

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VIDEO ART: A HISTORY

October 3, 1983 - January 3, 1984

This exhibition--the first of its kind--documents the twenty-year history of a new art form. Through photos, texts, and selected objects, The Museum of Modern Art will trace the evolution of video art from its beginning in the early 1960s through the present day. The exhibition will be on view in the Museum's Second Floor Video Gallery from October 3 through January 3, 1984.

Till now, much of the history of video has been fragmentary. Many of the early publications and exhibition catalogs are out of print; chronologies have tended to be sketchy; and significant portions of the historical record have existed only as word-of-mouth. Now, before much of the information on the early days of video art has been irretrievably lost, Barbara London, Director of the Museum's Video Program, together with Marita Sturken and Nicola Smith, has assembled materials and conducted extensive interviews so that the Museum could present a comprehensive view of how video art began and evolved.

The exhibition will begin with an illustrated text written by Barbara London that presents a synthesis of the information that has been gathered. This essay, along with a showcase of catalogs, periodicals, and video ephemera, will accompany the core of the exhibition: an elaborate timeline tracing video activity in North America, Europe, Japan, and Latin America from 1963 through the present. Over 80 photos of videotapes and installations, as well as of equipment and production centers, will be inset into the timeline, which will document more than 250 artists.

One of the major issues that emerges from the documentation is how the availability of equipment and funding played crucial roles in video's development. In 1965, Sony's release into the U.S. market of the first low-cost portable video camera meant that artists such as Nam June Paik could work with a medium that previously had been restricted to broadcasters. The creation of production programs for the

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independents at public television stations in Boston, New York, San Francisco, and Liège, Belgium, was of critical importance, both because it provided access to sophisticated equipment that otherwise would have been unavailable and also because in some cases it gave artists a broadcast outlet for their work. Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Canada Council at first tended to go to production centers and artists' collectives, thus encouraging an already strong tendency for artists to share scarce equipment. Collectives also shared information in the early 1970s through publications, such as the magazine Radical Software, which was of notable importance in keeping artists aware of new technology and the development of each other's work. Technological and financial changes have continued to have an impact on video as an art form; it was the introduction of the 3/4" cassette in the early 1970s that facilitated the distribution of the independents' work in a format that could easily be handled by museums, alternative galleries, libraries, and schools.

Barbara London also notes the importance of the extraordinary context in which video art began, during the social and cultural ferment of the 1960s. It was the time of civil rights and anti-war marches, when in the arts there were happenings, light shows, and mixed-media experimentation. For many artists, video was one of many tools to be applied to their interdisciplinary investigations. In time, the characteristics of the medium--intimate scale, sense of immediacy, temporality, and light-emitting screen--were assimilated into artists' working processes.

The exhibition will trace the ways in which artists began by treating television as a cultural icon (as in two pioneering works of 1963, Nam June Paik's Zen for TV and Wolf Vostell's Television Dé-collage) and then went on to use the medium that people all over the world are accustomed to in order to make videotapes and video installations that probe documentary, narrative, image processed, perceptual, and formalistic areas.

The Museum of Modern Art's Video Program is made possible by funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. For further information, the public may call (212) 708-9500.

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