

Kennedy and Khrushchev

The first step was to make a 16-mm workprint (something he does even when he's working totally in 35). Then he rented an optical printer, and taught himself how to use it—lighting and exposure were both difficult problems. Then, because he had neglected to have his workprint numbered, he had to eye-match his negative and workprint, a process which left him temporarily half blind. Finally, he animated Kennedy and Khrushchev. By skipping frames and printing short sequences more than once, he speeded them up and forced them into funny little repeat motions. The process took two weeks, but out of the two weeks came not only a fine film but a whole new list of pitfalls to be avoided for evermore.

VanDerBeek's masterpiece, thus far, is *Breathdeath*, which represents a kind of culmination in technique and vision. There are no new techniques in the film, but every one of the old ones is used. *Breathdeath* started out as a three-minute snippet about the dance of death, then grew as additional images crystallized around the basic one. Like most of VanDerBeek's

opens with a straight live action sequence of couples twisting while Screamin' Jay Hawkins sings *I Put a Spell on You*. Other live action is scattered throughout the film. In one sequence, VanDerBeek pays tribute to Méliès: in a take-off on *A Voyage to the Moon*, astronomer VanDerBeek suffers a black eye as he peers through a telescope at the unifying figure of the movie, an animated bird. There is a charming two-second snatch of his daughter August peering wide-eyed at the camera which introduces a drawing on the animation board —the background being Marilyn Monroe's face. There are tributes to Keaton and Chaplin done by collage on live action; a beauty contest turns into a death march by the same technique. VanDerBeek draws on his wife Johanna's face and animates her hair: in a hysterical sequence, she tries to make love to a suit of clothes with a television set for a head.

But to enumerate every image would be impossible, and would scarcely scratch the surface of the film. As VanDerBeek gains experience his cuts become quicker and quicker, and the rapid-fire visual and emotional switches that *Breathdeath* demands is one of its major triumphs.

Too old to protest

Breathdeath represents a culmination for VanDerBeek in more ways than one. It is a protest film, and VanDerBeek is getting too old for even the most sophisticated protest. The artist, he says, must be "dedicated to his own inner vision," and as an artist VanDerBeek is moving inexorably toward the specific, high-tension object, which is the way things look from his cool, almost hallucinatory realm of vision, and away from the definitive statement which becomes abstract merely by taking a position. His pet project at the moment is located a few yards from his hangar-home; he calls it the MovieDome. It's a silo top, 30 feet in diameter, a perfect hemisphere. It is to be used as a studio as well as theater. As a theater, it will present multiple projection, stereophonic sound, wind effects, odors, temperature, humidity effects, totally engulfing half-a-globe projection, and any other good ideas that come to VanDerBeek's mind.—