

#InTheLoop | SculptureCenter looks at video art 'Before Projection'

By Rob MacKay, September 28, 2018



Everybody has a personal YouTube account these days, but video art wasn't always like this. Take a trip down Memory Lane with help from a few mind-expanding displays.

SculptureCenter is currently exhibiting "Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974-1995" in its Long Island City gallery. To run until Dec. 17, the show features monitor-based sculpture made between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s.

Maria Vedder's "PAL oder Never The Same Color" was first presented in 1988. It consists of a wall grid of 24 monitors with one monitor set aside. Looped on the monitors is historic TV color test footage, including a host who presents herself in Phase Alternating Line and then National TV System Committee. (PAL is the system used to standardize color broadcasting in Europe, developed for analog TV. NTSC is the competing standard in North America. It's mockingly dubbed "Never The Same Color.")

When viewing Dara Birnbaum's early two-channel video installation "Attack Piece (1975)," the visitor stands between two monitors facing one another. One shows Super 8 footage shot by four artist collaborators. The four successively "attack" a seated and stationary Birnbaum with the cameras recording their aggressive advances towards her. Armed with a 35mm still camera, Birnbaum does not remain idle, as the other monitor shows a series of photographs she captured as the intruders approached.

Shigeo Kubota's "River (1979-81)" contains three monitors hung at eye-level above a trough equipped with a wave motor. The monitors alternate footage of Kubota swimming with brightly colored graphic shapes, which were created with the era's state-of-the-art postproduction equipment.

In 1964, Nam June Paik made the first "robot" in his series of sculptures that employ TV monitors. That year he also met his longtime collaborator Charlotte Moorman, a classical cellist involved in experimental performance. Paik's "Charlotte Moorman II (1995)" depicts Moorman with a cello for a torso and wires for hair.

Ernst Caramelle's "Video-Ping-Pong (1974)" examines the relationship between the human body and video through a recording of a Ping-Pong match, which plays on two monitors mounted on AV carts at approximate eye level and positioned in front of a "real" Ping-Pong table. Sounds of the bouncing ball are audible, although no ball is visible between the two monitors.

To make "Equinox (1979/2016)," Mary Lucier recorded from the 31st floor of a building in Lower Manhattan. Each day for one week, she progressively zoomed in on the sun while gradually shifting the camera's angle northward to follow the sun's natural movement. Each day, broader marks were "burned" onto the camera's internal vidicon tube, which manifest on the tape as dark greenish streaks in the sky that trail the sun's path. The seven consecutive videos showing the accumulated burn marks are presented on a series of monitors increasing in size, each mounted on a tall pedestal.

In her early work "Snake River (1994)," Diana Thater utilizes three monitors, each displaying footage in one of the three colors (RGB) that together make a full-color image on a CRT monitor. This tactic makes visible the "additive" system of color mixing, highlighting not only technological standards, but also the mechanics of visual perception. The monitors feature footage of the American West's vastness as emblematic of freedom, opportunity, and sublimity.

Friederike Pezold is interested in subverting classic dualisms between painter and model, subject and object, as codified in traditions of women's representation in film, painting, and beyond. Represented here by part of her major video series "The New Embodied Sign Language," this sculpture by the same title comprises four monitors displaying close-up videos of the artist's body altered by theatrical makeup. The videos are shown on monitors stacked on top of each other to reach roughly the height of a human body.

In Takahiko Iimura's "TV for TV (1983)," two monitors are positioned face-to-face, each tuned to a different broadcast station or static. Their respective streams are only directed toward the other TV set, rendering their images nearly invisible to the viewer. The work highlights TV's incessant streaming of images in a nonreciprocal, perpetual flow.

"Psychomimetic II" is one of Tony Oursler's early monitor-based sculptures, taking the form of what he calls a "model world." Mounted atop a pedestal, it resembles an architectural model. Rendered in somber gray, it depicts a nuclear cooling tower, a medieval-style tower, and a barren landscape. Embedded within are two tiny monitors: one placed at the bottom of a depression in the ground, streaming live-broadcast TV images of reworks, the other located in the tower, playing back an absurdist short narrative employing hand-drawn and computer-generated animation.

"In Credits (1984)," Muntadas edits together a sequence of credits, such as those found at the end of films and TV programs, and displays them in a loop. He investigates the ways in which producing institutions choose to represent themselves and how material conditions such as production value, fees, and authorship determine the media landscape.



Image 1/3

Image: SculptureCenter

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