

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VIDEO AND RITUAL TO BEGIN SEPTEMBER 27 AT MoMA

VIDEO AND RITUAL, an exhibition exploring contemporary artists' involvement with myth, ceremony, and the Western response to non-Western cultures, will be on display in The Museum of Modern Art's Video Gallery from September 27 through November 20. The series--presented in conjunction with the exhibition "PRIMITIVISM" IN 20TH CENTURY ART: AFFINITY OF THE TRIBAL AND THE MODERN--will comprise videotapes by 15 artists who draw on tribal culture, either through direct encounter or through emulation and analogy.

According to Barbara London, director of the Museum's Video Program, the use of small, portable video cameras was a boon to those artists who "became interested during the 1960s in earthworks and other unconventional forms. These works were not easily collected or handled by traditional art institutions, but they could be documented with video. It's an example of how, despite the anti-technological sentiment of the time, artists discovered that simple home electronics equipment could be helpful in heightening awareness of the world around us. Small-format video was also suited to artists who were incorporating ritualistic actions into their performance work--it gave them a way of taking a private experience, ordinarily seen by only a few people, and showing it to an expanded audience. And because video tends to establish an intimate, one-to-one encounter with the viewer, the members of that audience still could feel they were sharing in a private experience." The use of electronic technology might at first seem incompatible with a fascination with tribal culture. But, as London puts it, "Artists are always seeking new frontiers. Now that video is part of our everyday vocabulary, it can be used to explore the unsettled technological frontier, as well as the spirit and magic found in ritual and myth-making."

Of the videotapes selected for this exhibition, three are the result of direct contact between the artist and a tribal group. Juan Downey's Yanomami Healing I, made during an eight-month sojourn with the Yanomami Indians of Venezuela, gives the Western viewer a very rare glimpse of a shamanistic ceremony. Tule, by Edin Velez, was shot among the Cuna Indians on the island of Ustupu, off Panama, and focuses on the tribe's own artistic traditions. Finally, Bill Viola portrays a dying culture in Memories of Ancestral Power--The Moro Movement in the Solomon Islands, a tape incorporating footage shot by the islanders themselves.

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"For the most part, artists draw on the feelings and attitudes of tribal peoples rather than on the myths themselves," London notes, and this is evident in the video-tapes that emulate other cultures' interactions with nature. I Like America and America Likes Me by Joseph Beuys documents a week-long performance in Rene Block's former New York gallery in which Beuys locked himself up with a sacred, totemic animal (a coyote), his signature material (felt), and dozens of copies of The Wall Street Journal. Terry Fox's Turgescent Sex is a performance involving another totem (in this case a dead fish), a rope, a blindfold, and a cigarette. In Three Grizzlies and Solo No. 1, Simone Forti first observes bears in the Central Park Zoo, then performs a dance based on their movements. John Sturgeon uses video to document an alchemical rite in Spine/Time, as he evokes the power of the four elements in four different settings. Warlock(ing) by Paul Kos is a wry comment on the exploitation of nature, in which Kos's performance consists of putting out beartraps for the purpose of capturing rainwater. And in Rituals for a Still Life, the screen itself becomes the performer, as Frank Gillette turns a TV set on its back and uses the surface of ever-changing commercial broadcasting as a table on which plants and minerals rest.

Finally, the exhibition will present works of artists who use video to construct analogies with tribal rituals. In the Planet of the Eye by Rita Myers is an expression of ancient cosmological myths, translated into technological artifacts. Joan Jonas takes advantage of the camera's ability to create multiple images by setting up a masked double of herself in Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy. In Mitchell's Death, Linda Montano transforms a private moment of grief into a beautiful and moving ritual shared with viewers through the camera; in Sounds of the Lotus Blossoms, Ulrike Rosenbach incorporates an Australian aboriginal musical instrument into video performance. Paul Ryan uses the camera to explore unconscious (but highly formal) behavior in Ritual of Triadic Relations; and the young Belgian artist Koen Theys evokes the goddess of the hunt and the ritual of modern warfare in Diana.

The Museum's Video Program is directed by Barbara London, Assistant Curator in the Department of Film. Video exhibitions are made possible by grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

For further information, the public may call (212) 708-9500.

COMPLETE SCHEDULE IS ATTACHED

August 1984

 For further PRESS information, please contact Stuart Klawans, Film Press Representative,
 The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019 (212) 708-9752.

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SCHEDULE: VIDEO AND RITUAL

September 27 - November 20, 1984

PROGRAM I:

- Paul Ryan, Ritual of Triadic Relations. 1971-76, 1984. 30 min.
(12:00; repeated 3:30)
- Paul Kos, Warlock(ing). 1971. 8 min.
(12:30; repeated 4:00)
- Terry Fox, Turgescent Sex. 1971. 40 min.
(12:40; repeated 4:10)
- Simone Forti, Three Grizzlies. 1975. 15 min./Solo No. 1. 1975. 8 min.
(1:20; repeated 4:50)
- Joan Jonas, Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy. 1972. 23 min.
(1:45; repeated 5:15)
- Linda Montano, Mitchell's Death. 1978. 22 min.
(2:15)
- Frank Gillette, Rituals for a Still Life. 1976. 25 min.
(2:40)
- John Sturgeon, Spine/Time. 1982. 20 min.
(3:10)

PROGRAM II:

- Juan Downey, Yanomami Healing I. 1977. 30 min.
(12:00; repeated 3:00)
- Joseph Beuys, I Like America and America Likes Me. 1977. 28 min.
(12:30; repeated 3:30)
- Ulrike Rosenbach, Sounds of the Lotus Blossoms. 1980. 15 min.
(1:00; repeated 4:00)
- Edin Velez, Tule. 1978. 34 min.
(1:15; repeated 4:15)
- Bill Viola, Memories of Ancestral Power--The Moro Movement in the Solomon Islands.
1976-78. 36 min.
(1:50; repeated 4:50)
- Rita Myers, In the Planet of the Eye. 1984. 5 min.
(2:30; repeated 5:25)
- Koen Theys, Diana. 1984. 25 min.
(2:35)

PROGRAM I: Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays

PROGRAM II: Tuesdays, Fridays, Sundays

All screenings are held in the Video Gallery, Ground Floor.

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