

# Chris Meigh-Andrews



"Eau d'Artifice" - 1990 (photo David Schofield)

## Questions by Cinzia Cremona

- Cinzia Cremona: Why have you chosen video as your artistic language?

- Chris Meigh-Andrews: I chose video a long time ago (1978) because of its immediacy, the fact it was instant. I also loved the way the image looked- the low resolution, the quality of the colours (and B&W!!) and most importantly the TV display- "the box", that is both a piece of furniture and a frame, and a medium with a specific history and social significance. With video there is also a simultaneous use of sound and picture- in TV and video they are inseparable, and mutually supportive.

- What is the source of your creativity?

- I think the thing that inspires my creativity (or at least my desire to be creative) is a fascination with the interrelationships between things around me- images, identity, thoughts, language(s), organic life, the natural world, technology. I get excited when I suddenly see a connection or an interdependence. I like the parallels which exist between thoughts and communication systems, and living, thinking beings...

- What is your relationship with high technology: CD ROM, Virtual reality, computers...?

- My relationship is one of constant surprise. An equal mixture of frustration and excitement. High tech equipment seems to be more than a tool. It's an attitude to the world "out there". It's a contemporary language system in itself. It forces you to "speak" in a certain way which can be restrictive and reductive, but it can also be liberating because it is a language that many people want to participate in. Of course, every language has its constraints and as an artist I must find ways to exploit those constraints and turn them to my advantage. I think that's one of the major roles of a contemporary artist.

- Is there any special reason why you have never realised a single channel video?

- I have made numerous single channel video pieces. I began to concentrate on video in 1977, and continued to make single channel works until 1988. I still make diary pieces, but I prefer to work with sculptural ideas at the moment. I like to make works which operate between the flat screen (the monitor and the projected image) and the physical space within the gallery. I'm interested in setting up a tension between illusory space (within the frame of the screen) and

**Born in Essex, England in 1952, Meigh-Andrews lived in Montreal Canada from 1957-72, returning to the UK to study film & TV at LCP and fine art at Goldsmiths. An early member of LVA, he produced a series of single screen video tapes between 1978 and 1987 that have been screened internationally. Since 1989 he has been specialising in sculptural video installations, including commissioned and site-specific pieces. He has been Senior Lecturer in Time-Based Media at the University of Central Lancashire since 1986. Most recently he was Resident Artist in Electronic Imaging at Oxford Brookes University, where he has been working on computer-based projects - both installations and CD ROMS.**

real, physical, architectural space.

- What are the most important things in your life?

- To me, the most important things are relationships. To the people I love, the things I care about, relationships between thoughts and actions.

I think it is important that we keep growing, developing, thinking, questioning, trying to understand. Those are the things that keep us feeling alive and connected. I think a clear and positive sense of self is crucial too.

- Water appears in many of your installations. Can you tell me something about it?

- Water is a fundamental thing. Essential for life. Water also seems to me to be an important and very potent symbol. Its fluidity, its clarity, its power.

I am attracted to the elemental properties of water-particularly "flow". The flow of water parallels the flow of thought, of life, of time, of electrical signals audio, video and voltage. As I mentioned earlier, I am fascinated by parallels-and there are so many connections between flowing water and aspects of communication-especially electronic communication. I have been particularly influenced by the writings of the physicist David Bohm about the relationship between the nature of thought and the flowing movement of matter in general. In more recent work I have tried to introduce other flowing elements-wind in Perpetual Motion, for example and time in a new installation piece Fire & Ice.

- How was the idea for Perpetual Motion born?

- There is never one idea for a piece. It's of more a set on relationships. In the case of Perpetual Motion, I had been doing research into wind turbines as an alternative power source for an outdoor video installation. It occurred to me that using a turbine indoors and driving it via a fan powered from the mains electricity was an interesting contradiction-it seemed symbolic of the way in which alternative energy is used-at least in this country! I also liked the idea of the wind in the gallery (being created by the fan) as a physical (and tactile) experience. This in turn connects to my interest in the tension between the image on the screen (in this case the image of a kite flying in the sky) and the objects (the "sculpture") in the gallery. In this piece there are several sorts of "flow". Flowing images from the computer, flowing wind from the fan, flowing electricity from the

turbine to the video monitor and most importantly, the flow of thought as the gallery visitor makes connections between the elements within the piece.

- Tell me something more about A Sense of Myself. Why



"Man with Mouse", 1994

a work about identity?

- A Sense of Myself is a CD ROM. It is a collection of self-portraits made using a different lens-based media techniques. The idea was that it would trace the development of my use of different (but related) imaging technologies and parallel (that word again) my developing identity as an artist. It begins with early colour transparencies, taken before I was consciously trying to make "art", and progresses through more self-conscious attempts at image-making including colour Xerox and photo-booth in the 1970s, to video pieces and installations culminating with some computer-manipulated images made especially for the CD ROM. The theme all the way through is self-image. We live in a time where everything is documented-from birth to death, and even our most private moments seem to be available as an image. I'm interested in this mediated experience of life, and am curious about the sense of self that such a dependency on images provides.

- Did you realise your project for a permanent outdoor installation in a forest?

- Not yet. I have been working with another video artist, Catherine Elwes, on this. We have had Arts Council research funding to make a feasibility study, which we completed in collaboration with an electrical and structural engineer, and we have a site for work, but so far we have not been able to raise enough money to build the piece!!

- What is the general situation of video art in the UK?

- Changing rapidly. The old divisions between film, video, installation, photography, sound, etc, are all disappearing-mainly because of the computer in its many manifestations. I don't think the support structure is moving fast enough-perhaps it can't. Galleries still want objects to show or to hang on their walls, publishers thinking about marketing CD ROM titles or VHS tapes are still very unadventurous, and funding bodies still seem to think that media artists should be low-budget broadcasters. There are too few critics interested in the area, which means that artists are still having to write about each others work. On the positive side I think there is a wide audience for new media work generally-a genuine enthusiasm for art that used technology and a willingness to engage with it.

- You play different roles within the art world. Teach, write reviews and are an artist yourself. Does this create problems for you?

- For me, teaching would be impossible without my practice. The constant challenge of making and showing work is an important part of the experience I bring to my teaching. I'm involved in training practising artists and in order to do this effectively I think it's crucial to be engaged in contemporary art practice. I also value the exchange of experiences between myself and my students. Similarly in looking at the work of other artists critically I can better observe and be objective about my own work.

- What are your future projects?

- I am presently thinking about some new installations. A large multi-computer piece whose principle image will be comprised of a flock of birds- an image of many individuals acting as one. In connection with this I am researching into the use of computer animation "flocking" techniques. As a counter-point to this, I am also planning a series of small scale table-top pieces.