

are actually resented. It is all right, it seems, for the National Film Theatre, another division of the BFI, to screen *The Sound of Music* but an indication of a basically trivialising view of cinema for film societies to do so. Isn't the Institute really showing us what the cinema is all about in developing the regional film theatres and aren't they taking over the Federation's role? Nevertheless the Federation survived the slanders which described it as a tea swigging and bun-nibbling crowd.

The BFI is closed-mouthed about its activities because its very secretiveness helps it wield control and influence. A so-called Green Paper circulating in the Institute a little while ago, gives clear expression to the feelings of inferiority that run through the place. It describes films and television as 'disadvantaged arts in Britain'. Alongside the concert halls and the 'publicly visible suite of national theatres' is jammed under Waterloo Bridge, the NFT. Of course, we had an NFT before a National Theatre. But that is no matter. What we need is to 'redress the balance'. The paper is quite clear. Funds should go to those places that contribute towards 'an active audio-visual culture' accompanied, it seems, as an automatic condition of funding, by appropriate programme notes, lectures and discussions. The circularity of the argument could be drawn within a compass. The criterion of success will be judged by assessing the extent that a 'well-informed' audio visual activity is

generated. So, if the regions don't like it, the money will go somewhere else. It has actually been said to me that the BFI sees the regional theatres as its own circuit and I can quote a senior member of the BFI as saying 'Why should we give money to the RFTs if they aren't going to show what we want them to?' A development of this paper makes it clear that the BFI wants a circuit of its own. In *Towards a National Exhibition Policy* 'the continuing decay of commercial exhibition' (the BFI can make this point) should necessitate the integration of the NFT, the RFTs and the BFI Production Board films, essentially serviced and monitored by the BFI.

Even the ICA has had its knuckles rapped by the BFI's director in a letter which would provoke laughter were it not typical. In an excellent submission to the Department of Trade Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry, the ICA points out, on the assumption that commercial exhibition is dying in Britain, that by far the most active cinemas in recent years have been independent. 'Subsidies should go to individual cinemas rather than to a central controlling body' and they should be disbursed via the National Film Finance Corporation. No wonder Anthony Smith dashed to his typewriter to suggest that the NFFC wouldn't 'give a damn about supporting tiny RFTs'. The real question is, is the BFI with its current track record and policies an appropriate organisation to do so?

Kevin Gough-Yates

Performance & Video

London Video Arts/AIR Gallery
25 February

Previous screenings of videotapes at AIR have either been one-person shows, or selections of work with thematic or stylistic similarities. A great deal of the British video art shown at these Thursday night screenings, which until recently have constituted the only regular venue in London for artists' tapes, has overtly declared its status as first-order art. Whether it concerned itself with the perceptual properties of the video process, analysis of broadcast television conventions, or wider issues of representation of accepted 'reality', its audience was assumed to be prepared to adopt the special order of attentiveness reserved for work whose prime motivation is aesthetic.

'Normal Video' was a much less comfortable grouping of four works, selected by Dave Critchley, who during the last year has proved himself to be an energetic and imaginative organiser for L.V.A., as well as an accomplished artist. He included a recent tape of his own in a programme whose sardonic title indicated the questions it was intended to raise. The title emerged, it seems, in response to the observation by a disgruntled member of

K

KNOEDLER GALLERY

RICHARD SMITH

New Paintings
From 1 April

GILLIAN AYRES

New Paintings
From 27 April

22 Cork Street, London W.1. 439 1096

NEW ART PLATFORM

INVITATION TO ARTISTS

During 1982 the Midland Group will promote two exhibitions of work by artists who have not previously exhibited widely. Rather than aiming at a wide ranging survey, each New Art Platform will show a reasonably substantial body of work by perhaps three or four artists. Beyond this basic framework, the detailed organisation of the exhibitions will be made in response to proposals from artists.

Information is available for artists who would like to tailor a proposal to a specific space in the building, but this is by no means obligatory, and all submissions will be carefully considered. The work of undergraduate students is not eligible.

SELECTION: artists are invited to send slides, photographs or proposals to arrive on or before the 15th May 1982. Submissions can only be accepted at the owner's risk and all material submitted will be returned.

APPLICATIONS to Midland Group Nottingham
24/32 Carlton Street
NOTTINGHAM NG1 1NN
Telephone (0602) 582636

MIDLAND GROUP

24-32 Carlton Street · Nottingham · 0602 582636/7

the audience, at a previous L.V.A. screening, that the work shown 'didn't look like normal video'. Critchley's selection of tapes certainly didn't answer the question 'What is Normal Video?', which like similar enquiries as to the nature of truth, beauty, etc., will always be rhetorical, but this juxtaposition of three artists' tapes with a piece of I.R.A. propaganda demonstrated that easy distinctions between art, entertainment and political statement are neither possible nor desirable.

Apart from Critchley's piece, 'Dave in America', the programme included recent tapes by Stuart Marshall, a British artist, and Noel Harding, a Canadian. All three men have established solid reputations as video artists, but have worked in a variety of other media, as performers and organisers of installations. Their work has in common an eclectic deployment of varied elements, and in all three cases has developed from formal time-structures employing strong simple images, into complex, cross-referenced pieces, often employing several channels in one or more media, in which the veracity of a given image or statement is subjected to several kinds of questioning process.

Each of their tapes shown here dealt in some way with urban America, and in particular with the American media landscape, whose stereotyped attitudes and images of people have permeated the developed world, and threaten to distort the progress of many developing societies

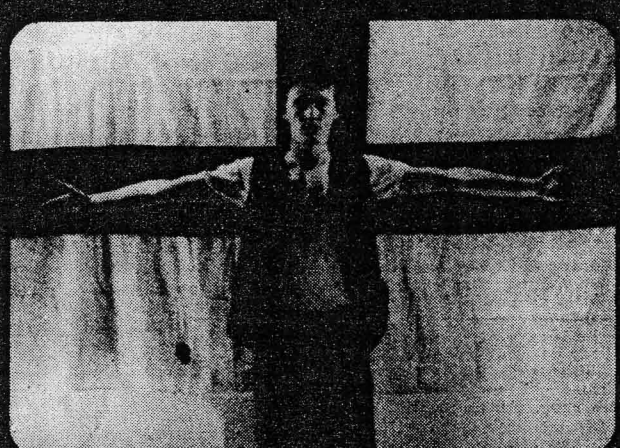
as well. It would be tempting to expand on this as a convenient unifying theme for the work by three totally individual artists, were it not for their totally disparate approaches to the subject, and their use of quite distinct production methods. If one aspect of the elusive norm in video is represented by the conventions and assumptions established by broadcast TV, then Noel Harding's tape was normal: as normal, that is, as an episode of *Dallas* produced by a very sophisticated amateur film society. Harding has taken the characters and attitudes of trashy TV drama, then reconstructed them with a low, low budget and his own unique visual flair.

On the surface, *Out of Control* gave us the story of Rand, a bucolic, absurdly macho millionaire wheeler-dealer, and *She*, a hard-bitten reporter, uncertain in her feminist convictions, to whom Rand grants an interview before roughly seducing her with a lack of finesse she finds simultaneously repellent and delightful. In the end, Rand zooms off to another round of tough dealing, leaving her with an aching heart and bruises. All this is a long way from the elegant formal relationships of Harding's early video work, but the patterns of ironic references which underpin the plot, and above all the subtle framing of objects and details of bodies, suffused in the electric colours the artist is able to coax from the video camera, mark the work as springing from a unique sensibility.

The tape has none of the sheen of conventional TV material: faces loom with gaping pores, exposed limbs are untanned; mechanical devices, like the helicopter that whisks Rand away in the final shots, are ungainly, intrusive, obsessive. The world depicted so skilfully and ironically is a harsh one, stripped of sentiment, whose values we are invited to embrace, propelled along by the insidious rock soundtrack and terse rapid monologues which form the narration.

The two tapes by British artists inform one another on a number of levels. Stuart Marshall's *The Streets of . . .* is a skilfully crafted portrait of San Francisco, compiled from monochrome portapak footage, which is then incorporated into colour post-production, executed in a sophisticated studio set-up. Chromakey techniques are used to impose layers of images on the resultant tape, which distances the viewer from the initial, deceptively informal location material through several generations of interpretation. The images of the city, shot from cruising cars, and at various tourist attractions, are very different from our received notions of San Francisco: the steep hills, rattling trolley cars and topless bars remain unseen. Apart from the unmistakable grandeur of the Golden Gate Bridge, it could be any anonymous Western city.

The sense of place is provided by anecdotes recounted by the artist's friends and guides, from radio news broadcasts and



**THE WORLD OF
GILBERT & GEORGE**

A FILM

7 - 24 April at 6.30pm
Wednesday - Sunday

ICA
CINEMATHEQUE
THE MALL SW1 930 3647

An Arts Council Film



West Midlands Arts

Fine Art & Craft Grants 1982/83

West Midlands Arts again invites applications from West Midlands artists, craftsmen and art and craft organisations for the support and promotion for craft work in 1982/83. (Applicants must live and work in Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire or the West Midlands Metropolitan County). Closing dates for Craft applications will be 1st June and 1st November. Closing dates for Fine Art applications will be 17th May and 8th November.

Full details (please state whether Fine Art or Craft) and application forms from Lisa Henderson, Visual Arts Officer, West Midlands Arts, Lloyd's Bank Chambers, Market Street, Stafford ST16 2AP. Tel: (0785) 59231/5.

Craft Programme 1982/83

This is a new scheme aimed specifically at making the work of craftsmen more accessible to the public. It is particularly, though not exclusively, aimed at more established craftsmen who may not, at present, wish to apply for grant-aid but who would be prepared to work with West Midlands Arts to achieve better understanding of their craft.

Further details (there are no application forms) available from Lisa Henderson at the above address.

extracts from literary essays. Municipal brochures provide the colour imagery: garish, over-tinted photographs enlarged to wall size, in front of which an anonymous 'normal' couple stroll or take photographs, echoing location shots in which Japanese tourists enact tortuous rituals of mutual portraiture, fixing and validating their presence. The tape punctuated by captions: 'The Tourist' . . . 'The Viewer' . . . 'Documentary' . . . 'News', and so on, which reveal the work to be, on one level, an inventory of the ways in which places, events and people become visible to us only through the intercession of biased modes of depiction and address. So embroiled is the city with the mechanics of representation that it eventually becomes one vast studio set.

The set for Dave Critchley's tape *Dave in America* is tiny, cluttered and casual. The informality of the title announces the intimacy with which we are asked to approach the work. While Marshall's tape presents the structured reminiscences of a self-conscious tourist in America, Critchley's, produced before his first visit, purports a wide-eyed naivety. Without much confidence, he invited us to believe the patently untrue proposal that the tape is made in America. As supporting evidence he parades masses of undigested images from magazines and TV in front of the sceptical, remorseless gaze of the camera. As a demonstration of the pervasive influence of American media, the work is unconvincing but oddly

touching, providing the warmth of shared uncertainty which Marshall denies us. One of the important points about American media, that film and TV started off dominated by first-generation immigrants, entirely escapes his attention. The tape is clearly a pot-boiler, but its vulnerability to public scrutiny renders it immediate and affecting.

By far the longest tape in the programme at 50 minutes, *No Japs at My Funeral*, attributed to Jackie Leonard, was shown first, and set the context for the tapes I have discussed. It consisted of an interview, heavily edited, with an active member of the IRA. Jackie Leonard is, of course, an assumed name. Shot with a single camera, in what looks like a loft apartment, the tape makes no claims to status as a work of art. Yet the way in which its production runs counter to most of the conventions of broadcasting, or rather, ignores those conventions to make its points, is oddly reminiscent of a great deal of performance-oriented video art. This could be put down to lack of technical sophistication. The hand-held camera wobbles and frames its subject awkwardly; the colour is unreal; the sound is none too good. A map of Derry is shot so that none of the place-names are the right way up, lights and microphones stray into view. In short, the crude production methods comprise a fresh set of 'non-broadcast' conventions, which while they emphasise the mediation of the recording apparatus, simultaneously work to

convince us that what we are viewing is the uncensored truth. An extended, sympathetic interview with a professed IRA man would be unthinkable on British television, and Jackie Leonard is as charismatic, entertaining and candid a personality as one could wish. His story of arrests, beatings, and torture at the hands of the army and police is at once scarifying and hilarious.

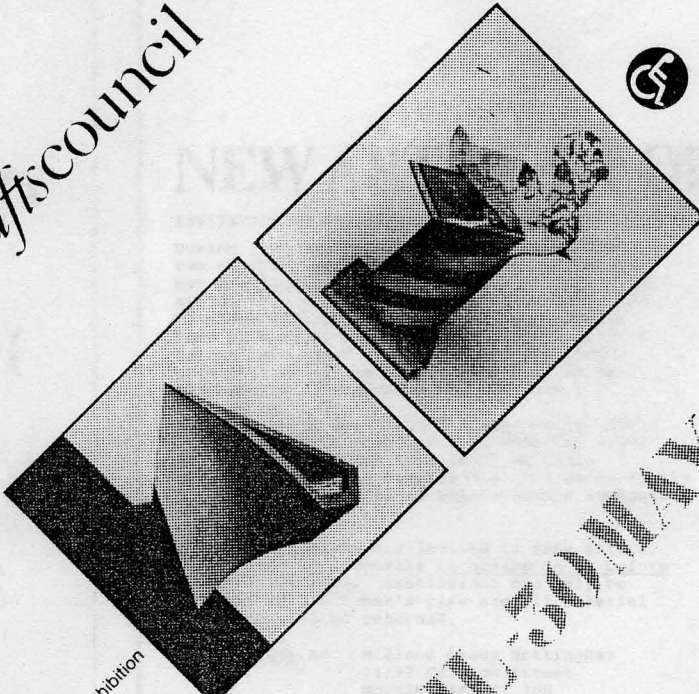
The extracts from interviews, apparently conducted by American newsmen, with representatives of the British Army and Government, which are crudely inserted into the monologue, show them in the worst possible light. In contrast, the subject of the tape is treated to encouragement rather than questioning, and his performance, for that is what it is, no matter how truthful his tale, has been drastically edited by the jump-cuts which punctuate the tape, presumably to further its effectiveness as propaganda. Although I am in no position to judge the veracity of the story, the tape made me very uneasy. My willingness to suspend disbelief was courted in the most blatant manner, which only emphasised the subtlety with which it is invited by mass media. Perhaps it is, after all, possible to distinguish a work of art by its embrace of contradictions which other forms of communication, with ulterior motives, ignore. And by its willingness to forego enthusiastic acceptance, for the sake of a more generalised, and healthy, scepticism.

Mick Hartney

Coffee Bar Information Services
Slide Index

CERAMICS COUNCIL
11/12 Waterloo Place, Lower Regent Street, London SW1Y 4AU 01-930 4811

craftscouncil



CERAMICS WEST COAST
Nearest underground: Piccadilly Circus

MARTIN SMITH
by Californian artists from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Forms around a vessel

Leeds City Art Galleries travelling exhibition
Illustrated catalogues available

WATERLOO PLACE

Tuesday - Saturday 10 - 5pm
Thursday until 7pm Sunday 2 - 5pm
Closed Monday Admission free