



---

**FROM THE ACADEMY TO THE AVANT-GARDE**

---

**FROM THE ACADEMY TO THE AVANT GARDE**

A TRAVELING EXHIBITION PRODUCED BY THE VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK, 1981 ● GUEST CURATOR, RICHARD SIMMONS

*Richard  
Simmons '88*

This exhibition and catalogue were made possible with a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the following people for their generosity and support in making this project possible:

Nancy Norwood, exhibition coordinator.

Arthur Tsuchiya, former media center coordinator.

Joan Lyons, Ed Reed, Cindy Furlong, Bob Bretz, Nancy Norwood, Linda Pickert, Tom Sullivan and Greg Erf for catalogue production.

Cover illustration from, *Through the Looking Glass*, by Juan Downey.

Copyright ©1981 by the Visual Studies Workshop

The exhibition and catalogue were produced at the  
Visual Studies Workshop  
31 Prince Street  
Rochester, New York 14607

## INTRODUCTION

---

Arthur Tsuchiya

The initial impulse to present this video exhibition arose from the belief that an important kind of video is currently being created: art that is demanding and dense, which sustains repeated viewing, and that is best understood in the context of other equally challenging works. Rather than add to the number of excellent surveys of video art, this more narrowly selective show *From the Academy to the Avant Garde* has been assembled to allow a more focused view into a type of video art that is of the intellect, yet is also articulated with wit and spirit.

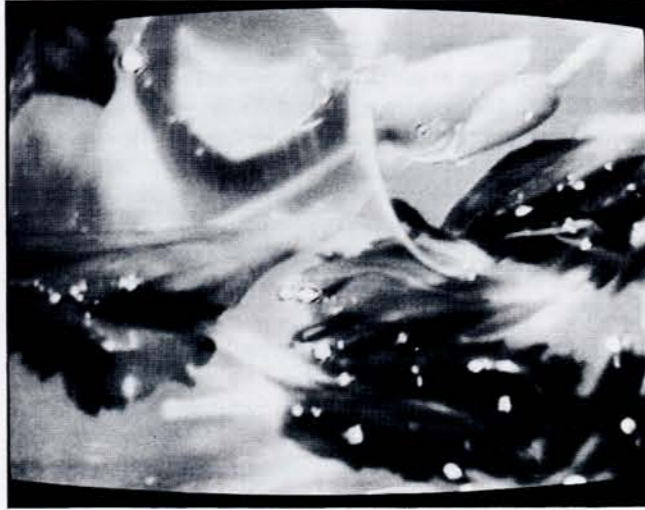
Recognizing the challenging and perhaps unfamiliar nature of these videotapes, this catalog, written by curator Richard Simmons, has been conceived of as a companion piece to the exhibition. It serves as an introduction to the artists and their other work, as a guide to the exhibition as a whole, and as an aid in extending the encounter between the viewer and the work. It is hoped that this will enhance the engagement of the viewer with the richness of this art.

The audience for video art continues to grow, despite having been left largely to its own devices for an understanding of the work. Although video is well into its second decade as an art form, it is generally acknowledged that the core literature of analysis and theory in this field is still being developed. As might be expected with the introduction of any new sensibility or artform, a number of arts commentators and scholars, who are apparently at a loss for a comprehensive grasp of the nature and meaning of video art, have projected their confusion into

publicly voiced doubts about the viability of video as art. They should know better. Any carefully considered review of video work by artists to date reveals the extraordinary manner in which their activity has enlarged the scope and reach of the medium. Video employs and enfolds images, sounds, and language; when intelligence and charm are brought to bear on such elements, new possibilities for perception and cognition emerge. Several of the artists in this exhibition have been making video art since its first years. For those viewers familiar with the earlier work, the tapes in this show will represent exciting advances in individual work. At the same time they mark the increasingly sophisticated state of video art.



VISIONS FROM THE GOD WORLD, (PART I), Les Levine



SYMPTOMATIC SYNTAX, Frank Gillette

## THE FAMILY JEWELS

Richard Simmons

Burton White of Harvard's Child Development Center, found that about one child in every thirty was brilliant and happy (a percentage that leaves nearly 97 percent of us dull and sad). These bright children are from a wide variety of backgrounds and have only one detectable factor in common: all spend much of their time in open, blank staring. . . . When blank staring takes place before a TV screen (as it does for our 97 percent dull and sad), the child bonds to the chaos of that screen. He is not being egocentric as designed by nature, but exocentric—he is constantly pulled outside his center. The screen is the center of his world and impinges upon him. Whether this impingement is cartoon mayhem, commands to buy corn flakes, instructions on how to spell Sesame Street or read the encyclopedia, is absolutely of no consequence. The content is inconsequential—the formal device itself and its effects are all that counts, and all that will ever count. *No content can be conceived that can overcome the dramatic split of self that the mechanism itself induces.*<sup>1</sup> (My italics)

How are we to understand the works of William Blake? Is it odd that this question is not asked about all art, certainly not contemporary art? In a contemporary gallery the problem of meaning is usually bumped by a more pressing concern: is this good art? Criteria for merit range from gut response (through there are many different guts) to a professional critic's weight and measure of an artist's skill in composition and execution, of the balance between innovation and homage, and of that same gut response, now adjusted upward by all this mental strife.<sup>2</sup>



PILLS AND HOBBIES, James Lecesne: from *DIFFICULT MUSIC*, Davidson Gigliotti

1. *The Bond of Power* by Joseph Chilton Pierce; NY: Dutton (1981) pp. 162, 164.
2. "William Blake: The Eye Sees More than the Heart Knows," by Jeff Weinstein. *Village Voice* Sept. 23-29, 1981, pp. 103, 104.

When Arthur Tsuchiya invited me to curate an exhibition of artists' videotapes, we agreed that a small selection of recent tapes with a common interest was more practical than surveying all the activities under the video art umbrella. This was an easy agreement for me since my last exhibition contained work by forty artists and limited the amount of time one could devote to them individually. I felt that many of the tapes deserved more attention, and I knew from my own experience that the more I watched them, the more intelligence they offered. It was this unfading quality which I wanted to pursue in this exhibition.

I knew I would find most of what I was looking for in imaginatively constructed narrative styles. Narrative ideas require direction and control and, like film, video lends itself well to complex ideas which require timing. Unlike film, video has the dimensions of intimacy and the miniature proscenium as opposed to cinematic spectacle. This is a useful distinction if an artist needs an intimate setting for his material. In varying degrees each of these artists understands television beyond its technical possibilities. In *Symptomatic Syntax*, Frank Gillette uses it like a fishbowl, upsetting the serenity of natural phenomena with an unanswerable temporal argument. Les Levine's *Visions from the God World* treats it as a window through which we see civilization and ritual. In *Difficult Music*, produced by Davidson Gigliotti, performance artists Laurie Anderson, Louis Grenier, Julia Heyward, Tim Maul, and James Lecesne, use appropriate personae to speak to us directly. Michael Smith performs a visual art spin-off as a travelogue host/TV salesman using commodities towards an indelible end. Juan Downey exploits television's technical devices in *Through the Looking Glass* to reflect on media culture delivered to a narcissistic society. Howard Fried is the unseen, ingratiating television politician in *Making a Paid Political Announcement*. Finally, in *Challenge: P.O.V.* Tony Labat assumes the role of television commentator for a psychological self-portrait about control and circumstance.

The subjects these narrative artists are working with are no less complex than the human spirit, affected by physical, emotional,

intellectual and social realities. They are no less spiritual than William Blake, whose pictorial icons were symbolic of consciousness and survive from the turn of the 18th century. In speaking, Blake showed that he wanted "to melt apparent surfaces away and show the infinite which was hid." Blake talked about the Divine Imagination, and hated the Royal Academy for being inexact and responsive to the corporeal but not the spiritual world. As we shall see from Juan Downey's tape, Diego Valesquez had similar inclinations in the 17th century, manifested in compositional structure. The artists in this exhibition pursue equally immaterial insights using methods and a medium which supports a philosophical exchange. In this regard they have much in common with Velasquez, these artists are all media sculptors, building an imaginative space within which our own imaginations and intellectual curiosity are activated. It's sort of like preparing a fine meal for perception. This method also conveys the sense of adventure, discovery and empathy that the artists experience. In an earlier tape, *Vito's Reef* (1978), Howard Fried describes this action as "the adventure of information transmitted." Richard Foreman in *Out of the Body Travel* (1978), says: "I'm going to teach you everything I know, be ready." In *Barricade to Blue* (1978), Rita Myers describes the location as "the perimeter of the ineffable, where thinking and being coalesce."

Admittedly, I have a personal attachment to the constructs represented in this exhibition but those constructs were not the only influence on my selection. My other considerations are more formal than romantic and can only be described with critical language. Criticism implies rules and standards, and every artist knows inspiration doesn't come from rules unless you can make something you like out of them. Weinstein is right in saying there are many different guts in determining good art, but artists do work with subjective standards. These standards are created and defined by accumulated art information and how each artist feels about the things they make. Artists are not charged with verbally elaborating on their collected sensibilities, so critics do it for them; but they are always at odds

with that portion which is fugitive from language – intuition. Trying to identify standards is like tracking the family jewels, cloaked in semantics and continually reinvested in artistic freedom.

Criticism is a language problem which affects art commerce, making opposition to it understandable. When Clement Greenberg originally wrote about abstract expressionist artists who were working out the syntactical limitations of the cubists, he elevated that particular approach to art at the expense of artists who had an equal sense of skill and history and had transcended the attachment to traditional materials. It was Greenberg's folly to neglect those artists whose intellectual eloquence and material freedom we now know as stunningly innovative. Greenberg's ideas however, are useful. He articulately epitomized workmanship, invention, and was informed by art, three of man's highest standards of philosophical qualification. It is in light of this criteria that strengths and weaknesses can be found and gut responses can be felt. It would be fair to say that these elements, working in tandem, contribute to the foundation of my most critical response.

I am reminded here of an aesthete's lesson; you can take a dull idea and make it pretty but it's still a dull idea. On the other hand, you can take a good idea and no matter what you do with it, it's still a good idea. In this exhibition we have both technical proficiency and good ideas. In Laurie Anderson's piece, one can see a gestural economy that is staggeringly sheer compared to the breadth of her text. Like Anderson, all of the artists in this exhibition exercise a high degree of control and invention, and this endows each piece with an intense and enduring life of its own.

It is always a pleasure to find something that makes one's mind work; the pursuit of understanding is an enterprise common both to traditionally motivated artists like Juan Downey, and to bizarre performance artists like Michael Smith. Hence the title *From the Academy to the Avant-Garde*. Whether these tapes mitigate against Burton White's assertion – that the content of television can never overcome the effect of watching it – is a judgment that can only be made by the individual viewer.

Richard Simmons was curator of video and film at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York 1974-1981. During this period, he curated over sixty exhibitions of artists' video tapes and gallery installations including two nationally circulating anthologies: *New Work and Abstract Video Imagery* (1976) and *Everson Video Revue* (1979). He is a part time faculty member at the San Francisco Art Institute where he teaches production and criticism. Simmons presently considers himself a free lance artist/curator specializing in the production and promotion of difficult and unusual projects. He can be contacted at 402 Arthur Street, Syracuse, New York 13204.

LIST OF TAPES IN ORDER OF VIEWING

---

Howard Fried, MAKING A PAID POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Davidson Gigliotti, DIFFICULT MUSIC

INCLUDING: LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS, Laurie Anderson; RISK, Louis Grenier;

BLUE PERIOD, Julia Heyward; SOHO, Tim Maul; GIDDI UP TRAVEL AGENT, Michael Smith;

PILLS AND HOBBIES and ART, James Lecesne; BANANA DUPUY, Jean Dupuy and Olga Adorno.

Juan Downey, THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Tony Labat, CHALLENGE: P.O.V.

Frank Gillette, SYMPTOMATIC SYNTAX

Les Levine, VISIONS FROM THE GOD WORLD, (PART 1)

Howard Fried  
*MAKING A PAID POLITICAL  
ANNOUNCEMENT*  
(1981, 5 minutes, color)

---

For the past ten years Howard Fried has worked with the sublime aspects of causality within a semi-confining structure. For each new piece Fried creates a plan which he models in response to larger perception. His plans can be seen as molds for an allegorical view of art and life. Fried then invites participants to perform within the boundaries of his plans, which both satisfy his general expectations and provide for the randomness of individual behavior. The resulting compositions display a range of human and social phenomena.

Fried produced *Making a Paid Political Announcement* in Seattle at the invitation of And/Or Gallery. His plan for this occasion required the participation of five "associate producers," each responsible for choosing a citizen-subject. Fried added a sixth to round out the demographic mix of male/female, young/middle-aged/old. Fried's goal was to ingratiate himself politically with these six people via the investigation of their own interests.

Fried was curious to see how different politicians' ideas would be if a political campaign centered around the wants and needs of a few individuals as opposed to those of a large constituency of voters. The resulting tape shows that the ideas of the few in-



dividuals are much more adventuresome and interesting. Fried loves the idiosyncratic, and the results are positively rich in their suggestion of originality and individualism.

One aspect of Fried's highly-structured work is its intellectualization of the elements of artistic composition. *Museum Reaction Piece*—a major construction which has been in progress for the past three years—consists of a primary two-part structure, and a secondary system composed of three conversational themes imposed on the participants in each of the 14 episodes. This design of continuous alternation between elements is a figurative translation of Chiaroscuro, the modeling of light and shadow to depict space; just as the eye perceives a visual difference, the mind perceives intellectual ones. This process of differentiation has analogues in Fried's other work; the balance between random and pre-determined ordering, the demographic mix of participants, and the suggestion of metaphor. Fried's ability to orchestrate seemingly unrelated elements on a grand scale is indicative of his astonishing sense of invention.



Howard Fried was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1946. He received his BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and MFA from the University of California at Davis, both in sculpture. He is currently department chairman for video and performance at the San Francisco Art Institute. He has received two NEA fellowships and represented the United States in Documenta V in Kassel, West Germany. His work has been shown in several exhibitions, including the Whitney Biennial in New York City, the Everson Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. He is currently preparing a retrospective of his work for the University Art Museum at Berkeley, opening in the summer of 1982. Fried distributes his own work and can be reached at 16 Rose Street, San Francisco, California 94103.

The following is excerpted from Fried's project description:

I will construct a political message in which I will make only promises which I reckon will win the favor of five specific citizens of Seattle. The content of the message will reflect only the specific concerns of these people as expressed to me in informal meetings at convenient sites; that is, sites that will least dis-

rupt, for the five, that day's normal activity. The meetings will be one to one; I will talk to each of the five, one at a time at some spot they'll name. "What's on your mind today?" or "What would make you happier?" or something similar will probably be the topic of discussion. I won't be interested in the greater social good unless it's what's on one or more of their minds.

The associate producers will be guided in their selection of people by some formula that I will fabricate to create a reasonable demographic mix among the five. (One that doesn't make me feel more vulnerable or more self-conscious than I would like to be.) The group won't be homogeneous, is what I mean more precisely. The formula will be derived from whatever pseudo-factual data I am able to gather about Seattle.

Finally, the televised message will be composed of vignettes of the five citizens doing whatever they usually do in the previously mentioned convenient sites. These vignettes will be accompanied by a narration which promises ingratiating solutions or resolutions to, or aggrandizing reaffirmations of what's on the minds of the five. In the narration these concerns will have been co-opted and expressed as the point of view of the speaker, the television politician. In the televised message the five citizens will not be referred to by name or for that matter referred to at all (except in the credits). Those parts of the content reflexive of my meetings with any specific person will not be linked with the vignettes of their activity in an illustrative manner, a promissory manner, or in any other manner. Rather, it is meant to read something like, "What you're seeing (I will not be seen) is the world, and this is what I'm gonna do for it." Similarly, my voice, the voice of the speaker, will not be identified with my name or my occupation.



LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS, Laurie Anderson



SOHO, Tim Maul



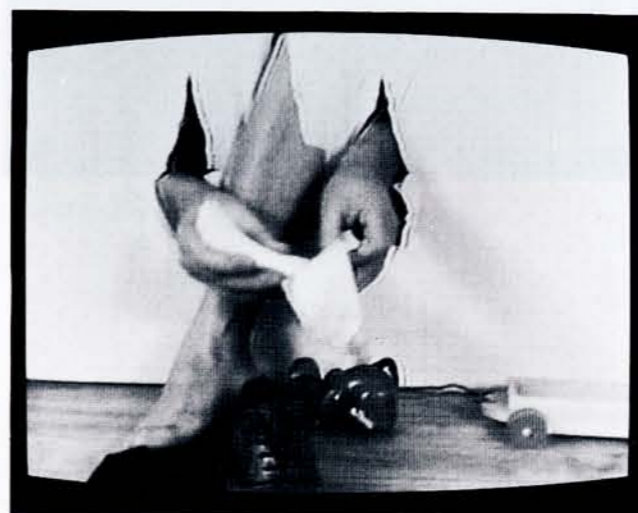
BLUE PERIOD, Julia Heyward



ART, James Lecesne



GIDDI UP TRAVEL AGENT, Michael Smith



BANANA DUPUY, Jean Dupuy and Olga Adorno

Davidson Gigliotti  
*DIFFICULT MUSIC*  
(1981, 30 minutes, color)

Including:  
*LANGUAGE IS A VIRUS*, Laurie Anderson;  
*RISK*, Louis Grenier;  
*BLUE PERIOD*, Julia Heyward;  
*SOHO*, Tim Maul;  
*GIDDI UP TRAVEL AGENT*, Michael Smith;  
*PILLS AND HOBBIES* and *ART*, James Lecesne;  
*BANANA DUPUY*, Jean Dupuy and Olga Adorno

*Difficult Music*, a selection from a larger work entitled *Hot Salt*, is a witty and provocative romp through the minds of seven New York artists. Producer/videographer Gigliotti invited each artist to create or tailor work specifically for this anthology format, which he previously used for a work entitled *Chant a Capella* in 1978. The artists in *Difficult Music* approach the television medium not as a simple recording device for their performances, but as a point of direct contact with the viewer. Their straightforward attention "out of" the set shifts the viewer's relationship from casual observer, primarily the case with commercial programming, to direct personal interaction with the artists and their material – almost like a conversational partner.

The material in *Difficult Music* is as diverse as the artists, but similarities do exist between pieces beyond the confrontation with the viewer's gaze. All of the artists come from a visual arts background, and their texts build visual impressions as well as ideas. From Laurie Anderson's "teeth like luxury hotels on the Florida coastline" to Michael Smith's visual "tour of mounting interest," these artists' performances distinctly differ from live



theatre, in spite of their often dramatic presentations. Another interesting parallel between the pieces is the artists' underlying attempt to trigger personal reactions in the viewer which relate to their own lives and perceptions. In *Language is a Virus*, Laurie Anderson alludes to the ability of language to alter the direct experience of our senses and to support our egos even at the expense of intuition. Julia Heyward's contribution suggests similar metaphors for consciousness raising. By contrast, Jean Dupuy's wonderful Fluxus nonsense, *Banana Dupuy*, provides a welcome relief from *Difficult Music's* penetrating assaults on our sensibilities.

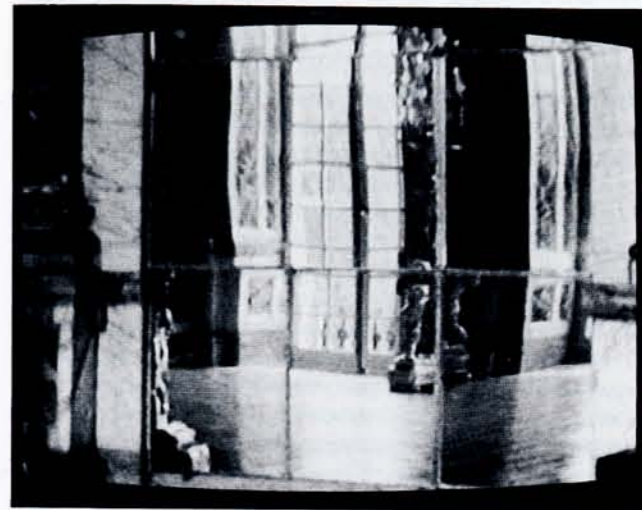
Davidson Gigliotti was born in Winchester, Mass., in 1939. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design from 1960 to 1963. His work was included in *Visions and Televisions*, a premier video art exhibition hosted by the Rose Art Museum in 1970. From 1969 to 1975, he was a producer with VideofreeX/Media Bus. Gigliotti has also been the recipient of two NEA fellowships. In addition to his anthology projects he creates large, multiple-screen installations of projected landscape studies. A single-channel landscape work, *After Montgolfier*, was included in the Whitney Museum's 1981 Biennial. His work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Everson Museum, and on public television. He currently operates a post-production facility for artists. Gigliotti and the other artists in *Difficult Music* can be contacted at 537 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10013.



RISK, Louis Grenier



Juan Downey  
*THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*  
(1981, 28 minutes, color)



**I**N 1971 Juan Downey began a project titled *Video Trans Americas*. His goal was to record the various Indian cultures of the American continents so that they would be seen within the context of another culture, the urban settings of the United States. This project eventually led him to the Amazon rain forest where he lived with the only surviving primitives of the Americas, the Yanomami. The content of these collected works from 1971 to 1978 changes from the crafts, music and dance portrayed in the earlier tapes, to the socio-political implications depicted in the Yanomami tapes. It is this *Trans Americas* series for which he usually known.

Prior to, and concurrent with these anthropological studies, Downey produced a number of works about consciousness. In 1972 *Plato Now* featured a recording of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, referring to the difference between the ideal form or concept and what we actually perceive. In 1975 he produced *Las Meninas* (Maidens of Honor) – inspired by the 17th century painting of the same name by Diego Velasquez – and referring to the simultaneity of views required to understand space if it is used as a metaphor for human understanding and knowledge.

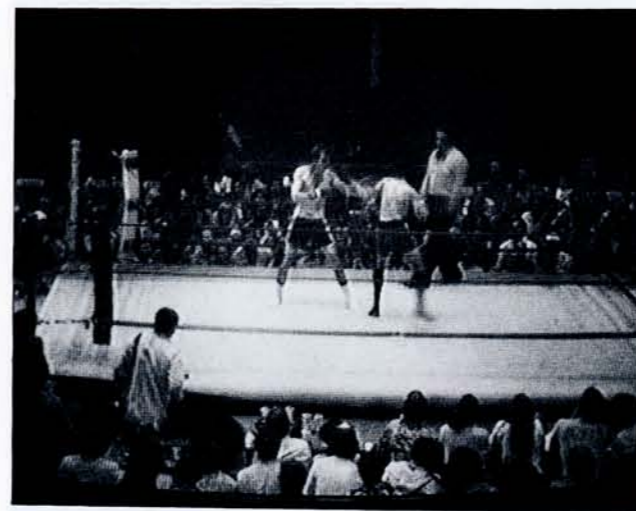
Both *Plato Now* and *Las Meninas* are precursors to *Through the Looking Glass* which examines the uses of mirrors by presenting narcissism and consciousness from a diversity of viewpoints. The tape ostensibly examines the function and symbolism of the mirror in architecture and art by tracing the mirror's image from the Renaissance to Picasso. A lively travelogue across England, France and Spain is created as *Through the Looking Glass* sweeps through history, making playful use of computer effects to illustrate complex spatial concepts. The tape's multi-layered texture also presents an anthropology of individuals, their personal visions of art, and the manner in which they articulate their insights. Finally, *Through the Looking Glass* closes with a text prepared by art historian Leo Steinberg which analyzes the spatial structure of the Velasquez painting and clarifies the true intentions of the tape – to reflect the movement of perception relative to space as the instrument of active thought.

Downey plans an additional twelve tapes in this series which probe the idea of reflectivity. Like *Through the Looking Glass*, these will stretch the objective documentary format to allow lyrical subjective elements to be projected, thus inducing the viewer to see something of himself within each tape's psychological context.

Juan Downey was born in Santiago, Chile in 1940. He received his BA in architecture from the Catholic University of Chile. Between 1963 and 1965 he attended Atelier 17 in Paris. Downey later attended Pratt Institute in New York City from 1967 to 1969. He currently lives in New York City and is associate professor in the School of Architecture at Pratt Institute. His work has been shown widely in North and South America and in Europe. He has received fellowship grants from the NEA and the Rockefeller and Guggenheim Foundations. His videotapes are distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, 142 Greene Street, New York, N.Y. 10013.



Tony Labat  
*CHALLENGE: P.O.V.*  
(1981, 45 minutes, color)



Tony Labat's work as a video and performance artists is well-known in San Francisco, where he has shown in nearly every club and alternative space. His themes extend outward from personal experiences, rather than idealized constructs, and his work features a distinctive narrative style. In *Room Service* and *Babalu*, both produced in 1980, his method of telling a story is heavily visual. Labat punctuates the transitions in his stories with

inventive and unexpectedly evocative cuts which function as oblique translations of the text. For example, when a friend is coming over to pick him up, motion and distance are implied by an alternately expanding and contracting stomach. The slant on frustration is "jumpy" or "itchy." For Hialeah, a suburb of Miami, we are shown a Jai Lai cesta. Showering is a methodical under-arm slapping, and cruising for girls' pictures an electrical outlet. Collectively, Labat's cuts enhance the narrative form in an illusory rather than straightforward manner. The story of *Challenge: P.O.V.* begins here with the idea of illusion.

In July of 1980, Labat received a letter from another San Francisco artist named Tom Chapman, challenging Labat to a boxing match as an extension of the realist tradition in sculpture and the more contemporary aspects of performance art. In addition to the physical confrontation, Chapman challenged Labat's aesthetic with the statement "the best illusion is no illusion," adding that this challenge wouldn't be any fun – an integral quality of Labat's life and art. Without explanation, Chapman further informed the press that Labat needed his ass kicked. That was all it took to begin a vendetta. Labat vowed to teach Chapman "an art lesson he'll never forget." *Challenge: P.O.V.* is Labat's point-of-view on this event which took place in San Francisco in June, 1981 under the title *Box Cleanly—Don't Foul*. The project as a whole turned out to be both maddeningly amorphous and intellectually challenging for the art community, as well as physically and emotionally exhausting for Labat and Chapman.

Labat has constructed *Challenge: P.O.V.* with the same diverse sense of delivery employed in his previous tapes. He uses a mixture of verité footage, interviews and staged events, and presents the material in the guise of a television commentator. Like earlier tapes, *Challenge: P.O.V.* reflects the underlying theme of dislocation. (*Room Service* focuses on the Cuban boat people, and *Babalu* was about Labat's return visit to Miami when he found himself trapped in a by-gone consciousness.) Labat tries to convey a sense of the emotion involved and the frustration of circumstances which are out of his control. In *Challenge: P.O.V.* he enters the ring after an intense year of

preparing for the fight and finds himself in a twilight zone where anger and rage dominate his intelligence. Never one to overlook an opportunity to express himself, Labat conveys the many facets of this project and his relationship to it with a range of creative anecdotes. His confidence of expression provides us with a refreshing experience.

Tony Labat was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1951, and came to the United States in 1966. He received his BFA and MFA in video and performance art from the San Francisco Art Institute where he is currently a faculty member. He is a co-founder/director of San Francisco's notorious A-Hole Gallery and a member of the performing arts group, *Puds*. His work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Long Beach Museum of Art, the Paris Biennial, the National Video Festival and Video '80 and '81. His work is distributed by Terminal Gym, 110 First Street, San Francisco, California 94105.



Frank Gillette  
*SYMPTOMATIC SYNTAX*  
(1981, 31 minutes, color)

Frank Gillette's ideas have taken form in a variety of media, but he is best known for his elaborate multiple-screen video installations. His work features a calculated arithmetic shooting style and a fascination with intellectual constructs and natural phenomena. *Symptomatic Syntax* is a contextual model for the philosophical argument that time is unreal. Gillette uses a water-filled terrarium and various flora to isolate and recreate a series of natural circumstances. He sets up an environment in which there is no *a priori* knowledge of what will happen. The "degree" of indeterminateness that results is then applied obliquely to a metaphysical text about the torturously rhetorical argument. Gillette's method is to create a feeling for complexity by furnishing something that lies between pure information and description.

The version of *Symptomatic Syntax* shown in this exhibition is a single-channel study taken from a larger, six-channel work entitled *Symptomatic Synchronization*; the larger version contains three pairs of televisions, each pair progressively smaller in screen size. While the larger version more elaborately amplifies the text's theoretical premise, both versions convey the unreality of the temporal series found in the text. The multi-channel installation presents a simultaneity of events, whereas the single-channel piece portrays events in linear succession. Gillette further elaborates the philosophical quandary of defining time in relation to a series by periodically changing the camera's focal length. These changes provide the visual portion of the tape with a sense of continuous alternation and infinity. Methodical specificity is an appreciable element of Gillette's work. A sense of contradiction results as the frustration

of the theoretical premise is placed in opposition to exquisite and wholly satisfying imagery.

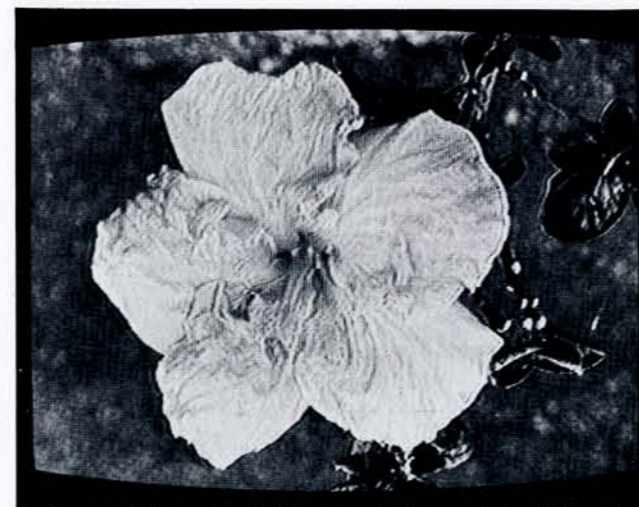
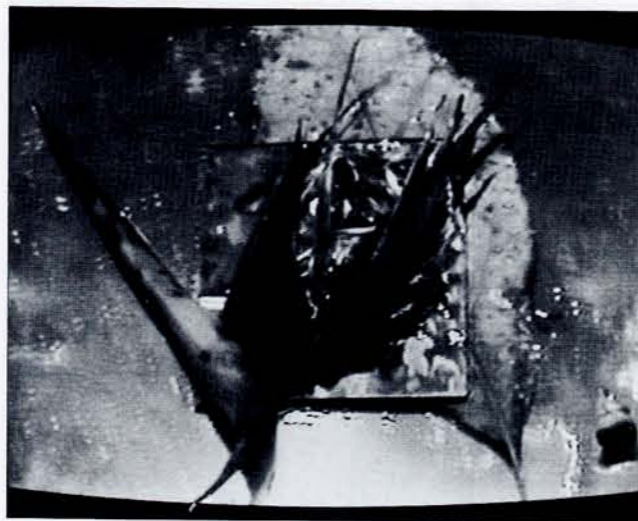
Transcribed text from *Symptomatic Syntax*

McTaggart's notorious argument about the theory of unreality of time goes as follows: Events can be temporarily order in two ways; the B series runs from earlier to later, the A series runs from the past to the future through the present. The A series cannot be reduced to the B series, and the B series can only exist if the A series exists. But the A series cannot exist because it involves a contradiction from which there is no escape. Thus, the B series cannot exist either. Time is unreal.

Is "knowing" an activity of the same logical type as "making"? According to Brentano's axiom, the mental is distinguished from the physical by the fact that it can refer to something other than itself, even to something non-existent. A material object is a dimensional entity that is composed of matter, is bounded by surfaces, exists in space, endures in time, behaves as a malleable unit, and possesses qualitative complexity.

Such infinities are vicious. In McTaggart's words, the attributes of the characteristics past, present, and future, to the terms of any series leads to a contradiction unless it is specified that they have evolved successively. This means that they have evolved in relation to the terms specified as past, present, and future. Thus, to avoid a life of contradiction they must in turn be specified as past, present, and future. If this continues infinitely the first set of terms never escapes from the contradiction at all.

Frank Gillette was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1941. He attended Pratt Institute in New York City until 1963. He was the founding director of Raindance Foundation with Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot. Gillette first exhibited his video matrices in 1969, at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City. In addition, he has had several major exhibitions in the United States and Europe. He has received fellowship grants from the NEA, as well as the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations.



Les Levine  
*VISIONS FROM THE GOD WORLD*  
(PART I)  
(1981, 30 minutes, color)

---

Les Levine's work began to surface in the 1960's, a period of Pop Art, Minimalism and formalism. Since that time, Levine's primary concern has been the greater social good; exemplifying life around him and paying attention to its values. Levine has focused on the art world itself, exploiting clichés and criticizing its limitations. He invented the unlimited edition and promised in one tape to remove all the "sneaks" and "creeps" from art education. Titles have included: *A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words*, *Stamp of Approval* and *I Am Not Blind*, a photo/sound/video installation exploring the heightened sensitivity and perception of blind people.

In *Visions from the God World*, Levine attempts to make a narrative without words. He uses the term "God World" to identify a fictional space in which one is satisfied in all worldly ways; material, physical, intellectual, etc. Figures move through an environment of commodity and sensation in a never-ending search for buoyancy and ego support. The tape is a theological/technical fantasy about desire and illumination. It was shot on location in Hawaii amidst beautiful beaches, palm trees and crisp, tall buildings. The soundtrack utilizes a continually repeated falsetto to invoke terrestrial possibilities and to suggest an escape from discomfort. The tape is beautifully "wrapped," but it resembles an assembly-line packaging of empty rewards. There is no philosophical argument present; rather Levine creates a complex visual texturing to represent a psychological state and a social profile. This may be standard theological fare, but Levine's construction is a unique visual discourse for the process of thinking itself.

Les Levine was born in Dublin, Ireland, and moved to the United States in 1958. He produced his first videotape, *Bum* in 1964, and is a diverse and accomplished artist with over 100 one-man shows to his credit. He has represented the United States in the Sao Paulo Biennial and in Document V in Kassel, West Germany. A recent book entitled, *Media: The Bio-Tech Rehearsal for Leaving the Body*, and his videotapes are distributed by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 33 East 74th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024.

