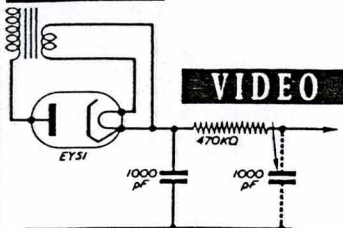


PERT
REVIEW



ALL THROUGH FEBRUARY, a small artist-run gallery in the East End of Glasgow became the platform for the developing culture of video art. Its environment, usually host to static exhibitions of paintings, was transformed into an Aladdin's Cave: stacks of video monitors lined walls, a computer sat churning out its observations, wires were everywhere, artists' video cassettes littered the place. Signs and arrows outside the gallery were anything but obscure: 'Come in, we are open, this is art, and this is free,' is what they seemed to be saying. Inside a participating artist would give you coffee, show you an installation and then give you a catalogue list of artists' video works which you could view at your discretion. This not only attracted the attention of an interested art audience, but also of Glasgow crooks and subsequently the CID, disorientated critics and perplexed locals unable to grasp the fact that this was an art exhibition. On several occasions people would come in wanting to buy a TV; or the woman from the chemists' next door who came in wanting to hire a video for her husband's viewing that evening. The attendants were willing to oblige, no doubt, though her response of awe and embarrassment of the sight of Steve Littman's 16-monitor video installation made it perfectly clear that she would decline the offer today, thank you. One would have given more credit to Glasgow art critics who should have been able to recognise art when they smell it, even though their nasal passages were slightly blocked from spending too many years in the draughty Fine Art Society. 'What is the difference between a painting and a video work of art?' asked one critic, who was clearly out of his depth, verified when the question was asked 'How many frames are there in a video work of art then?' One critic asked if the place was still a gallery. When told that this was an art exhibition he swiftly made an exit saying that he would return when there was a real art exhibition on. One particular Glasgow newspaper, in fact the only one which reviews shows — did not send a critic to review the event because they did not know whether to send an art critic, film critic or TV critic.

'Is video art?' was the question that local radio and local press saw the event as proposing, though not much time was wasted on this question since it seemed to be an unequivocal 'yes'. This was work by artists using video. Not a state of the art but a selection of work that is being done in Scotland linked with some nation-

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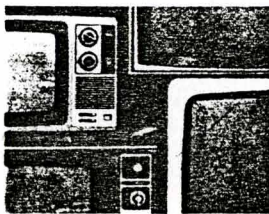
al developments. The event could have safely given credit to known work and big names, but participation and crossover characterised this show: established video artists such as Littmann, Zoe Redman and Steve Partridge presented works alongside artists presenting their first pieces; artists of a high profile, such as Kevin Atherton and David Hall presented works in the same contexts as student work from Dundee. The event had more the feeling of a multi-media show, incorporating performance pieces, film screenings and a film installation by Jane Rigby. There was also a vast video library at hand, containing videos and film work, such as a compilation from Newcastle based Projects UK, a selection of work from London Video Arts, a selection of new Independent Australian video, to some excellent tapes from Factory Records' video company IKON.

The venue for all this was Transmission Gallery. This was the first show of its kind in Scotland since the Third Eye Centre, under the directorship of Tom McGrath, staged 'Towards Defining An Aesthetic' in 1975. It seemed fitting that the opening evening event should feature the irrepressible McGrath, with the added presence of Peter Nardini, both taking turns on the impromptu stage to deliver their own brands of Glaswegian humour. McGrath through his poems and Nardini through his snappy lyrics accompanied by acoustic guitar, both made incisive exposures of Scottish cultural pretension. The sedate activities in gallery one were fed through to a 16-monitor video wall in gallery two, for the benefit of those who could not drag themselves away from the free wine table. This video wall had earlier been installed for Steve Littman's piece 'Overseen... Overheard... Overlooked', which was shown for the first four days of the event. This was the piece in its original structure, without the addition of live performance or the collaboration with Hidden Grin (see Performance No. 38). In front of the video wall, a video camera as a surveillance device was recording the movements of a goldfish and the movements of the audience beyond. The effect of the video wall was overwhelming, and the torrential rain of images that ensued contained a sense of oppression that

carried the theme powerfully: surveillance, the collection of information about individuals and its potential use. The piece used 4 inputs into 16 monitors and developed in stages: a child learning to recognise images of who is watching us; recurring images of a police surveillance helicopter; an interrogator questioning us (the scene might be anywhere, from DHSS office to police station). It then went through a series of images of ears, eyes, noses. It was too much to take in one sitting — a bit like having brillo pads rubbed into your temples. Littman's piece was not a pleasant experience for those not deconditioned from watching TV.

In contrast, Zoe Redman's installation *She, Her, I*, was contemplative, meditative, and ambient. In a blackened gallery, six monitors were reflected in a pool stained with black ink to heighten its reflection. As in her single screen work *Last Place*, it contained slow, shifting images — a child, the sea, landscapes and organic symbols. With an effective musical score and soft dreamy monologue, its affect was poetic. *Last Place* was dedicated to her mother and all mothers before and after her, for creating hope. It dealt with cycles of birth, growth, decline, decay, death and rebirth. These were emotional as well as metaphysical cycles, commencing upon life, meaning, essence and despair. The discussion which followed revealed nothing and broke the spell of this moving meditation on mortality.

In *The Dream of Diagonon*, a performance collaboration between Tony Judge, Brian Rowlands and a video, — two monitors were stacked vertically on a plinth flanked on either side by a table, at which the performers sat scribbling



notes. The central characters, the video monitors, portrayed a close-up of an eye and a mouth. As the two performers move towards the video, the eye watches them suspiciously, moving from one and then to the other. The video is entwined with rope, which the performers pull at in a 'Tug-of-War' fashion. The performers return to their desks, then approach one another again, untangle the video and proceed to try to pull the rope from one another in a ritualistic fashion. The earlier action expresses the struggle of coming into contact with a technological medium, the later action between the performers represented the antagonistic process involved in the collaboration of ideas. Lasting a short 15 minutes, this was a simply stated and entertaining work.

For one night, televisual provocateur, Kevin Atherton presented a piece called *Death in Glasgow* a flawless delivery on the contradictions and the possibilities of TV. I had seen his *TV Interview* in the British Arts Show, and the derivative thereof on Channel 4's survey of British video art last year, and I found his performance in Glasgow to typify what I imagined Atherton to be all about. Atherton was concealed throughout the piece behind a large black curtain from where he watched us through a small monitor linked to a camera being operated by an assistant out front. It wasn't until the second half of his piece that it became apparent to those who hadn't realised already, that Atherton was in the venue, that this was live. His talk tape — on a second monitor — acted as a commentary on what he is watching. This gave us the feeling that he was watching us, which in fact, he was. As Atherton is watching out front,



Transmission is a new gallery in Glasgow and as, MALCOLM DICKSON reports, its first video event created a long overdue stir amongst the local art community.

he can instruct his other assistant to stop and start the tape when he sees fit, to make interjections and comments about the nature of the piece. This was not only entertaining but was also informative. Atherton's art always questions and attacks the problematic idea of 'this is not what art is but this is what art should be doing'. His concern is not with aesthetics, but one of deconditioning passive expectations in the process of viewing TV. By addressing particular issues of the way we perceive life through TV, his position is a political one. TV has yet to realise what it is.

I was unmoved by Jane Rigby's installation — the only work of its kind represented in the show. This used four 16mm projectors, each placed in a corner, images being projected onto all four walls and blending in with one another. Images of trees, the countryside, a churchyard (or a cross on a church tower?) gave the feeling of being drunk whilst driving through the country. The piece was silent, except for the sound of the projectors, and as it used film loops its time length was flexible. It was good to show a piece of this kind amongst what was a video dominated show. It had to be approached in a different way. It didn't give you the fixed reference point that video does. There is no focus. The idea of installation, however, is to arrest and engage and to draw you into the piece. This, however, seemed a pure exercise in film aesthetics. If Jane Rigby was attempting to transfer an emotional experience, she failed. The work was simply too cold and unstructured to hold my attention.

There was some stunning film material available in the video library, however, including the vintage Burroughs inspired *Towers Open Fire*, the enigmatic *Feverhouse* with text by Ken Hollings, and the Super-8mm compilation tape form Ivor Unwin called *Flickering Shadows*. All the tapes were from IKON. The latter two works, however, left the aftertaste of an unfulfilled experience — the fate of many films transferred onto video. Language specific to film, in the editing and in the process of perception, loses something in the video medium. *Intellectual Properties* by John Adams was an exception; filmed originally on 16mm and 35mm and trans-

ferred onto Umatic video, manipulating the filmed material by editing out certain numbers of frames to give a strobe effect, this utilised the film and video medium in a way which enhanced the visual and thematic concerns of the work.

All the work from artists based in Scotland has been produced at Dundee School of Art, where Richard Gardiner and Pictorial Heroes have put the video departments' advanced production facilities to good use. Current students at Dundee, Jo Goslan and Cammy Galt use rapid images of boiled sweets in the video *Raison d'Etre*. An assault of shape and colour, which, with its synth generated soundtrack was as interesting to hear as to watch. *Human Landscape* is the first video work by another Dundee student, Sandra Christie. Using time-lapse and colour effects to transform shots of a male torso into a surreal, unsettling and animated looking work. It suggested a repressed eroticism and an imagination, which — judging by the energy of this work — is soon to make more of a disclosure.

'Glasgow Events Space' brought diversity and excitement to Clydeside, though it was not without its critics amongst the young Glaswegian artistic community who were a bit suspicious of all these English artists. That no experimental groups or tendencies exist in Scotland reflects the cultural marginality of the country and at the same time the conservative structure of its teaching institutions, and not any lack of vitality of talent amongst the new and eager generation of Scots bred artists. It was unfortunate that no public discussion took place about the sort of structures that are needed to support experimental artists in Scotland. Apart from Dundee video department there is a very real problem of a lack of access to the necessary technology.

'Glasgow Events Space' was intended to act as a catalyst for the development of a widespread experimental activity that encompasses video, film, performance, contemporary dance, visual theatre and installation work.

Such activity, if it is to be radical in any way, should not remain as sub-cultures to the tradition of painting or writing in Scotland, but should be equal to, dependent on and interactive with them.

I hope that the lack of sympathy from some quarters towards 'Glasgow Events Space' will motivate the creative determination of young artists North of the Border, and will stress the necessity for Transmission's continuation. ●