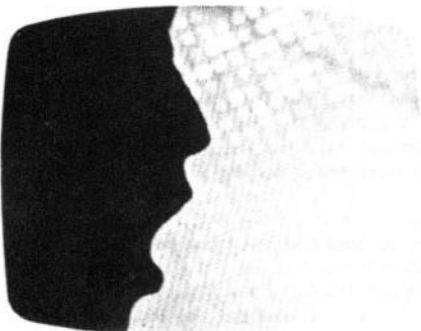


Video

~~Photo~~ Times

The Video Show
Festival of independent video at the Serpentine Gallery
1-26 May 1975



Artists' video



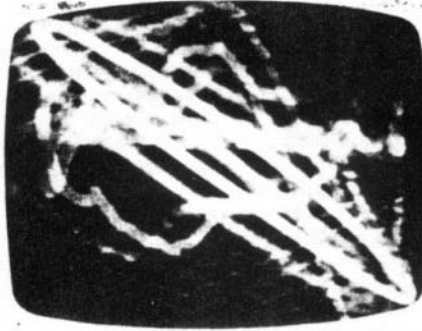
Community video



Performances



Closed circuit installations



Video graphics



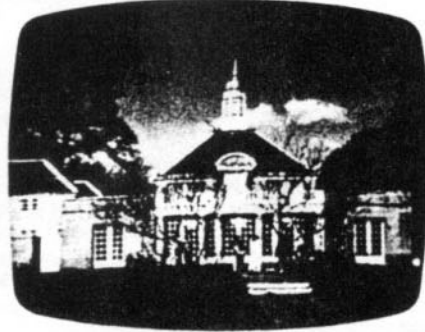
Tape library



Live events you can
take part in



Giant TV screen



At the gallery
in the Park

ARTS COUNCIL

Preface

Video makes demands which static art forms do not. It needs to be heard and seen in reasonably controlled conditions. The difficulty of its incompatibility with quieter art forms has prevented us from including video in our past summer shows (combined one-man exhibitions of work by young artists). In our present one-month festival, perhaps partly in compensation, we have aimed to show as much British tape as possible. All independent tapemakers working in Britain have been invited to show up to an hour of their work. As a result of this open submission we have some 100 hours of tape from different sources. Only a small proportion has been publicly screened before.

A greater availability of equipment and institutional funding has allowed North American video artists to develop a visual literacy that has dominated European exhibitions to date. The international selection includes some of the most interesting work from North America and other countries. Thanks to the energies and convictions of a number of groups and individuals in this country, video activity has expanded greatly over the last year or two, especially in the context of community experiments, where portable equipment is used as a process tool. Enormously increased interest amongst artists — many of whom are exploring the intrinsic qualities of the medium — has resulted in a strong art college-based movement. We hope that, by a combination of British and international programmes, we can offer a comprehensive survey of world video, as well as a first opportunity to see the variety of work which has been undertaken in England over the last few years.

The making and showing of finished tapes is only one aspect of video as a creative tool. To demonstrate the 'live' qualities of the medium we have commissioned a series of closed circuit installations and live performances from artists working in this area. The essence of many of these is audience participation — the visitor to the gallery can make his own art by interacting with such installations.

We are grateful to our committee, William Feaver, David Hall, Professor Stuart Hood and Clive Scollay, for helping us find a formula for the exhibition which we hope is sympathetic to the needs of tapemakers as well as visitors to the gallery. Without the persistent energy of Peter Bloch, our outside consultant, we might have despaired of ever solving the problems raised by mounting the first major video survey in Britain. We are also grateful to John Howkins, editor of *InterMedia* and secretary to the Standing Conference on Broadcasting, for his continuing advice and assistance during the planning of the exhibition, and for his introduction to the catalogue. The Greater London Arts Association and the Royal College of Art responded warmly to our plans and have organised a complementary series of seminars and lectures.

Sue Grayson
Argentine Gallery Organiser

The Video Show by John Howkins

Britain is notorious for its reluctance to accept social change. In 1944 the Editor-in-Chief of the BBC said he didn't like television and would not have a TV set in his house. In 1955, the Astronomer Royal declared that space travel was "utter bilge". Since 1960, many professional broadcasters have felt uneasy at the mention of a special kind of television — video.

In one sense, video is the original kind of television. The broadcasters remain hostile, however, because video bypasses their traditional monopoly (it doesn't need to be broadcast) and its political and artistic ambitions are radical and independent.

Ideas usually arrive before the right words to describe them. When television was first invented, a TV set was called a Television Receiving Apparatus and a viewer was called either a watcher or a tele-observer. Video is particularly confusing because it means both the picture part of a TV signal and the kind of artistic experiment seen at the present Video Show.

Video confronts the BBC and ITV with a radical challenge to their kind of television. For years, both institutions have given the impression, unavoidably, that the only natural and proper way to make television is *their* way; and that the best way to get the pictures from the back of the camera to the TV set is to broadcast them through the air. The Video Show demonstrates many alternative kinds of TV making, and one alternative form of transmitting it: closed-circuit links to small groups or even individuals.

The BBC and ITV are broadcasters, primarily, not makers of television. The early radio engineers of the 1920s and 1930s were so exhilarated by their success in transmitting sound that they decided to experiment with pictures. They called the result "television": the event of seeing (video) something from a distance (tele, from the Greek word for distance). Those early broadcasters made television in their own image. John Logie Baird's first pictures showed his own worried, ascetic face. In America, Farnsworth was even more prophetic — his pictures showed a dollar sign.

Broadcast television typically involves a few competitive channels, fixed viewing times and a pre-packaged flow of programmes. We should release television from the broadcasters' grasp and exploit its televisual qualities. Broadcast television should become more courageous and more accessible, and should be complemented by the new video. We should use the new technologies of cheap, portable video-tape units (the kind that produced most of the Video Show's material) and make a new kind of television that does not depend on broadcasting but, instead, draws its energies from communication and art.

Video is not an upstart nephew of Auntie BBC and Cousin ITV but a long-lost brother who has come home after 40 years. Video resurrects the original meaning of the word television: the use of electronics to see something from an external viewpoint. When video-makers use the new equipment to make a programme, or *product*, the result can be totally different from broadcast television's own familiar products.

Video as process gets even closer to television's electronic potential. Broadcasters have used it, but secretly. A chat-show host may look at his private monitor to check that his tie is knotted smartly, but he would be ashamed if his vanity was broadcast to the audience. Video people take the opposite view. They actually concentrate on such personal moments of feedback. They don't use process as a secret preliminary to the performance, but as the show itself. It can be private or public; boring or spectacular; funny or frightening. Encounter groups often use video to record their members' expressions and actions.

Seeing myself from the outside can change my idea of my body; my sense of identity; my attitude and behaviour towards others. The best video ignores the repetitive stereotypes of most broadcast television and explores and tests the user's own multi-dimensional realities.

Many artists have rejected the traditional forms of theatre, studio, cinema and gallery and moved into more open and personal spaces. Artists in video have rejected broadcast television. The new technologies enable them to make television on their own, simply and cheaply. The Video Show itself will make more television every day than the combined efforts of the BBC and ITV companies; and with considerably less money and equipment. More with less. Television as art (a few years ago the phrase sounded so odd!) demands our attention.