

A SHORT HISTORY OF DUTCH VIDEO ART

30 YEARS IN 30 WORKS OF 30 ARTISTS

An exhibition of Single-Channel Works



Artists in the exhibition: Marina Abramovic & Ulay . Babak Afrassiabi . Tiong Ang . Barbara Bloom . Daniel Brun . Miguel Angel Cardenas . Ulises Carrión . Yael Davids . Alicia Framis . Henryk Gajewski . David Garcia & Annie Wright . Claudio Goulart & Flavio Pons . Noel Harding . Heiner Holtappels & Klaus Boegel . Nan Hoover . Christina Linaris-Corridou & Robert J. Nottrot . Raul Marroquin . Mariano Maturana . Atsushi Ogata . Dan Oki . Michal Shabtay . Jeffrey Shaw . Debra Solomon . Elsa Stansfield & Madelon Hooykaas . Sandra Sterle . Nasrin Tabatabai . Lawrence Wiener

WORKS in the EXHIBITION

Marina Abramovic & Ulay

City of Angels, 1983, 20'.

After using video for several years during the 70s to record their performances, Abramovic & Ulay took the step of producing their first video piece meant also for television broadcasting. *City of Angels* was shot in the capital of Thailand, in the garden of what appears to be an ancient Buddhist monastery. Abramovic and Ulay describe the spiritual and ascetic dimensions of Eastern culture in general, and of Buddhism in particular, in a series of staged 'tableaux vivants' which are 'enacted' by monks and by the local people. The artists depict the essence of religious life in a number of lucid, stylized and theatrical scenes that are partly accompanied by Buddhist chanting. The timeless harmony attested to by *City of Angels* is created by the sense of unity that exists between the location, the sound and the participants.

Babak Afrassiabi

The Necktie, 2003, 3' 40''.

The protagonist is asked to replace two men who are unable to attend their blind meeting. He fulfils his role as he is asked, representing each character by changing the colour of his necktie.



Here the impossibility of the plot is the dilemma of this short video. Through montage this dilemma is deferred until, at the end of the film, it is handed over to the viewer. Any identification with the protagonist is a second-hand one as his role is nothing but a mere replacement. His

identity is constructed through a series of flashbacks, all being the repetition of the same textual representation. In the end he embodies the failure of the meeting.

Tiong Ang

Ray, 1997, 3' 55''.

A long shoot, bathed in golden light, and in close up, of an old man with down's syndrome. He looks around, restless, impulsive, moving the whole time, while people around him walk and talk.

Barbara Bloom

The Diamond Lane, 1981, 5', 35''.

Bloom's *The Diamond Lane* was a film production, which was explicitly shown in the cinema. It is a trailer of a movie that did not exist as such, with pregnant and attractive visuals, and brilliant finishing. The inclusion of this work in this exhibition is intended to show a piece which has been of

importance the discussions in the video scene of Amsterdam. Questions about the way narratives are constructed within the moving image, whether of film or video, were a growing concern in the 70s and early 80s. So were issues regarding strategies artists could follow in producing works commenting on one medium and the results of showing them within the commercial system that sustain the same media. The Diamond Lane, which was created between 1978 and 1980, included a promotion campaign for the fictitious film, including film posters, advertisements, interviews with the director and the actors, and articles about the film.

The film has the characteristics of a trailer: highlights from a forthcoming film are presented, leading actors are announced, the public is invited to go and see the film. The Diamond Lane shows scenes which, at first sight, have nothing to do with one another. We see a highway, while a voice-over tells us something about "the diamond lane", the outermost lane of a highway which can only be used by car poolers. The following scene shows a meeting room, with a voice-over telling us about "a game of twenty questions". The scenes are linked together by thrilling music, returning actors and returning themes, but do not form a coherent story. They only develop into a story when the viewer, in his own way, begins to connect the scenes and the spoken text with each other. Filmed in Holland, Belgium and France, the cast consisted of Susan Davis, Eric Fischl, Marriane de Graaf and Cees van Hoorn.

Daniel Brun

Bleechin', 1980, 9' 20''.

Brun's works made a valuable contribution to the discussion and visibility of gender as understood in the 70s. Having reflected on the so-called SM gay community of

Amsterdam already in the late 70s, in *Bleeching* he focuses on the dress code that was to become the subject of much Dutch sensationalist journalism on the Amsterdam gay scene in the mid-80s. Making use of short advertisements like images of jeans, he crosses this piece with an appealing visual quality sustained by sexual tension.

Michel Angel- Cardenas

Me lavo las manos, 1980, 5'.

After reaching the 70s independent video artist's dream of showing his work on national television with "Somos libres?", a joint effort of the artist and De Appel Foundation as producer, Cardenas introduced explicit political questions of war and oppression, after having interrogated the politics of Dutch everyday life. This time the work was rejected by Dutch television.

Both the past and the present are drenched in the blood of injustice, wars and oppression. *Me lavo las manos* ('I wash my hands') deals with the need to assume a position in terms of any given situation, with the need to be aware of political and social injustice even if your own life is a peaceful and comfortable one. How responsible is our western society, where peace seems to be the most lasting, for the wrongs of history and those of the 'Third' World? I wash my hands... in innocence or blood? As we watch a man washing his hands, we hear the sentence 'me lavo las manos' repeated over and over again. Across the image, we read the superimposed names of history's trouble spots: Afghanistan, Wounded Knee, Auschwitz, Belfast, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Nagasaki, etc., etc. The hands are dripping blood...

Ulises Carrión

Aristotle's Mistake, 1985, 26'.

Several people from different cultural backgrounds (Dutch, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, Malayan, Polish,

Israeli), tell the love story of Maria Callas, Aristotle Onassis and Jacquelin Kennedy, and the consequences in their lives. Carrión, who was been working on questions related to language, film and television and structures of social phenomena, in which the private and the public intercede, took on issues of culture and cultural difference in several works from the mid-80s.

Yael Davids

Pillow, 2001

A man is lying on a bed. His head is inside a pillow. The pillow moves up and down, filled and emptied with air, simulating the rhythm of the man's breathing. When the pillow is emptied the shape of the face becomes visible on the surface of the pillow. Then it is filled up with air again, making his face disappear. The pillow seems an endless mechanism to measure the face: breathing as the maker of the image.

Alicia Framis

Apart Together, 1999, 4"10".

The room is completely dark, but every few seconds there is the flash of a stroboscopic lamp, and slowly but surely a recognizable image begins to take shape on your retina. A young woman is lying on a bed, wriggling herself out of her clothes. Each new image shows her more naked than the previous one. The camera is very close to her, one and a half metres away at the most. Things are becoming explicitly erotic when the woman begins to sigh more and more intensely, the situation becomes more and more electric: due to the presence of the camera; when the noises make you aware that the camera is also recording in the dark; when you notice that the camera must be hand-held, because the image is not static, and particularly when you can hear the woman's excited noises mixing with those of a man. This can only be the cameraman, who is getting more and more

involved in the erotic play. Hesitating between watching curiously and keeping an appropriate distance, you try to determine your position. But it is difficult to escape from the presence of your gaze upon the scene, first and foremost because the dark intervals between the images tempt you to keep your eyes fixed on the woman, but eventually also because the lens of the camera has become an extension of your own eyes - emphatically a sense that you share with the cameraman. And from exactly the same lack of distance, you see exactly what he sees, and what excites him so much.

Henryk Gajewski

Identity, 1985, 11' 45".

This work is explicitly concerned with questions of identity in the context of displacement. Gajewski, of Polish origin, interrogates language, place of origin, migrations, family and work with detachment and straight-forwardness.

David Garcia-Annie Wright

Speaking in Tongues, 1988, 12' 25".



A ghostly city created out of newspapers (New York is in the picture) is populated by grey Mickey Mouse characters. Their tedious movements end in an impressive image of destruction and terror. This tape was made in 1988, and, as in many of their other video tapes, Garcia & Wright appear as masters of political close reading.

Claudio Goulart & Flavio Pons

Portraits, 1985, 21'30".

The piece is a remarkable archive of the changing populations of The

Netherlands in the late 70s. In contrast with much of the portraiture practised in the 90s, which was grounded in the (photographic) history of anthropology and police portraiture, Goulart and Pons develop a loose-looking video which allows them to be pointed.



Commissioned for the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the City of Den Bosch, this video was made using (other) photographic traditions and video.

Noel Harding

Elephants, 1983, 5'.

'Elephants' is a pastiche of a TV commercial for an airline. Taking on the Canadian company, Harding, who was born in Canada, crosses this work with explicit references to his native country. The actor Richard Layzell blows up a plastic inflatable plane against a background of billowing clouds. Then this plane turns up in the railings of a zoo to be confronted with a real elephant. The meeting of two 'jumbos'.

Heiner Holtappels & Klaus Boegel

Monotonie, 1978, 24' 30".

This is the registration of Boegel and Holtappels' performance at the Performance Art Festival of the Beurschouwburg Brussel. Holtappels walks a circular line until he can no longer find his way and his balance; Boegel punches his head against a metal board which hangs on the wall.

Nan Hoover

Watching Out. A Trilogy, 1986, 14'.

Nan Hoover's works are

characterized by her poetic and slow videos in which the alternation of light and shadow allows her to talk about perception and gestures. But in *Watching Out*, she is concerned with the actions we culturally relate to the act of watching as such. In three stages a woman looks out over what appears to be a seascape. First she holds her hand above her eyes - a gesture which seems to aid perception - then she places her hand against her forehead so that the physical aspect of looking appears to have acquired its mental equivalent. At the end of the tape she brushes both hands through her hair as if confused. But these last minutes are preceded by one essential moment where she suddenly looks at us as if she wants us to take over, to be responsible for this act of seeing, her seeing. These images (in contrasting black-and-white) sometimes resemble abstract ink paintings on white paper. Significantly this video was made at the time Hoover started drawing again in the mid-80s, a "traditional" artistic practice considered taboo for artists using electronic media and that other Dutch video artists, like Cardenas, took up again as a medium to the outrage of the art world.

Christina Linaris-Corridou /Robert J. Nottrot

A Comedy, 1983, 7' 30".

This work, which was made for the exhibition "Dell'Inferno di Dante" in Aorta Gallery in Amsterdam, was inspired by Dante's voyage through hell in his "Divina Commedia". This work stresses that the journey through hell is a recurrent experience in our lives.

Mariano Maturana

What can we do against discrimination?, 1987, 1'45".

In a short video from 1987, Maturana raises the question of discrimination, much discussed in the 90s, but certainly sensed as present in

their daily life by artists and the migrant population in The Netherlands already in the 80s. In fact some years after the making of this video the first openly racist party, the Centrum Partij, won its first seats in Parliament. In images that recall the ones used by television to portray refugees and political prisoners in faraway countries, Maturana challenges the image and the message of much of the well-meant television imagery.

Raul Marroquin

Extra, extra, extra, read all about it. 1979, 6' 15''.

At a time when most video production was black and white, Marroquin produced a colour piece. "Extra, extra extra, ..." makes use of children's toys of comics characters (Spiderman, King Kong, etc.) to develop a narrative of actions and struggle, at the background of the political. There is no clue, and the sound track is what tells the tale. But the recurrent presence of the newspaper-kit selling a newspaper, and the fact that the newspaper is "Fandangos", the art magazine Marroquin published from Maastricht, make of this video both a manifesto and an advertisement.

Dan Oki

Navigations, 1995, 9', 10''.

"Rari nantes in gurgite vasto". The famous line by Vergil (Aen. 1.118) springs immediately to mind when contemplating the visual elements in this encyclopaedic sample of aquatic references. "Here and there an individual floats in a maelstrom", whereby all kinds of driftwood and crushed artifacts appear in the mind's eye as well. Oki undertakes a - nautical - wandering after first taking a decisive plunge into a swimming pool, accompanied by an a capella nocturnal chorus of crickets. His references sometimes tumble over each other, literally, in horizontal or vertical bars over the primary image. The efforts of a frenetically circling compass

also indicate a well-nigh inexhaustible range of possibilities. A limited summary: a) the sea with a little ship meandering on it, b) a brisk walk along a sun-drenched sandy path to the beach c) a helicopter flight over an empty ocean, d) a gurgling stream whereby the colours -electronically- fade just as quickly, e) a bucket in a well, f) coral reefs, g) an overflowing fountain, h) the rarified tick of a sonar. In keeping with the encyclopaedic set-up, Oki finishes with questions in seven languages (Greek, Latin, English, German, French, Russian and Croatian) about Not-being (like a drowning person) or (the puzzling nature of) tangible objects.

Atsushi Ogata

Aki no tawamure, 1991, 6' 30''.

Based on images of nature, like several works of Ogata in the 90s, *akino no tawamure* ("autumn playfulness") is a visual reflection on personal moods and feelings. He achieves, as in previous video tapes, a remarkable graphic quality.

Michal Shabtay

L'Odalisque Mecanique/Amour Endormi, 1984, 13'

Shabtay constructed a critical work about "orientalism" based on paintings that populated the market, the imagination of many and the representation of millions in the 19th and 20th Century (and still in the 21st). The cross-editing of images of animals and the figure of a lying, absent woman makes use of an impressive soundtrack connecting them.

Jeffrey Shaw

The Virtual Museum, 1991, 6'09"

This is a videopresentation of an interactive work that Shaw made using a complex relation between computer-generated images and the possibility of directing them through movements of the body of the spectator, who is seated in a chair. As in many of his works,

architecture plays an important role, and in this work it is the canonical space of the museum on which Shaw focuses. The video shows the five spaces that the viewer can access.

Debra Solomon

the_living, 1998, 30'.

Debra Solomon creates experiential interventions aimed at breaking down the barriers between art and viewer. The result is to alert visitors to the existence of a myriad of alternative realities that can be tapped into at any time.

In the project *the_living*, Solomon devised a series of performances, a 'wardrobe of live moments' showing a digi-persona (nicknamed *the_living*) apparently engaging, realtime, with new media. In a sequence of spectacular settings, (underwater in a swimming pool, in an ice cave, biking her way through the Dutch landscape, boating on the Amsterdam canals, spinning on a Ferris wheel etc...) Solomon invited audience participants to join in digi-persona *the_living's* fictional narratives and, with her, to re-enact moments of their lives on-line. Playing a real-life tamagotchi *the_living* asked her audience community to pretend-along. She stated, 'We live in Japan in a little plastic egg, little children will play us,' evoking the plot-line of William Gibson's *Idoru*. 'Ladies Reflective Chamber' documents an online video conferencing performance of digi-persona 'the_living' in which the visual of the desktop and the ambient audio of the computer is broadcast LIVE.

The video image is in fact directly tapped from the desktop - all sounds and images are computer generated and *the_living's* guests see and hear what she sees and hears. The video is a performance portrait of net activity. Solomon's work in the exhibition shows that the production of electronic pieces in The Netherlands has entered a new period.

Elsa Stansfield & Madelon Hooykaas

Flying Time, 1982, 8'.

The waterside on the beach and waves of clear water are rippling back and forth over the sand. A motionless woman casts a blue shadow: only her hair is moving. A woman's voice monotonously recites time distances and time differences, each time between two places on the route from Amsterdam to Sydney. Meanwhile, the image of the shoreline is gradually shifting towards the ever deeper and darker water. The images of the rolling water surface alternate with calm underwater images of fish, a turtle and a shark. The sound goes underwater too. On the 'way back' from Sydney to Amsterdam, the camera slowly travels back to the shore. The image ends once again with the woman's shadow on the beach. This work plays with time and tide – time in what is being told, tide in the images. The image of the female figure (only represented in the form of a shadow) is ambivalent: time and again, it is washed over by the waves, but when the water recedes, it is still intact on the beach. A shadow, normally speaking a fleeting thing, here proves itself equal to the strong natural force of the sea.

Sandra Sterle

True Stories (Story 1), 1998, 5', 53''.

True Stories is based on characters hiking around different locations, a process which continually coaxes different demeanours and recalls different memories. In (Story 1) Sterle is dressed up like Minnie Mouse, and she leads us into the forest towards her hidden secrets. We are only privy to her world of experience to a certain degree, a world dominated by a tone which is at once playful and threatening.

Nasrin Tabatabai

Old house, 1999, 16'.

This work was made at the request of Haci Cyhan, the Turkish owner of a shop in Rotterdam, who wished to show

his relatives in Turkey a film of the city where he lives and works. He set up the situation, directed the shooting, and conducted the dialogue. The video documents the re-scribing of the city of Rotterdam, a real-time re-mapping of the city by an immigrant. A series of architectonic representational signifiers, unexpected corners and significant endings, in a new discovered geography.

Lawrence Wiener

Plowmans Lunch, 1982, 28' 25''.

The word 'ploughman' means 'man who ploughs'. A ploughman's lunch is a square country meal, which can be ordered in English pubs. The word 'Plowman' in the title, apart from being the US spelling of ploughman, possibly also refers to the famous poem Piers Plowman by William Langland, the 14th-century English poet. The lengthy text describes a number of visions, in which the (Christian) figure Plowman leads the quest for truth and redemption. In Lawrence Wiener's tape, a ship is manned by a number of eccentric figures and two children. The texts recited by the characters appear to be art-historical discourses. The more complex and affected the text, the crazier and more playful the person reading it. "Constant placation of previous aesthetics consumes present resources to the extent that, as the needs & desires of a present aesthetic make themselves felt (even when the basis is in a previous aesthetic), the resources have been exhausted." The children, by contrast, are very mature in their behaviour, taking part, among other things, in political discussions. "Politics, I think it imposes on style too much." The tape is bilingual, the characters speak in both English and Dutch, which makes the text even more difficult to follow. Wiener seems to be making fun of (art) theory, and, since he was living at the time in Amsterdam, of Dutch criticism too. The ship, in turn, could be read as a reference to the Dutch colonial past.

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This exhibition has been possible thanks to the cooperation of the artists, the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (Netherlands Institute for Art History), Radio Netherlands (English Language Service) and the Netherlands Media Institute (Montevideo-Time Based Arts).

Organisation

Gate Foundation

Research & Curation

Sebastian Lopez

Research Assistant

Sannetje van Haarst

Texts

Sebastian Lopez and Netherlands Media Institute

English editing

Peter Mason

Design

Julia Schipper

Exhibition Co ordination

Sabine Gouw

DVDs

Netherlands Media Institute
Montevideo-Time Based Arts).

Technical Assistant

Arthur Bueno

Thanks to:

Claudio Goulart, Heiner Holtappels, Martha Hawley and World Wide Video Festival.