



The first great work of art in the video medium? (see Video)

KIR. PEROV

Video

THE PASSING: Fifty-six minutes long, brilliantly black-and-white, Bill Viola's latest mixes psyche and landscape, memory and desire, air and water, birth and death. At the moment, I think it's the first great work of art produced in the video medium. February 14 at 3 and 6:30, February 18 at 6, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, 708-9480. (Taubin)

Making Strange

By Amy Taubin

The Passing
The Exploding Valentine

Some of the images in Bill Viola's *The Passing* burst out of the darkness, shimmer, and fade as radiant and ephemeral as shooting stars. Others coalesce before our eyes, emerging like ghosts from a field of electronic noise. On a video screen, noise looks something like film grain—it's what you see in the absence of a signal strong enough to override it. For Viola, noise is the stuff that subtends representation, the ground of both video and consciousness.

Awesomely beautiful, *The Passing* is proof that as a visual medium, video is *not* inferior to painting or film. For the first time in the 25-year history of video art, it isn't necessary to make either allowances for or a virtue of the crudeness of the image. It's not incidental, however, that *The Passing* is entirely produced in black and white. At its best, color video is about as subtle as acryl-



SANDRA-LEE PI. PPS

Do you know where you're going to?

ics, though far more difficult to control.

Viola is one of two world-class video artists, the other being Nam June Paik. If the populist Paik brought TV into the modern art museum, Viola extended the aesthetics of modernist art to the TV screen. Although his confrontational video installations have,

until now, overshadowed his videotapes, at least a half-dozen of the latter—for example, *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)* and *Anthem*—are among the most compelling works of the '70s and '80s.

Like most of the pieces Viola has produced since 1973, *The Passing* is an autobiographical in-

investigation of consciousness. During the four years in which he shot and edited the tape, his two children were born, his mother died, and he himself turned 40. At the midpoint of his life, he found himself not in Dante's "dark wood," but under water, drowning, struggling for air and light.

The central image of the piece is of a man (Viola) lying in bed, tossing between sleep and waking, his eyes open but looking inward. Like avant-garde "trance films," *The Passing* breaks down the boundaries between the self and the external world, between the imagination and materiality. In that sense, it owes a great deal to the work of Stan Brakhage. Viola, however, defines the mind/body/inside/outside relationships very differently from Brakhage. If the unstable imagery of *The Passing* represents the terroristic threat of imagination and memory—the stuff that's overwhelming yet can't be grasped—the slow, slightly labored breathing that dominates the soundtrack is an index of the rhythms of the body through which consciousness is mediated.

Video technology allows Viola to revive an exhausted avant-garde form and push it further than anyone has before. It's the dematerialized characteristic of the medium—the fact that it involves the transmission of electronic signals rather than the production of an object—that makes it so suitable for the exploration of psychic processes. In video editing, moreover, every frame can be not only obsessed over, but tinkered with, memory and desire mixing to create pictures unavailable to the naked eye.

There are less than a half-dozen images in *The Passing* that Freud would have considered *heimlich*. Indeed they could have come out of anyone's home movies: a child running on the beach, the child posed with his grandparents, a pan across a mantle place covered with photos. There are two other images that are no less direct although slightly more studied: a close-up of the wet, crinkled face of a newborn and another of the parchment-skinned grandmother, white lace framing her head, lying in her casket. These moments serve both as our entry into the

piece and as respite for the protagonist (Viola) from his terrifying subjectivity, his way of coming up for air. *The Passing* isn't structured as a narrative, but, posed between birth and death, it raises the question basic to all narrative: Where has one come from and where is one going?

Unearthing images expressive of inner-eye vision, Viola also follows the imperative of the Russian formalists: that art is about "making strange." *The Passing* restores to the landscape of the Southwest the inherent surrealism that Hollywood turned into cliché. A starkly triangular mountain and its reflection in the water below (the Salton Sea) form an abstract black diamond shape against a gray ground, as stunning as a Richard Serra drawing. A crumbling adobe building with the graffiti scrawl "It stinks in there" next to its cavelike entry suggests unspeakable horrors, not all of them contemporary. The archaeology of a desert is a metaphor for that of the mind.

Just as memorable are the multilayered fantasy images. A carefully arranged table lit by a single

lamp is engulfed by water. No rain, but a river vertically upended falls from the ceiling and then is sucked back up out of the picture. In terms of video engineering, it's not a difficult image to produce: its magic is precisely its rabbit-in-the-hat simplicity.

The Passing suggests that the self resolves its terrors by plunging deeper within. The final image is of Viola asleep and floating under water.

The Passing plays at the Museum of Modern Art on February 14 at 3 and 6:30 and February 18 at 6:00. Viola will introduce both shows on the 14th. A word of caution however: the tape will be screened on a video projection system, which is guaranteed to blur its detail and diffuse its intensity.

...the modern

Bill Viola

Information (1973) color sound 30 minutes

Information is the manifestation of an aberrant electronic non-signal passing through the video switcher in a normal color TV studio and being retrieved at various points along its path. It is the result of a technical mistake made while working in the studio late one night. The output of a videotape recorder was accidentally routed through the studio switcher and back into its own input. When the record button was pressed the machine tried to record itself. This caused electronic perturbations which effected everything else in the studio. Color appeared where it shouldn't have been; there was sound where there was no audio connected; every button punched on the video switcher had a different effect. After this error was realized and traced back, it became possible to sit at the switcher as if it were a musical instrument and learn to 'play' this non-signal. Once the basic parameters were understood, a second videotape recorder was used to record the result. Information is that tape.

(Produced at the Synapse Video Center, Syracuse University.)

- 1951 Born, New York.
- 1960 Captain of the "TV Squad", 5th grade, P.S. 20, Queens, New York
- 1973 Graduated, BFA, Experimental Studios, College of Visual and
 Performing Arts, Syracuse University, New York
- 1973-80 Studies/performs with composer David Tudor and new music group
 "Rainforest" (later called "Composers Inside Electronics")
- 1974-76 Technical director in charge of production, Art/Tapes/22 Video
 Studio, Florence, Italy
- 1976-80 Artist-in-residence, WNET Thirteen Television Laboratory, New
 York
- 1976 Travels to Solomon Islands, South Pacific to record traditional
 music and dance, and document Moro cult movement
- 1977 Travels to Solo City, Java, Indonesia to record traditional
 performing arts with composer/ethnomusicologist Alex Dea
- 1979 Travels to Sahara desert, Tunisia to videotape mirages
- 1980-81 Lives in Japan. Studies traditional culture and video technology
- 1981 Artist-in-residence, Atsugi Laboratories, Sony Corporation, Japan
- 1982 Travels to Ladakh in Himalayas, northern India to observe
 religious art and ritual in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries
- 1983 Instructor, advanced video, California Institute of the Arts,
 Valencia, CA
- 1984 Artist-in-residence, San Diego Zoo, CA
- 1984 Travels to Fiji, South Pacific to document fire walking ceremony
 of the South Indian community in Suva
- 1987 Travels throughout Southwest U.S. to study ancient Native
 American archeological sites and rock art

Selected One-Person Exhibitions

- 1973 "New Video Work," Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY (installation,
 videotapes)
- 1974 "Bill Viola: Video and Sound Installations," The Kitchen Center, New
 York (four installations)
- 1975 "Rain - Three Interlocking Systems," Everson Museum of Art,
 Syracuse, NY (installation, videotapes)
- 1977 "Bill Viola," The Kitchen Center, New York (installation, videotapes)
- 1979 "Projects: Bill Viola," The Museum of Modern Art, New York
 (installation)
- 1980 Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA (videotapes)
- 1981 "Bill Viola," Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada, (videotapes)

- 1982 "Bill Viola," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
(videotapes)
- 1983 "Bill Viola," ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France
(two installations, videotapes)
- 1985 "Summer 1985," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, nine
individual exhibitions (two installations, videotapes)
- 1985 "Bill Viola," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (installation,
videotapes)
- 1987 "Bill Viola: Installations and Videotapes," The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. (three installations, videotapes)
- 1988 "Bill Viola: Survey of a Decade," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston,
Texas (two installations, videotapes)
- 1988 "Bill Viola, Video Installation and Videotapes," Riverside Studios,
Hammersmith, England (installation, videotapes)
- 1989 "Bill Viola: The City of Man," Brockton Art Museum/ Fuller Memorial,
Brockton, MA. (installation)
- 1989 "Bill Viola: Installations and Videotapes," The Winnipeg Art Gallery,
Canada. (two installations, videotapes)
- 1989 "Bill Viola: Sanctuary," Copp Street Project, San Francisco, CA.
(installation)
- 1989 "Bill Viola," Fukui Prefectural Museum of Art, Fukui City, Japan,
part of The 3rd Fukui International Video Biennale.
(Five installations)
- 1990 "Bill Viola: The Sleep of Reason", Fondation Cartier pour l'Art
Contemporain, Jouy-en-Josas, France. (two installations,
videotape)
- 1990 "Bill Viola: He Weeps for You," LA BOX, Ecole National des Beaux Arts,
Bourges, France (installation, videotapes)
- 1991 "Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House," North Dakota Museum
of Art, Grand Forks, North Dakota (installation, videotapes)
- 1991 "Bill Viola: Video Projects," Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt,
Germany (videotapes)

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1972 "St. Jude Invitational Exhibition," De Saisset Art Gallery and Museum,
Santa Clara, CA (videotape)
- 1974 "Projekt '74," Kunstverein, Cologne, West Germany (videotape)
- 1975, 77 "La Biennale de Paris," ARC, Musée D'Art Moderne de la Ville De
Paris, France (videotape)
- 1975-87 "Biennial Exhibition" (all), Whitney Museum of American Art, New
York (videotapes, installation in 1985)

- 1976 "Beyond the Artist's Hand: Explorations of Change," Art Gallery, California State University, Long Beach, CA (installation)
- 1977 "Documenta 6", Friedericianum, Kassel, West Germany (installation, videotapes)
- 1978 "International Open Encounter on Video, Tokyo '78," Japan (performance)
- 1979 "Everson Video Review," Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY (videotape)
- 1981 "International Video Art Festival," Theme Pavillion, Portopia '81, Kobe, Japan (videotape)
- 1982 "'60'80 attitudes/concepts/images," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (videotapes)
- 1982 "National Video Festival," American Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA (installation)
- 1983 "Video As Attitude", Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM. (installation)
- 1984 "The Luminous Image", Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (installation)
- 1985 "Currents" Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (installation)
- 1986 La Biennale di Venezia, Italy (installation)
- 1986 "Où Va la Video?" La Chartreuse, Villeneuve-lez-Avignon, France (two installations, videotapes)
- 1987 "L'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion. Aspects de l'art d'aujourd'hui," Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (videotape)
- 1987 "The Arts for Television," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (videotape)
- 1988 "Selections from the Permanent Collection," Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA. (installation)
- 1988 "Carnegie International," Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA. (installation)
- 1988 "American Landscape Video, The Electronic Grove," The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (installation)
- 1989 "Video-Skulptur: Restrospektiv und Aktuell 1963-1989," travelling exhibition: Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne. (installation)
- 1989 "Einleuchten," Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, West Germany. (installation)
- 1989 "Image World, Art and Media Culture," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (installation)
- 1990 "LIFE-SIZE - A Sense of the Real in Recent Art," The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (installation)
- 1990 "Passages de l'image," Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. (installation)
- 1990 "Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento," Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. (installation)
- 1991 "Metropolis," Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany. (installation)

- 1991 "Opening Exhibition," Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany (installation)
- 1991 "Selections from the Permanent Collection 1975-1991," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (installation)

Selected Fellowships/Awards

- 1980 Japan/U.S. Creative Arts Fellowship (National Endowment for the Arts; Japan/U.S. Friendship Commission; Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Japan)
- 1982 Rockefeller Foundation, Video Artist Fellowship.
- 1983/89 National Endowment for the Arts, Visual Artist Fellowship, Video
- 1984 Polaroid Video Art Award for outstanding achievement.
- 1985 J.S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Fellowship, Video
- 1987 Maya Deren Award, American Film Institute
- 1989 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award
- 1991 Rockefeller Foundation Intercultural Film/Video Fellowship

Selected Prizes for Videotapes

Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat). (1979)

- 1980 Grand Prize, Portopia International Video Art Festival, Kobe, Japan.
- 1982 Jury Prize, U.S. Film and Video Festival, Park City, Utah.

Hatsu-Yume (First Dream). (1981)

- 1983 Grand Prize U.S. Film and Video Festival, Park City, Utah.
- 1983 Jury Prize, Video Culture/Canada, Toronto.

Anthem (1983)

- 1984 Grand Prize, Video Art, Video Culture/Canada, Toronto.
- 1984 First Prize, Video Art, Athens Film/Video Festival, Ohio.

I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like (1986)

- 1987 First Prize, "Videoart," 8 Festival International D'Art Video, Locarno, Lago Maggiore, Switzerland.

ART SPHERE



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MILLER

THE FIRST MAJOR exhibition of the photographic legacy of Lee Miller (1907-1977) opened at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., on February 11, 1989. Sponsored and coordinated by the California/International Arts Foundation, Lee Miller Photographer was curated by Jane Livingston, Associate Director and Chief Curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and includes 96 images, many of which have never been published or exhibited.

photographer

The exhibition will travel throughout the United States and around the world, including Japan, Spain, Israel and France. In the U.S. the exhibition will travel to: New Orleans Museum of Art (July 8–August 20, 1989); Minneapolis Institute of Arts (November 4, 1989–January 7, 1990); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (February 2–April 1, 1990); International Center of Photography, New York (Spring, 1990); Art Institute of Chicago (May–July 1990) and Santa Monica Museum of Art (August–September, 1990).

Major funding for the exhibition and the book accompanying it has been provided by the Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation and Eastman Kodak Company. The American tour is underwritten by the AT&T Foundation, and additional funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The succeeding text is excerpted from the book *Lee Miller Photographer*, by Jane Livingston.



Lee Miller, *Self-Portrait*, 1932

If Lee Miller is watching from some other dimension, I am sure there is a wry smile on her lips. Man Ray once declared she could make more work for other people than anyone else he knew, and this talent has continued to make itself felt with undiminished strength. Since her death in 1977, people have been working continuously, printing her legacy of some 40,000 negatives, collating, cataloguing, and filing them in the Lee Miller Archive. There is still enough work to keep everyone busy for several years to come.

For those of us who have worked intimately with it, Lee's photographic estate has given more than the opportunity to enjoy fine material of historic importance. Lee speaks to us all through her work and life. It is often more instructive to study a person's defeats than his or her successes, and there is a

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

C/IAF INTERVIEWS

BILL VIOLA

Bill Viola has exhibited his video works and installations internationally, and was the subject of a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1987. The C/IAF funded his installation "Room for St. John of the Cross" at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1984. This work was subsequently purchased by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, as part of the El Paso Natural Gas Company Fund for California Art, and was shown at MOCA in the exhibition of that collection in 1988. Bill Viola was interviewed by Sarah Tamor in February 1989.

ST: Your installation "Room for St. John of the Cross" commemorates the Spanish mystical poet who was imprisoned and tortured for his religious beliefs. The work combines the contemporary medium of video, with primal elements such as water and landscape, and a voice whispering St. John's poetry, to create an eerie feeling of the bridging of centuries.

BV: I am living in this day and age, so I use a contemporary medium, but the themes I'm interested in are ancient. I try to resolve specific historical references and my own subjectivity, by using natural symbols which have a profound, universal place in the psyche, which resonate beyond language. For me, art is rooted in things that are meaningful in life, which are not topical, because they've always

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

(VIOLA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

been there - birth, death, desire, love - there are millions of births every day - it's a miracle, and it happens every day. Miracles are around us all the time. You can get enlightenment walking down the street- it depends on your state as an individual. For me the main function in art is encouraging self-awareness, giving someone the space and situation to have an insight.

ST: It seems that video came along at just the right time for you. You were doing work with David Tudor, performance related, electronic music, but obviously you're visually oriented.

BV: Well, I went to art school to study painting, and I flunked. I failed painting. I always knew since I was little I was gonna be an artist - that wasn't the question. Working with Tudor was great, working with sound, with found objects, and creating an environment where each of these objects resonated and gave off a different sound. It taught me that sound and time could be considered physical materials which can be manipulated, broken down, built up, squeezed or stretched.

ST: Also, the found objects resonating with their own noises - it's like the object is speaking what it is. That's a very consistent approach in your work.

BV: I guess that's because I want to know what it is. Everything has something to teach you, so I will go and look at something as long as I can, and not speak, and hopefully, let it speak. I don't take anything for granted.

ST: You use the tools of television, which in this culture is the most banal thing around, to articulate profound inner processes. How do you articulate the interior world, using pictures of the exterior world?

BV: Because it's the same thing. The exterior world is the interior world. In Islam, the Sufis call it a "veil" - there are 70,000 veils separating you from

Allah, they say. You can think of it sometimes as a brick wall; other times, it's transparent. But the outer world and the inner world are complementary reflections of the same thing. The idea of the sacred and the profane is not intrinsic to any particular objects or images. Any image can be a vehicle of transmission between the two worlds.

That's what the piece "Anthem" is about. When I first moved to Southern California, I felt that it was as far away from the spiritual as anything I could think of. But I felt my initial reaction was simplistic, so I tried to find the mythic or inner elements of which this is a reflection. I used shots of the Long Beach harbor, and the oil refineries in San Pedro, very familiar things. Everything has multiple dimensions to it.



Bill Viola, photograph by Sarah Tamor

It's like the installation *The City of Man*, which I just did at the Brockton Art Museum in Massachusetts. It's about this world, this day - now. Most of my work has been about the other world, in the language of the other world, making a statement about this world by negation, by the fact that the common elements of this world are not there. My installations envelop you in physical metaphors for inner experiences. *The City of Man* is the rational, human side, as opposed to St. Augustine's *City of God*.

The piece is a triptych, based on the proportions of Renaissance triptychs, with three channels of rear-projected video projected onto the panels. The center

panel is a meeting in City Hall with a group of people at a big table, discussing something you can't quite hear, for a half-hour in real time. The left panel shows these new housing clusters on the hills in Diamond Bar in Riverside County, and the freeway, and a snow-covered mountain in the background. The light slowly changes for a half-hour. The far-right panel is an old factory burning at night, flames leaping into the air out of the windows. The feeling is one of perpetual, continuous time.

ST: Is it safe to call you a romantic? You named your kid "Blake," after all!

BV: That was after Blake Carrington!

ST: Oh, of course, you're referencing popular culture!

BV: I'm ok in the art world, now, right?! Well, am I a romantic? I don't know, there are a lot of things about the romantic tradition that I identify with, but there are aspects of it that I think are dangerous. Even though some of my images may look like that, the Romantics' engagement of landscape is on a very different level. The tradition of landscape in the East, the Eastern concept of the person's place in the universe, makes alot more sense to me.

I've felt that the landscape is the raw material of the psyche. The majority of human habitation has been as hunter-gatherers; as "civilized" human beings we're a recent phenomenon. Therefore, if you agree with people like Carl Jung, that there is an archeology of mind, and that the mind is built upon many layers of past experience, then it stands to reason that there is a deeper, very strong connection with the landscape. Most of the images that have fallen on human retinas throughout history have been nature, wilderness, rather than the interiors of cities and towns.

The reflection of all those years as hunter-gatherers, in awe of the overwhelming power of nature, is what confronts you.

(CHINESE INFLUENCE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

work to life over a long period of time, GUY WILLIAMS' art looks as if he created it suddenly, with the decisive clap of hands. Hard-edged, solid-colored and crisp, the shapes in his painted paper cutouts seem to burst into being with supreme confidence. Williams' work is an intriguing marriage of Eastern and Western aesthetics. The drips and spirited brush strokes around the periphery of his works called "Stations of the Square" resemble the marks of sudden inspiration in Zen ink paintings, while the central squares and folding shapes blend Western concepts of pictorial flatness and illusionistic depth.

Ceramic sculptors ADRIAN SAXE and Richard White provide a sharp contrast of sensibilities, and insight into the wide range of

Oriental influence on Occidental ceramics. In a sense a Post-modernist who was ahead of the movement, Saxe creates historical pastiches that are also original inventions of form. He may refer to French Sevres porcelain presentation pieces, or suggest Chinese vases of the K'ang-hsi period with twisting antelopes atop patterned jars. Diagonal stripes on other pieces resemble the stylized rainfall in Japanese ukiyo-e prints. A technical master who may combine porcelain with stoneware or raku in a single piece, Saxe is a savvy commentator on ritualistic uses of art.

Unlike Saxe's highly detailed and smartly finished work that makes free use of decorative motifs, RICHARD WHITE's rough figurative sculpture has an earthy feel. It was directly inspired by the 1974 archaeological discovery, near Xi'an, of the underground terracotta army of

the first emperor of China, Qin Shi-Huang. White creates imperfect, seated figures that have a strange, meditative presence. These philosophers and magnates are historically encrusted characters that might have been recently unearthed. We are given few clues to their identity, so we accept them as mute embodiments of another time and place - a puzzling link to the past.

This exhibition is only a brief introduction to the profound impact that the Far East continues to exert on contemporary art from America's West Coast. But the examples included indicate an important relationship that stems from a tradition of cultural interchange.

Suzanne Muchnic is an art critic for the Los Angeles Times.