

REVIEW

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In 1973, artists Richard Serra and Carlotta Fay Schoolman bought airtime on broadcast TV and showed a six-and-a-half-minute piece of video art. *Television Delivers People* consisted of no images, only scrolling text with truisms that criticized greedy media and scolded the viewing public for being complacent. “Art is not democratic. It is not for the people,” read one criticism.

Surprisingly, the 20th-century love affair with television — that great democratizer — has rarely scheduled time for white-cube-style art. That is because television is its own art form. Serra and Schoolman’s video piece was not the insertion of art into not-art. No, they already knew that television was a lost opportunity to bring gallery art into people’s homes. For the plastic arts to continue receiving an audience in a hyper-Pop world, they had to do so secretly and out of the view of the public.

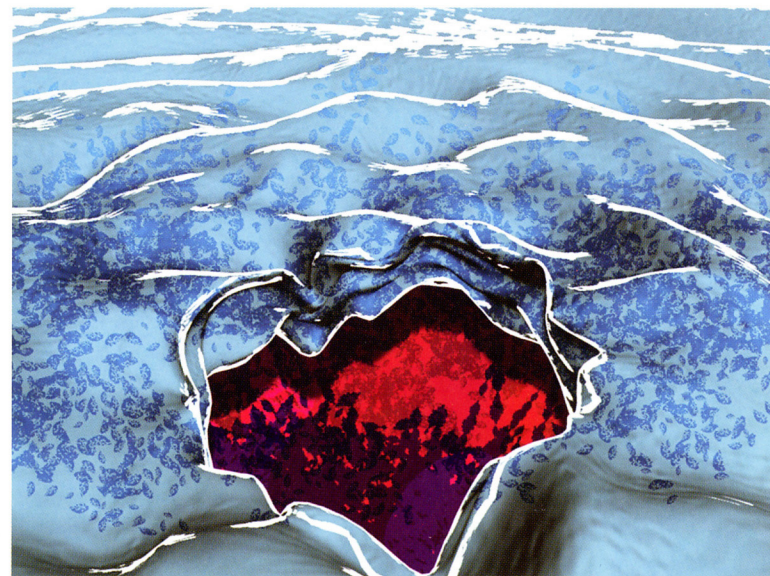
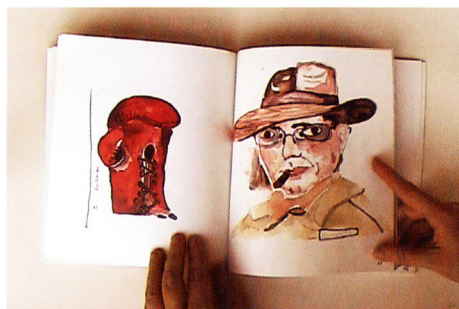
Some of the first anti-mainstream experiments with video as a fine art medium concerned how the apparatus worked, what it looked like and felt like, and how it was different from painting or even photography. Early on, the means of video art production included closed-circuit cameras and video recorders, meaning that if you wanted to make a video, you had to carry a television with you — the equipment undoubtedly informed the

content. Video artists, being the great tinkerers that they are, turned an inward eye to questions of form that were closer in nature to Abstract Expressionism’s formalist critique than the filmic, narrative quality of video already ingrained in the public consciousness. Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas, and Nancy Holt took the formalist, phenomenological approach head-on but eventually, thankfully, ended up back at narrative. When Acconci stared intensely at the (implied) viewer for 15 minutes straight, he was also staring at a live recording of himself.

“I sense you watching me from behind the screen,” says an actress to herself in Julie Orser’s *Double-Bind* (*Anna Moore*), 2007. The shattered-mirror moment of self-reflection and dissociation is also directed at the viewers, whether we are actually watching her or not.

Orser assumes an implicit viewer — “I see you watching me” — in the spectator sport of making and showing video art. But what if no one is watching? It is the old tree-falling-in-the-forest quandary — well, at least the actress is watching herself in the video. This inward turn, according to Alicia Eler and Peregrine Honig, co-curators of the exhibition *Video as Video: Rewind to Form*, marks another formalist moment for video art, except this time no one is concerned with distilling the essential properties of the medium: color, editing, pacing. The curators did not ask, “What does video look like,” but rather, “What can video do?”

Abhishek Hazra’s video in the exhibition is the product of an Internet developer’s dreams. On the surface, *Codework* mixes surreal imagery with labyrinthine



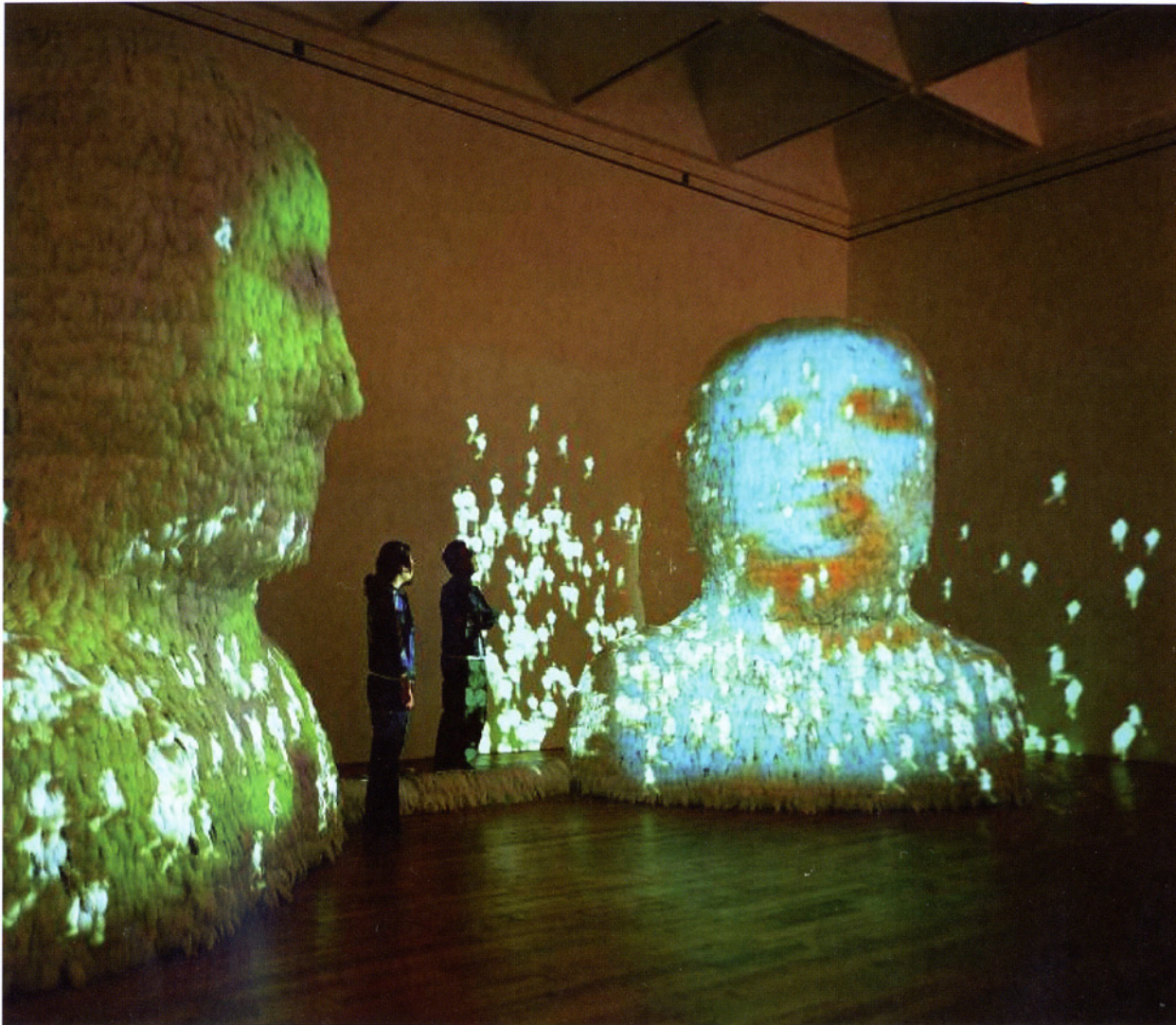
Left: Peregrine Honig (left) and Alicia Eler (right) at Art Basel Miami Beach, 2008. Photo: Brenda Schumacher

Above, left: Julie Lequin, still from *GOSSIPS* video, book / DVD project, 2007, published by 2nd Cannons Publications

Above: Luana Perilli, still from *W Tiina!*, 2005. Courtesy of The Gallery Apart, Rome, Italy

Above, right: Abhishek Hazra, *Codework*, 2007. Courtesy of Gallery SKE

crime-drama-style text, which is actually animated PHP scripting, the computing building blocks of most Web sites. The coding language is not imagistic but does use alphanumeric symbols, and Hazra translates this foreign coding language into the video format to comment on the culture of global technologies. Web site users do not see PHP scripting; it is embedded in



Mioon, still from documentation of *Human Stream* installation at Kunstmuseum Berlin, 2005

the object, like the laws of physics or the work of low-wage laborers, for example.

Honig, who runs the Fahrenheit Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri, met Hazra at an Art Omi International Artists Residency in upstate New York. Seven of the nine artists in the exhibition are from that residency, but none are exclusively video artists. Video is now such a widely available medium that artists have little hesitancy to

pick it up and start playing with something so user-friendly and familiar in its commercial form. Including those from an open call, the artists in *Video as Video* formed an international roster culled from New York City, North Korea, Canada, Italy, and India.

“People are thinking about the same issues all over the world,” says Honig, and as the exhibition connected a multi-city network of video artists, so too did its

curators. Honig met Eler (an art critic) in Chicago several years ago when Honig’s art was being shown at the Gescheidle Gallery (closed in 2008). Eler had been doing a lot of writing about neo-Feminist work and connected with Honig over this aspect in her art. After a year or so of conversing via e-mail, Eler took the eight-hour Megabus ride to visit Honig and experience Kansas City’s art scene, and discussion led to their curatorial collaboration.

Forgoing the traditional cinematic black-box viewing room, Eler and Honig displayed each work on its own portable DVD player, each with its own shelf. The arrangement resembled a painting gallery in which viewers could intimately engage single works of art on their own terms. Honig joked that the gallery looked like a language-learning lab where students were absorbed in their personal lessons, wearing headphones and with eyes glued to the screen.

Video is a uniquely mobile medium. The shipping costs for the exhibition were next to nothing; the videos could even be transmitted digitally if the artists so desired. In the 1960s, the use of video as an art medium was idealistically revolutionary in the face of rampant commercialism; video was unhinged from being a salable object and, in a way, formless. Now, however, the art market embraces video as an art object worthy of collectors’ money. Artists are aware of video’s collectibility and tailor their output accordingly. Sometimes video is made in a limited edition under strict copyrights, but other times artists realize the profound possibility of releasing their vision in a global network such as YouTube.

Eler and Honig are now looking for some exhibition venues in what Americans may consider the far reaches of the world, but locales such as Istanbul, Turkey, given the proliferation of digital and televisual media, may be right around the corner. “The show is at home anywhere in the world,” says Eler — all she needs to do is mail it ahead. •

Jason Fomberg is an arts writer living in Chicago, Illinois.