

## Art

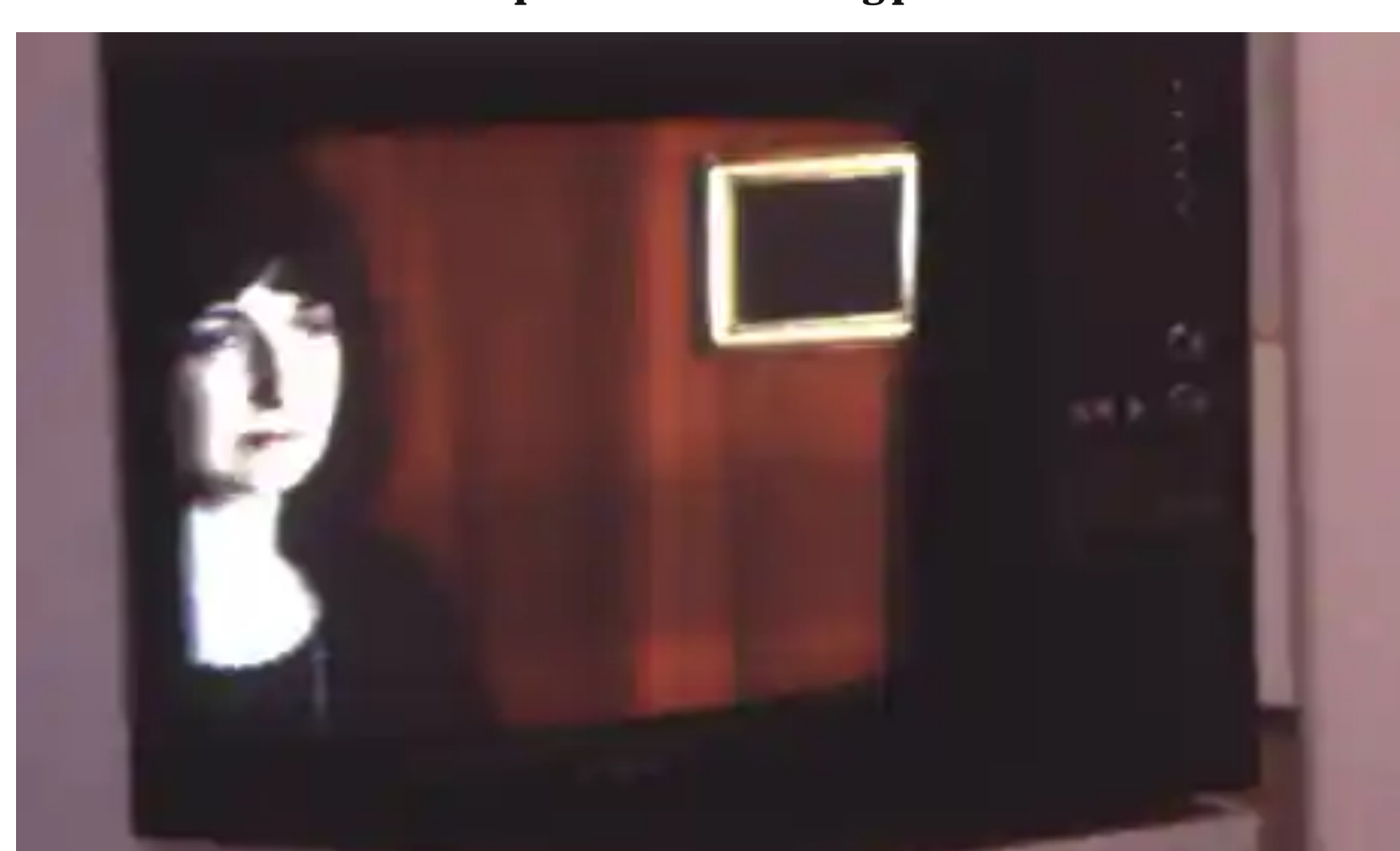
**Michael Tooby**

Thu 6 Aug 2009 18.58  
BST



## Tamara Krikorian

**Innovative video artist and promoter of striking public art in Wales**



📷 Krikorian seen in *The Heart of the Illusion*, 1981

Tamara Krikorian, who has died aged 65 of pneumonia after a period of ill-health, was a pioneering video artist who went on to become a distinguished curator of public art in Wales. To this latter role, she brought the complex insights of the artist and awareness of current experimental work.

Born in Dorset to an Armenian family, she was educated at St Dominic's convent, Harrow, north-west London, and the Lycée Français, Kensington. She also studied music privately before becoming stage manager for a small opera company.

In 1966 Krikorian moved to Edinburgh, and the following year met the artist Ivor Davies. They remained partners for the rest of her life. He taught art history at Edinburgh University and was part of the loose international community of artists experimenting with performance, text and temporary presentations. Her own interest came to lie in the arena that became known as video art, practised by a network of artists across the UK.

In 1972 she embarked on updating the Scottish Arts Council's artist archive. Encouraged by Bill Buchanan, the council's head of visual arts, she began to use the new technology of portable black-and-white videotape to record interviews with artists and saw a way of converting techniques for documentation into a vehicle of personal expression.

Krikorian's work *Breeze* was included in one of the first surveys of video in Britain, at the Serpentine gallery, London, in 1975. The following year she was a central figure in *Video Towards Defining an Aesthetic*, at the new Third Eye centre, Glasgow - the first public video art project in Scotland. Meeting artists such as David Hall and Stuart Marshall, she built relationships through teaching at Maidstone College of Art, Kent, and Newcastle Polytechnic. She co-founded London Video Arts in 1976, an organisation that defined the terms for video in the UK.

Her own work referenced art history, and often embraced imagery such as sky and water to exploit the potential of the black-and-white screen. She was at the forefront of "installations", placing video monitors in architectural space. An *Ephemeral Art* (1979) comprised a series of screens showing real-time video juxtaposed with an empty monitor in which butterfly pupae hatched. *The Heart of the Illusion* (1981) used mirrors and screens set in false walls.

Though Krikorian did not take a feminist stance, she was part of a generation of women artists confident about self-representation through new media. Her best-known work was perhaps *Vanitas* (1977-79), which used self-portraiture alongside a real-time still life, renewing the irony of a timeless *nature morte*.

In 1981 she and Davies moved to south Wales, and she was appointed director of the Welsh Sculpture Trust in 1984. She led it from its original role of commissioning and siting sculpture to being a broad agency for artists' work outside the gallery. It adopted the title *Cywaith Cymru/Artworks Wales* in 1990.

For 25 years she led an extraordinary range of projects. Some were landmarks around Wales, while others encouraged artists to make subtle public interventions. She recognised the value of ephemeral practice, particularly performance. As a result, public art in Wales has come to include not only the quirky suite of sculptures in the Cardiff station approach and landmarks for the Carmarthenshire and Gwynedd coastlines, but also performances and temporary installations at festivals including the National Eisteddfod.

Krikorian left *Cywaith Cymru* in 2005, reconnecting with video practice. *Time Revealing Truth*, her response to the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut, was part of Tate Modern's recent *Expanded Cinema*.

The generosity of approach and breadth of outlook she displayed through reflection, writing, research and debate made her an exemplary "critical friend" for a huge number of artists, curators and academics. She is survived by Davies.

● Tamara Seta Krikorian, video artist and public art curator, born 5 July 1944; died 11 July 2009

Topics

**Art**

Wales / Arts / obituaries



Reuse this content

Advertisement

**Subscribe to the Guardian Weekly**



## Most popular

All the day's headlines and highlights from the Guardian, direct to you every morning

[Sign up for the Guardian Headlines email](#)

Contact us  
Complaints & corrections  
SecureDrop  
Work for us  
Privacy settings  
Privacy policy  
Cookie policy  
Terms & conditions  
Help

All topics  
All writers  
Digital newspaper archive  
Facebook  
YouTube  
Instagram  
LinkedIn  
Twitter  
Newsletters

Advertise with us  
Search UK jobs