

David Hall's contribution to British video art is unparalleled. Not only are many of his video pieces classics – *TV Fighter (Cam Era Plane)* (1977) and the BBC commission *This is a Television Receiver* (1976) – but he has also made important and often brilliant contributions to experimental film, installation and sculpture. A successful sculptor in the 'new generation' school of the 1960s, Hall had accentuated the gallery space in his sculptures, especially the floor, creating large flat works hugging the floor surface, such as *Nine* (1967) in the Tate's collection. At the end of the 1960s he turned his attention to the less tangible media of photography, film and eventually video. A founding member of the video art movement in this country in the early 1970s, Hall was an influential activist on behalf of the infant art form. Tracing his work is to simultaneously survey the history of British video art before its fragmentation in the mid 1980s. Hall's practice emerged from the late 1960s art movement of conceptualism.

In his early film pieces Hall developed a sensibility and conceptual rigour that drew upon sculptural notions of form, representation and objecthood, only translated into filmic equivalents. *Vertical* (1970), *Timecheck* (1971) and *View* (1973), all dealt with illusion in relation to objects in space and time, and constructed filmic perspectives that distorted space, or rendered it ambiguous. His groundbreaking *TV Interruptions* (1971), later distributed as *7 TV Pieces* were made for Scottish Independent Television to coincide with the Edinburgh Festival. Shot on black and white film, the pieces were inserted unannounced into normal television transmission. Their imagery was intended to "redirect attention back to the box as object." Their imagery was often a single image using time-lapse, pixillation or the vagaries of the screen as a flat surface for three dimensional representation. Subsequently, he placed more emphasis upon the relationship between screen image and spatio-temporal illusion – as in *This Surface* (1973), with its witty use of text on image. The latter film anticipated the

ways throughout the tape. One of the classics of British video art, it combines an exploration of the properties of video as a mechanical mode of representation and a confrontation with the illusionism of broadcast television.

Michael O'Pray

Stooky Bill TV

1990, 4min, colour video

This tape is a caustic glance backwards at the founder of television: John Logie Baird's legacy of 'dummy television'. But the tape is also a resounding formal success in so far as it presents an image equivalent to that one first produced in an attic in October 1925. All the trademarks of Hall's work are present here: dry wit, seriousness and the exploration of illusion; the awareness of material conditions and of cultural forms.

Michael O'Pray

The Situation Envisaged

1978, installation, colour, 8 television sets, 1 monitor, 1 player

Eight domestic television sets are supported side by side in a quarter circle, across the corner of a room. Each faces into the enclosure away from the viewer, and each is playing a different television channel. The viewer hears a cacophony of sound, and initially sees only the ever-changing glow above and beyond the line of sets. However, part of a monitor screen can be glimpsed through small gaps between them; its glass reflecting the television output layered over a tape of private ritual. The work confronts issues of power and the individual; the public and the private; the viewer and the viewed.

Key works

This Is a Television Receiver

1976, 8min, colour, video

The image of a TV announcer talking about the machine we are sitting before and watching, is deconstructed through sound and electronic patterns, rendered problematic and revealed for what they are – an illusion.

Michael O'Pray

TV Fighter (Cam Era Plane)

1977, 11min, b&w, video

Hall takes the point-of-view shot in its most dramatic form, by using archive war footage of a fighter plane strafing a railway train and a ship at sea. The camera is obviously strapped to the plane. These shots are repeated and edited in slightly different

Born 1937, Leicester. Studied Architecture, Art and Design at Leicester College of Art 1954-60 and Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London 1960-64. Founded the Time Based Arts department of Maidstone College of Art, Kent. Installation exhibitions include: Serpentine Gallery, London; Tate Gallery, London; Third Eye Centre, Glasgow; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford; La Ferme du Buisson Gallery, Paris. One man retrospectives at festivals and institutions including the ICA and Tate Gallery, London; ELAC, Lyon; Video Art Plastique, Herouville-St Clair, Caen; Photographers' Union, Warsaw. Works commissioned for broadcast by BBC, Channel Four, MTV Europe and Scottish Television.

video pieces, which stressed the materiality of the monitor in relationship to the image as representation, eg, *TV Fighter* and *This is a Television Receiver*.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Hall developed video installation work that explored the relationship between gallery space and video in terms of light, mass and representation. In *The Situation Envisaged* (1978), sculptural qualities of object-mass and space interacted with a critique of television as one was confronted with a circle of television sets turned ominously in towards the wall, with only the light and sound emanating from its centre betraying its representational function. In a later version of this installation, *A Situation Envisaged: The Rite II (Cultural Eclipse)* (1988), the sets are arranged as a single block facing close to the wall except for one with a primitive, 30 lines panning image of the moon. With *Stooky Bill TV* (1990), made for Channel Four, Hall reworked the founding moment of television by producing an image with equipment identical to the original 1925 apparatus of John Logie Baird. Its biting critique of television reflects Hall's persistent engagement with its context as an institution and mode of communication. Over thirty years he has produced a body of work that has been intellectually rigorous without sacrificing the imaginative and aesthetic qualities of art.

Michael O'Pray



RIGHT:
STOOKY BILL TV