

piece with its atmospheric montage and use of sound, while Maria's own *The Heartbeat of Annubis* was a haunting melange of mythology and absurdist humour which amused and disturbed at the same instant.

Installations

Video's move into the museums has never been quite so successful in Britain as in this festival and the range of installations testified to the sculptural aesthetic video art has achieved in this context. Yet, I found many of the installations somewhat too neat and polished, the kind of designer



'Immemorial' Jeremy Welsh

sculpture which would go unnoticed in a high tech office lobby. As the installations were exhibited on a rota, I only managed to see half of them; Christopher Roland's *Hothouse* with its numerous monitors placed in a greenhouse made a topical statement about the decimated state of nature; while Andrew Stones' *Harvest Festival* called for an ecological return to more simple and meaningful lifestyles. On a more subjective note, Jez Welsh's *Immemorial* created an intimate environment where the artist's past and future seems to be unraveling, the use of images from lantern slides, photographs, home footage, to recent video images, conveyed a strong sense of loss and pointed to the ironical reality that images mostly convey absences. Zoe Redman's *She, Her, I*, a six monitor installation reflected in a pool of water, was a quiet meditative piece focusing on images of landscape, water and a child to convey near mystical notions of time and place.

David Hall's installation was titled *A Situation Envisaged: The Rite II*, and consisted of a 15 monitor video wall; all the monitors faced a white wall (creating an aura around the stack) with the only visible image on the central monitor. As a statement against television, it made its point but sat uncomfortably in the corner of the space in which the central position

was occupied by the state of the art 42 monitor videowall.

The Videowall

The national videowall project was set up in 1986 in order to give artists the use of the latest technology in multiple monitor presentation. For the uninitiated, a videowall is a bank of monitors organised in blocks and linked together electronically to present either one composite image or any variation of individual images on each monitor. Widely used in advertising and trade shows, its effect is impressive and large scale.

Six pieces were commissioned for the festival and a Canadian compilation, *The Lunatic of One Idea* (originally presented in a shopping mall in Ontario, and suffering its new gallery context) was also shown. Unfortunately, while I was there, the technology was playing up and the computers could not present the work as the artists had intended it, with the more complex pieces suffering. Here Maria Vedder's work stood out again with *Silent Language*, a piece which used the wall in a witty and self-referential manner, while Judith Godard's *Silver Lining* used the structure of the wall to dynamic ends. If Katherine Meynell's *Moonrise* used what could be termed mythological female imagery (sea, waves, fire, a mermaid), then Steve Littman's *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* was a summum in male angst with its aggressive obsessions with guns, chase and more guns.

The videowall is a spectacle in the purest sense; it does not permit the kind of discourse possible in a single screen work but it could develop other possibilities if artists do not get swallowed up by its technology. Personally, I found the high tech thrill undeniable, yet behind this cathartic spectacle, I saw a vision of obscene technology.


The Conference

The Conference, organised by the Film & Video Umbrella, was titled *Exposure*. Its main aim was to encourage the exhibition of video art to programmers, curators and exhibition organisers in a series of presentations and seminars by a variety of guest speakers. The initial presentation which focused on the practical steps to exhibiting video art were clear enough but the panel discussions involving critics and artists were too short and disparate, leaving no time for audience participation and productive critical debate. It all pointed out the real need for a longer conference with more focused and targeted issues and audience; the festival could have incorporated a series of symposiums around the issues brought out by the work, the problems of a critical language and the relationship exhibition context has to the work (an issue extremely pertinent in this festival).

Diversions

I didn't attend the workshops nor did I make it to the Williamson Galley which hosted two installations, *Beyond Colour* by Mineo Aayagamuchi and *Quartet* by Joanna Millet, for the simple reason that my time ran out; after attending the conference, seeing most of the installations and screenings, I felt video-saturated!

I will remember Video Positive '89 for the relentless enthusiasm of the organisers, the extremely effective publicity coverage, the concise catalogue and the large range of installations. Responding to both a need to set major art exhibitions outside of London and give video an artistic status, the festival has all the reasons to continue as a bi-annual event. Its success lies mainly in the record attendances in some museums, demystifying video art to a large public by making visible an often marginalised art form. Yet overambition and lack of focus were striking. The festival fell far short of being 'the largest international video festival held in Britain'! Although the scale of the installations was admirable, the screenings were too few (often culled from other installations) and the international presence extremely poor; representations from North America and Germany is just not enough!

In future, the festival will have to set its agenda more carefully, focusing its aims, and no doubt it will become a successful platform for the exhibition and promotion of the latest in video art. 

Michael Maziere