

# INTERFACE

Gränssnitt Grensesnitt Sidesnit  
Kohtauspinta Tengildi  
**nordic video art**

HUHTAMO,

VIDEO INSTALLATION

The Nordic Arts Centre/Nordiskt Konstcentrum/Pohjoismainen  
Taidekeskus, Suomenlinna, Helsinki 13 November - 9 December 1990.  
Moderna Museet, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 22 January - 6 February 1991.  
Frölunda Kulturhus, Gothenburg, April 1991

## Colophon

### Organization

The exhibition is organized by the Stiftelsen Nordisk Video-konst (The Nordic Video Art Foundation), Box 7005, S-103 86 STOCKHOLM, Sweden; phone +46-(0)8-108883; fax +46-(0)8-215468

Co-ordinators: Fredrik Ceson, Karl Holmqvist, Pål Wrangle, Clara von Rettig

The board of directors of the Nordic Video Art Foundation: Thor Elis Pålsson, Sven Pålsson, Minna Tarkka and Pål Wrangle (chairman)

The Nordic Video Art Foundation is backed by Föreningen Elektronisk Bildkonst (The Society for Electronic Visual Arts), Stockholm; MUU ry, Helsinki; UKS, Oslo and Thor Elis Pålsson, Reykjavik.

### Selection

Video installations: Ingebjørg Astrup, Erkki Huhtamo, Monica Nieckels, Sven Pålsson  
Video tapes: Mats Olsson, Torben Søborg

### Funding

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### Catalogue

Editor: Pål Wrangle

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Translations to English: Pål Wrangle (p 5, 28-29, 30-37, 40, 44 and passim), Anka Ryali (p 14-17), Erkki Huhtamo (p 21-23) and the artists. Most of the English texts have been reviewed by Kim Loughran and Donna Seftel.

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## Twenty fragmentary thoughts about video installation

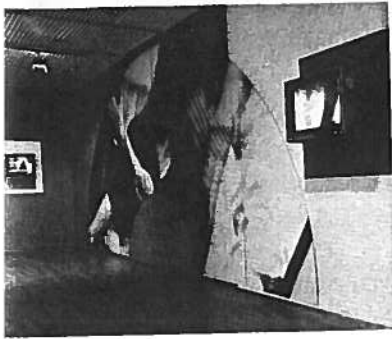
Erkki Huhtamo

english

1. Video installation is a multi-faceted interface of late 20th century art. It brings together art and technology, private and public space, subjective vision and the opaque surface of the machine, high culture and mass culture, the seriousness of the art object in the museum and the digital orgy of satellite television, the moments when the body disappears and is found again.
2. Video installation cannot be sent in a letter or put into a VCR. It cannot be turned into a video-copy and to a copy of a copy. Every man cannot afford to buy it for the living-room corner and an artist cannot produce it with his/her pocket money. One has to travel to the video installation, just as one has to travel to see Fontana di Trevi or Michelangelo's DAVID. As a rule an entrance fee has to be paid.
3. Video installation is a counterforce to "the aesthetics of disappearance" (Paul Virilio). It provides a tangible frame for the immaterial video image, fixes it to a time and a space. It gives video art back the aura of a unique art-object (or rather its simulation); it brings the restless media image to human proximity; it allows the breathing of the work and the breathing of the spectator be mingled.
4. A paradox: the video cassette is small, pocket-size and distant; video installation is big, public and close.
5. Video installation has its history, conditioned by changes in the art-world and the media-world, as well as by political conjunctures. There is a connection between video surveillance and 'closed circuit' installations; equally between video games and interactive installations. The character of video installation—and our perception of it—changes as the position of video in the society changes.
6. Television was a new piece of furniture in the homes of the 50's. According to Vito Acconci, it was placed in the cultural position traditionally reserved for sculpture: "Compared to other furniture, the television set couldn't be used, it could only be looked at; it had the uselessness that one associates with art."
7. The arts rushed out from the Academy in the 50's. They claimed that the barrier separating "art" and "life" had to be removed, and ended up in the transfiguration of "life". They fixed their attention on television as the totem of the new private-centered order. Fluxus-artists Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell dragged the television set away from the living-room corner, ridiculed it and maltreated it. They conceived



Klaus vom Bruch, EINSTEIN-BEAM II, 1989.  
Photo: Klaus vom Bruch.



Dara Birnbaum,  
THE DAMNATION OF FAUST: EVOCATION, 1984

it as a 'prepared ready-made' to make visible its implicit mythical, philosophical, and political dimensions.

8. Video art was born as installation art, even before videotaping and playback were available for artists.
9. Interaction has been a feature of video installation from the very beginning—that between the video image and the artist-constructed environment; that between the spectator and the work. Nam June Paik called his early pieces "participation TV"; they required the visitor's active participation. The "closed circuit" installations at the end of the 60's forced the spectator to encounter his/her own image, either in real time or with a (slight) time-lag. Recent interactive installations, exploiting the multi-channel video-disc technology, bring the requirement of interaction to another level: the work of art is realized only through spectator activity. It's for the artist to provide the framework.
10. According to Rosalind Krauss it was still possible to define the modernist sculpture of the early 20th century in negative terms in relation to classical sculpture; it had become "nomadic", losing its commemorative function, its fixed place and becoming largely self-referential. In the early 60's, sculpture had entered "a categorical no-man's land: it was what was on or in front of a building that was not the building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape".
11. Video installation is the material, spatial and 'abiding' dimension of video art—nevertheless, it escapes definitions. Even the presence of the television monitor or the video image are inadequate as common denominators. Peter Campus uses the video projector, the monitors in Fabrizio Plessi's *MATERIA PRIMA* are silent and grey like stones, like primeval graves.
12. Wulf Herzogenrath proposes to speak about "video sculpture" instead of "video installation", because it "refers to the world of 'old art'". According to Edith Decker "video sculpture" is closer to the traditional arts as has been thought. Is the Academy making a counter-offensive, a bloodless *coup d'état*? The concept "installation" (like *readymade*, *objet trouvé* or *assemblage*) was born as part of the avant-garde's own discourse, connoting its values, remarks Davidson Gliotti.
13. Vittorio Fagone states that the concepts "video installation" and "video sculpture" can alongside the ideological debate be used to define two types of work. "Video installation" is based on the interaction between the video image and the artist-created environment. "Video sculpture" is a piece, where the video image is placed within a virtual, self-sufficient construction.

14. The breakthrough of image-processing on television and the over-heated state of the art market in the 80's have plunged videoartists into an identity crisis. It has become practically impossible to make a "formal" distinction between a video art tape and the flow of commercial "neo" television. Also, how could one persuade anybody to sit and watch video tapes in the museum, while TV is overflowing with its glossier imagery?
15. The "immateriality" of the video-tape has become both a blessing and a curse for the artist; it hasn't become an object to collect or to invest in—compared to 'postmodern' photography, not to mention painting and graphics.
16. Video artists have had four alternative roads in the 80's. Some have been enlisted by the television, are on its payroll and have accepted the rules of its game. Some have retired to the margin, homeless and bitter, finding consolation in the Romantic myth of the impoverished artist. Some have gone looking for fame, status and fortune as refugees in the Academy. Some have chosen the road towards multi-media art, reducing video to one medium among the others. These roads frequently cross.
17. The impressive entry of video installation into museums, art mega-events and public collections is a sign of its coming of age. Or perhaps: of a great surrender, of early senility?
18. Video installations frame and reduce the play of the flamboyant empty signifiers of the dominant media. Even as multi-monitor installations they fragment the money-jointed electronic space and press the mental "pause"-button. They want less rather than more images/sounds.
19. Video installation is gradually entering urban public space, being transformed into a permanent (but strangely fleeting) videomument, a "cultivated" neighbour of the marketing videowalls. Nam June Paik and Dara Birnbaum's RIO VIDEOWALL are pioneers in the West; in Japan they are much further ahead.
20. Video installation has come full circle in a quarter of a century. It was born with the arts' great escape from the Academy. Television was one of the things they encountered. Little by little the TV-sets—prepared, multiplied, transfigured—have been carried back through the Academy gates. They have been put on pedestals. Somewhere outside even more massive pedestals are built, to make video art a new "commemorative representation" (Rosalind Krauss), the Arch of Constantine of our post-industrial and preapocalyptic era. The movement goes on, further back in history and on to the future.



Bill Viola, THE CROSS OF ST JOHN.