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Art Becomes Electronic:

New Gallery Sells Works You Can Put in Your VCR

By: Hunter Drohojowska

In the beginning, TV and video art were oceans apart. But the advent of cable and VCRs changed all that. Suddenly, video art is the newest wrinkle in consumer products, and Richard and Karen Kennedy want to be in on the first wave of interest.

The Kennedy's just opened Modern Visual Communications on the corner of Melrose and Altavista, in a classic building that used to be Tom's Auto Body. The 1929 steeple and art deco details have been painted with silver radiator paint, accented with aqua and lavender, to lead an identity that is both futuristic and historic.

The Kennedy's brave new gallery is devoted to art generated by electronic means. They will sell video art, holograms, computer-generated graphics, electronic sculptures - all manner of what they call techno-kinetic art.

"I wanted a building that would be solid and classical, but also futuristic in its nature, the dual representations of what the gallery will be," says Richard Kennedy.

The Kennedy's are full of enthusiasm for what they see as an untapped art resource and market. Richard, 40, a former clothing designer, and Karen, 33, a former theatrical costume designer, moved here from Manhattan in 1961. They are still enthralled with L.A.'s positive atmosphere, the easy acceptance of new ideas.

"It started to feel sad in New York. We felt a kinship to the L.A. lifestyle," says Richard. They both hope this city is ready for a video and electronic art gallery.

"I feel like we're at a point in time that is the same as at the turn of the century with the impressionists," says Richard. There is such an openness of collaboration. I get schmaltsy because what's going on is so important. We're opening new ways for people to see and experience work."

What you see at MVC, as they call their gallery, is a series of video monitors, each playing a different artist's tape. You put on a pair of headphones and listen for as long as you want, standing a bit awkwardly in the middle of a store for minutes at a time. Tapes are available by such established artists as Peter D'Agistino, Lynn Hershman, Gary Hill, Ed Emschwiler, Michael Scroggins and Vibeke Sorensen, as well as many lesser-known figures. One hallway is filled with a three-monitor installation by Stuart Bender. Another room is given over to a 10-monitor installation called *The West* by video artists Woody and Steina Vasulka. The tapes will be sold for between \$49 and \$69. As the gallery becomes more established, the Kennedy's want to sell signed, limited edition laser discs of artists' work for \$3,000 or more.

While video is widely accepted as an art form and collected by contemporary art museums, this is less true of other forms of electronic art sold by the gallery. Holograms by an English artist with one name - Alexander - are suspended from the gallery ceiling. Eerie cage-like forms in a rainbow of colors seem to hang in space. Kennedy is fond of one titled *War Into Peace*. He jostles a visitor into the most advantageous position to point out that a barbed-wire globe gives way to the shape of a dross in negative space. Another room bears the world's largest hologram, according to Alexander, a 6 by 3 foot dream image of a nude woman in a hammock, being watched by a single eye and a sea monster.

In another corner of the gallery, a black plexiglass monitor by Guy Marsden bears the moving image of circular helix that changes shapes and colors when you twiddle some knobs. It sells for \$2,500, and the Kennedy's bristle

at the remark that, for one visitor, the impact is like that of a lava lamp. Elsewhere in the gallery, the walls are hung with graphics that were drawn by computers by such artists as Mark Lindquist and Sorenson.

This emphasis on high-technology and computers has affected the apparent selection of videotapes, many of which rely on image processing and correspondence to music, such as the work by David Stout, Micheal Scroggins or Robert Campbell. These tapes are lush, abstract images.

Richard Kennedy first became interested in technokinetic art when doing displays with video and holography for his Manhattan boutique Lifestyle. "I wanted to communicate more and facilitate communication for others," he says. "What's filling peoples' time these days is garbage and we felt we wanted to make available work that fills peoples' time in a worth while manner."

Karen adds, "The video movement is an interesting one because although it is supported by institutions like museums and the National Endowments for the Arts, it hasn't been available to the general public. People haven't been able to get involved unless they knew the artists. Our desire is to give access to the public."

Richard says, "It's not going to happen one-two-three, but the VCR's are there. As we give people a context and understanding for how it works, people will buy it. We are an audio/video label as well as a gallery and we represent some artists exclusively. We have some 35 to 40 artists, which was all we could handle to open."

"As people develop confidence in us and the integrity we maintain here," Karen continues, "that will be key to bringing in other artists."

Both Kennedy's are Candide-style idealists. Karen left theater because she wanted to reach more people. "My excitement was wanting to bring technology and humanity together. I've always seen myself involved in some sort of forum, and I was finding less and less dialogue in the theater. We feel this will be a center for dialogue. We're interested in creating a positive lifestyle." To that end, they have established an outdoor cafe where people can sit and discuss what they have seen in the video theater. They have also scheduled children's programs for weekend afternoons.

"We want to integrate MVC into the larger world," Richard says. "We're not going to make AC/DC tapes as a sideline: MVC will be self sufficient. But that doesn't mean that one of these artists couldn't make a good video that will end up on MTV."

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