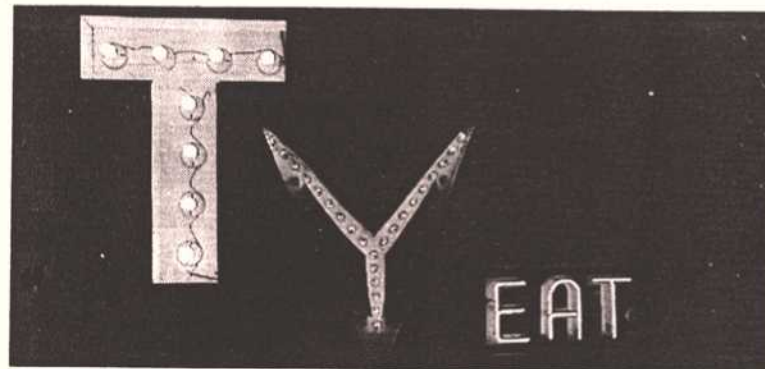


## THE ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

ART



Lights and neon spell out the name of YAHOO's contribution to "Video" at the Forum.

## A Different Sort Of Canvas

Television becomes part of the work by the makers of video art

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Photos by Renyold Ferguson  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

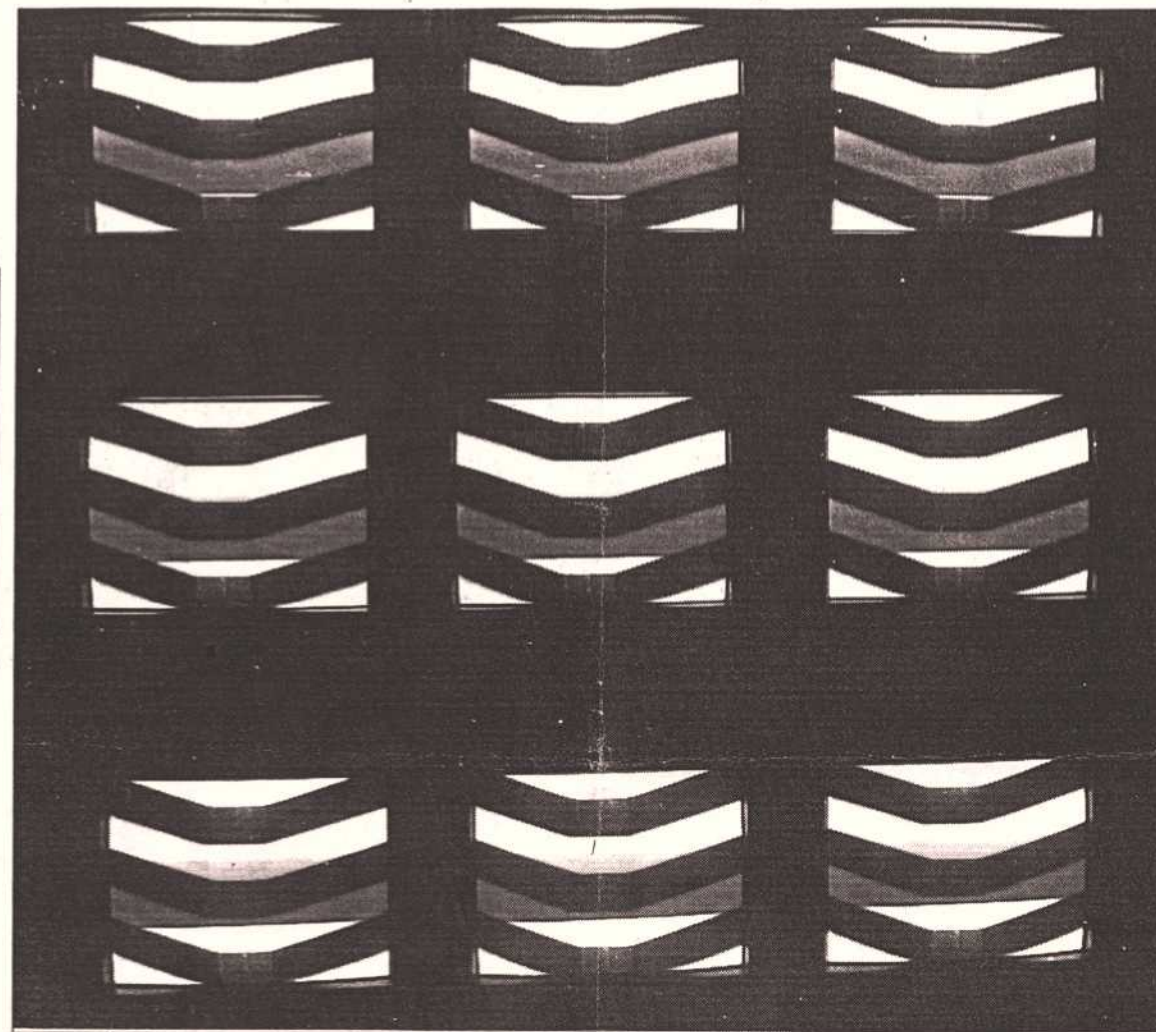
**Y**OU CAN'T help but wonder if the visionaries, scientists and engineers who foresaw and created the idolized, addictive, maligned, genuinely helpful and seriously destructive medium of television ever imagined how central and inescapable a presence it would become.

It is, among other things, Rodney King, "I Love Lucy," Clarence Thomas, "Twin Peaks," "Sesame Street," "Roseanne," Desert Storm and "Howdy Doody," the Army-McCarthy hearings and Phil Silvers. It is Watergate and "Winky Dink and You." It is the Olympics and "La Boheme" and Willard Scott and David Koresh. It is the "\$64,000 Question."

It is public television, network and cable television, and as the replacement for the Super 8 camera, it has become the electronic medium of Everyman. It is *quite* astonishing, and its history has happened on fast forward.

**Because it is** such an extraordinarily visual medium it is no surprise that since the late 1950s — with some coaching from guru John Cage and inspiration from art shaman Joseph Beuys — television has been appropriated for the purposes of art. Nam June Paik was the first artist to become really famous with television, as opposed to becoming famous on it. And he continues to make interesting art using video technology.

There was a traveling show of Paik's at the Forum a year and a half ago; last weekend, a new show called simply "Video" opened, and this one



An instant in Van McElwee's "Cityscape" installation at the Forum for Contemporary Art.

was produced by the Forum itself. It is an ambitious exhibition and, like the medium itself, ranges all over the place. It is arranged in four parts.

Part I is a retrospective of the work of video artist Van McElwee, and visitors encounter it as soon as they come into the Forum's ground floor gallery.

In it, nine monitors are mounted on a wall in a darkened viewing space. The televisions in the black room have an elegance all their own, and their precise, orderly, technologically attractive appearance actually complements what you see once the tape is rolling.

The program played on these monitors is called "Cityscape," and McElwee's intention is to create a city with it, or a perception of a city, through the use of architectural images that are repeated and reversed and observed from various

angles and at various speeds and rhythms.

The nine images are identical, but because it is not possible to look at only one screen, vision and the senses are quite effectively enveloped by the moving and ever-changing pictures. It is clean, crisp, clear. But beyond its beauty and elegance there is a hypnotic quality to the work that moves a viewer beyond the gallery and into an altered time and space.

"Cityscape" is the largest work by McElwee in the exhibition, but there are other works by him that offer a broader appreciation of his serious and thoughtful endeavor. Included is the premiere showing of a new work called "Fragments of India," a work that is, in its churning motion and hot, almost searing light, an interesting contrast to the cool precision of "Cityscape."

□

**McElwee, who is** associate professor of media at Webster University, is also curator of the second part section of the Forum's show, called "Video Time Shifts" — all of which have to do with the ability of television to alter perceptions of time.

Like McElwee's work, these tapes are interesting in the variety of experiences they offer and their manifestations of the versatility of the medium of television.

"Reflecting Pool," by veteran video maker Bill Viola, is a fascinating and haunting observation of a human figure, his reflection in a pool, the gradual alteration and eventual obliteration of that image electronically, and its magical televised resurrection.

More abstract, but equally involving, was a more traditional observation of the passing of time.

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This was expressed through the use of distinguishing characteristics of the seasons and traditional cinematic devices such as wipes and fades, where pictures are wiped away or fade away to reveal something new, thus suggesting the passage of time. This video is called "Photographic Memory" and is by Steina Vasulka. Other artists represented in the "Video Time Shifts" section are Dara Birnbaum, whose work is called "Wonder Woman"; Woody Vasulka, who made "Art of Memory"; Peter Callas, "Bon Voyage"; and Gary Hill, "Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)."

**One of the** first major art museums to take video art seriously was the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. By giving video space and attention in its exhibitions, especially its often-reviled but always consequential Biennials, the medium was thus given mainstream blessings, however messy, as well.

Video was a major component of this year's critically bazooka-ed Biennial. The third part of the Forum's "Video" show is "Redefining Film and Video Art," the video complement of the 1991 Biennial. It is in circulation now under the sponsorship of the American Federation of Arts Media Arts Program.

John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at the Whitney and a pioneer champion of video, wrote that the selections in the 1991 show "illustrate the reflections of contemporary

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## Video art

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artists on a number of important issues in our society, ranging from feminism to the representation of cultures."

There are a total of nine programs of videos in the Whitney segment of the Forum's show. Two have been shown already; the remaining seven will be shown at 10:30 on Saturday mornings now through July 31. Along with the art comes a cup of coffee that's on the house. For a schedule, call Susan Lee at 535-4660.

**The fourth part** of "Video" was produced by a talented and enthusiastic group of young West End artists called YAHOO, which is under the guidance, if not the spell, of artist William Christman. The members of the group are Carla Bayer, Samuel DiLorenzo, Billie Chavez, Patricia Chavez, William Freeman, David Gioia, Lucy Griesbach, John McGuire, Robert Scales, Jeremy Schoenfeld, Briana Taylor, Sharron Westbrook and Mary Wiltenburg.

This part of the show is called "TV-EATS." The name, like the installation itself, has double meaning. One level is obvious: snacks. And this level provides plenty of pleasure: It is bright and sassy and so much fun. Along with the signs and whimsical machines and funny sayings produced by the YAHOO artists, there are all sorts of actual snacks around, Sirens of Sodium that sing silently but nonetheless seductively to the visitor/viewer.

But on another level, there is the knowledge that this stuff is full of calories that are empty, and that the food value of this sweet or salty, crunchy stuff is negligible, that there is all sorts of fat in it, that its pleasures are only momentarily satisfying.

A steady diet of it isn't particularly good for you. Like a lot of TV.

**Support for "Video"** came from the Regional Arts Commission and the Missouri Arts Council.

**Video: The Van McElwee Retrospective, Video Time Shifts, the 1991 Whitney Biennial Exhibition and TV-EATS: An Installation by YAHOO**  
Where: Forum for Contemporary Art, 3540 Washington Avenue  
When: Through July 31  
Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Whitney Biennial videos shown at 10:30 a.m. on Saturdays through July 31