

9/00

Article Number: 00013

## **The Ithaca News 4/28/77**

### ***Ithaca Video Festival Shows State of the Art***

**By Marilyn Rivchin**

On view now through Sunday, May 1 at the Johnson Museum, the third annual Ithaca Video Festival is a concentrated program of stimulating video art. Selected from over 200 entries by American and Canadian videomakers, these 21 tapes provide an excellent sampling of the current range of experimentation in the medium by artists independent of the commercial TV system.

According to Philip and Gunilla Mallory Jones, directors of Ithaca Video Projects, which sponsors this event, the high proportion of tapes from New York State indicates the real extent of video activity here. This, in turn, reflects the acknowledgment of the medium-as-art through financial support from state organizations such as CAPS and the New York State Council on the Arts, which funds Ithaca Video Projects. The entire program of tapes runs continuously for about four hours but viewers may also request to see specific tapes at the museum.

Often video people will refer to two sorts of "pure video." At one extreme this means long, unedited recordings of real-time events, including natural synchronization of sound and image; there is no manipulation beyond the initial selection of material and framing and the decisions to start and stop. At the other extreme of the medium's potential is the total manipulation of real-time or generated material through a variety of technical means, including editing, superimposition, animation, electronic synthesizing of images and/or sound, coloring, etc. The first mode lends authenticity to personal or social experience; the latter, by altering time/space relationships, emphasizes the formal and graphic characteristics of the medium to recreate sensory experience. At either extreme, or anywhere along the continuum, video can be exciting or boring; "pure" video doesn't necessarily mean "good" video, as one tape, on view at the Johnson Museum, *Curiosity Killed the Cat* proves. As pure, personal document this videotape (like many early video attempts) pushes that hazy line between self-expression and self-indulgence to its limits. Its information is utterly forgettable.

#### **Intense Subway Decoration**

Happily, there are many excellent tapes in this festival. Direct interviews with young, New York graffiti "artists" intercut with images of their intense subway decoration form the substance of *Graffiti People*, by Elizabeth Weiner. Using the most conventional interview and editing techniques, this is a fascinating intimate study of the dangers, processes, self-awareness and social dynamics of one group of creative outlaws.

Another must-see tape is the perceptually mind-bending *From Cheektowaga to Tonawonda*, by Steina Vasulka. Through the heavy manipulation of relatively simply raw material - black-and-white video recording from a car during a drive between the two towns of the title - Vasulka metamorphoses the familiar city-town-highway-country, imagery into an evolving cosmic voyage. Shifts from minimal blue colorization, to upside-down movement experience, to synthesized, multi-colored imagery, to extraordinary wave modulated landscape and house forms (which result when the, electronic impulses of the original are fed through an oscilloscope) persistently challenge one's normal perceptions. Part of the peculiar force of this tape lies in the continuity of the sound track (natural driving noise) and the unaltered real-time automobile rhythm. These provide apparent anchors to one mundane experience of reality, while the visual experiments continually explode and enrich ordinary expectations.

Among the best shorter tapes are two eccentric and, delightful two-minute animations by Dennis Hylasky, *Old Sister Cow* and *A New Tape*.

#### **Quiet Humor**

*Milk* is a kind of self-interview in which Diane Sporadek sits on a couch in front of her fixed-position video camera and manually expresses her breast milk into a glass. The quiet humor of this tape rides on the edge between factual demonstration and personal insights and associations on pregnancy, breast-feeding, sex-roe behavior and milk. The simple presentation and straight faced humor of her performance/life draw the viewer into the commonness of her intimate experience and help to provide an alternative to the accumulated images of women-as-sex-object in the media by suggesting reality, not glamorization.

*December 10, 1976* by Tomiyo Sasaki plunges right into repetitions of fragments of casual conversation, creating new sound/image patterns from the subtlest inflections of voice, fleeting facial expressions, the briefest hand and body gestures. It is a wonderful analysis, through rhythmic replays, or the poetry, music and dance inherent in ordinary human interaction and an exceptionally sensitive use of simple video techniques to explore a process.

Besides its relatively inexpensive costs and ease of operation, many independent artists choose the medium of video, rather than film, to document or interplay with the dance medium. Portable equipment, particularly, allows fluidity of movement; more sophisticated hardware makes possible striking abstractions related to the abstractions in dance. Both permit the flowing development of music to be thoroughly integrated with the moving image in that neutral, shallow "space" that is oddly shared by video and dance.

### **Electronic Enhancement**

So it is no surprise that there is such a high incidence of dance tapes in general and in this festivals program. Among the tapes that interrelate these media, I most admired *Merian* by Edin Velez for the beauty of its electronic enhancement and *The Crystal Palace Tape* by Eva Maier for the beauty of its restraint. Although less successful individually, the ambitious electronic manipulations of *Dance Nine*, by Doris Chase and the comic relief of *Dying Swan*, by Laurie McDonald suggest the range of experiments possible in this media marriage.

Comedy in video is well represented in several tapes, especially in a documentary-spoof called *Initial Survey of Lindalil Use by Occupations for TV Ads*, by Jack Frost. *Words*, by Ernest Gusella will undoubtedly be popular but I found it excessively long for a short tape. Among the more serious conceptual tapes, *Artistructure*, by James Edwards, and *Migration* by Bill Viola are both tightly constructed, beautifully intriguing video statements.

One of the strongest personal documentaries in the program is *Road Kills* by Robe J. Carey, but many viewers may find it difficult to stay with the sensitively photographed dead animals by the highway. Less powerful, but psychologically interesting, is *First Memories*, a tape by Fred Simon including interviews with three people. Each relates a first memory, then a painful experience. The style is simple, the memories highly visual in nature, though described in words. It is the self-reflection of the storytellers that is most interesting and which the medium of video so subtly conveys.

See the whole program if you can, as it gives an excellent introduction or update to the current state of the-art. This balanced selection of videotapes was made by a panel including Ed Emshwiller (independent film and video producer), Jason Wong (Assistant Director, Johnson Museum) and the co-directors of Ithaca Video Projects.

*End*