

MIT List Visual Arts Center
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Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995

February 8 – April 15, 2018



ABOVE Ernst Caramelle, *Video-Ping-Pong*, 1974

Two video monitors, two video players, two video tapes, black and white, sound, 45 min (loop), two metal-racks (118.5 x 60 x 48 cm each), table tennis table, table tennis rackets and ping pong balls
Reconstruction table, metal-racks and technical equipment: Ernst Caramelle with Generali Foundation 2000
Courtesy Generali Foundation Collection — Permanent Loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg
© Generali Foundation, Photo: Werner Kaligofsky



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Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995

Hayden and Reference Galleries February 8 – April 15, 2018

Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995 shines a spotlight on a body of work in the history of video art that has been largely overlooked since its inception. Exploring the connections between our current moment and the point at which video art was transformed dramatically with the entry of large-scale, cinematic installation into the gallery space, *Before Projection* presents a tightly focused survey of monitor-based sculpture made since the mid-1970s.

From video art's beginnings, artists engaged with the sculptural properties of the television set, as well as the possibilities afforded by combining multiple moving images next to each other. Artists assembled monitors in various configurations and video walls, and, from the 1980s onwards, incorporated TV sets into elaborate environments and architectural settings. In concert with technological advances, video editing and effects also grew more sophisticated. These video works articulated a range of conceptual and thematic concerns related to the television medium, seriality, figuration, landscape, and identity. Much of this work was developed in critical opposition to television and cinema alike. The material heft of the cube monitor, before the advent of the flat screen, also anchored these works firmly in three-dimensional space.

Before Projection focuses on the period after very early experimentation in video and before video art's full institutional arrival—coinciding with the wide availability of video projection equipment—in the gallery and museum alongside painting and sculpture. Proposing to examine what aesthetic claims these works might make in their own right, the exhibition aims to resituate monitor sculpture more fully into the narrative between early video and projection as well as assert its relevance for the development of sculpture over the course of the 1980s in general.

Dara Birnbaum

b. 1946, United States; lives and works in New York

Attack Piece, 1975

Two-channel video (transferred from original 8mm film footage and 35mm slides) with two-channel mono-mix sound, black-and-white, 7:40 min.
Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/London

When viewing *Attack Piece*, the visitor stands between two monitors facing one another. One monitor shows Super 8 footage shot by artists David Askevold, Cyne Cobb, Dan Graham, and Ian Murray. The four successively “attack” a seated and stationary Birnbaum, 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. Both the artist and the attackers are trapped in these patterns, just as the viewer is trapped between the two display monitors. *Attack Piece* sets out to reclaim the medium for the female filmmaker and her gaze: training her lens onto mainly male camera operators, she complicates distinctions between subject and object, stalker and stalked, attacker and attacked.

The carpet and monitors in the work recall a living room; *Attack Piece*, therefore, considers the ways in which media from outside the home can infiltrate domestic space. She also configures the camera as a weapon, engaging with contemporaneous theories that parsed cinema’s gendered and objectifying gaze. When Birnbaum—originally trained in architecture—began to work with video in the early 1970s, she noticed two distinct threads emerging in the nascent medium: the first was body- or performance-oriented, the second was bent on critiquing the medium of television. As Birnbaum characterized it, the former was personal, the latter social. This early work of hers deliberately situates itself between these threads, giving form to the popular second-wave-feminist rallying cry, “The personal is political.”

Ernst Caramelle

b. 1952, Austria; lives and works in Karlsruhe, Frankfurt, and New York

Video Ping-Pong, 1974

Two-channel black-and-white video installation, two monitors, two media players, metal shelves, Ping-Pong table, paddles, and balls, 45 min.
Courtesy the artist and Generali Foundation, Vienna

Ernst Caramelle made a series of video sculptures during an early-career fellowship at MIT’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies, where he was in residence from 1974 to 1975. This includes *Video Ping-Pong*, which was first exhibited in 1975 at MIT’s Hayden

Gallery, the predecessor to the present-day List Visual Arts Center.

Video Ping-Pong juxtaposes a real Ping-Pong table with a videotaped table-tennis match, displayed on two monitors placed

at either end of the court. Sounds of the bouncing Ping-Pong ball are audible, although no ball is visible between the two monitors. A ball can be activated in the piece, however, if viewers were to play a game of their own on the real table behind them.

Caramelle made his last video work in 1979, but nonetheless retained his interest in the original and copy, which he continues to explore in other media. While at MIT,

Caramelle also worked on a series called *Forty Found Fakes*, in which he invented works that were intended to be mistaken for the art of various contemporaries, including Muntadas, Friederike Pezold, and Nam June Paik (all included in *Before Projection*). “These works could only be designated fakes if they represent works not yet made by the artist,” Caramelle writes, “since the artists in question are still living. The fakes therefore precede their originals.”

Takahiko Iimura

b. 1937, Japan; lives and works in New York and Tokyo

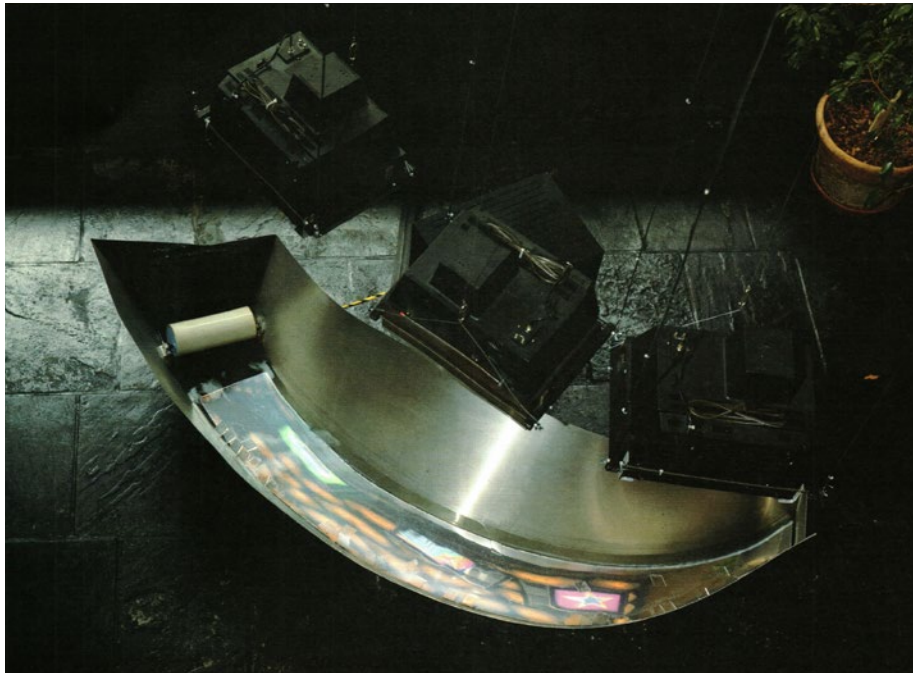
TV for TV, 1983

Two identical monitors face to face, ed. of 3 + 1 a.p.
Courtesy the artist and Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn

In *TV for TV*—which Iimura sometimes calls *TV Confrontation*—two monitors are positioned face-to-face, each tuned to a different broadcast station. Their respective streams are only directed toward the other television set, rendering their images nearly invisible to the viewer. Simultaneously, the work explores properties unique to video and distinct from film: the medium’s capacity for immediacy and simultaneity, which in *TV for TV* is realized through its utilization of real-time broadcasts. On view in the gallery for months at a time, the work highlights television’s incessant streaming of images, a nonreciprocal, perpetual flow

that seems almost impervious to the presence or interest of a human viewer.

Iimura began as a filmmaker concerned with the formal properties and materiality of celluloid. In these early works, he often gave form to varying linguistic descriptions (and thereby conceptual understandings) of film. In English, film is referred to as a “moving picture,” whereas the Japanese word 映画 (*eiga*) translates more literally as “reflected picture.” While *TV for TV* explores the idea of the “reflected” image, it is interesting to note that the first character 映 can also be translated as “projected.”



Shigeko Kubota

b. 1937, Japan; d. 2015, United States

River. 1979–81

Three-channel color video installation with steel trough, mirrors, motor, and water, 32:17 min.
Courtesy Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, New York

River was doubly inspired by a gigantic swimming pool featuring an artificial wave machine that Kubota had seen while in Düsseldorf on a DAAD fellowship, and by the centrality of rivers in Buddhist thought (her father was a Buddhist monk). The work is composed of three monitors hung at eye-level above a reflective trough equipped with a wave motor. The monitors alternate footage of Kubota swimming with brightly colored graphic shapes and hearts, which were created with state-of-the-art postproduction equipment of the time. Reflected on the surface of the water, the images' legibility is periodically disrupted by the wave motor. The work typifies Kubota's

recurring interest in water and video as apt mediums to represent cyclicity.

The artist often preferred the term "video sculpture" to the now more common "video installation." She was explicit about her intentions to use video equipment sculpturally, stating: "I wanted to be unique. So I made big video installations. . . . You don't need so many single-channel artists. But you need special [ones], like video installation artists or video sculptors." Her piece *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase* (1976) was the first video sculpture to be acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Mary Lucier

b. 1944, United States; lives and works in New York

Equinox. 1979/2016

Seven-channel video installation with sound, 33:00 min.
Courtesy the artist and Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., New York

Between March 9 and 21, 1979—the latter date was the vernal equinox—Mary Lucier recorded seven days' sunrise from the thirty-first floor of Independence Plaza in Lower Manhattan, a building with a view spanning 180 degrees, from the Empire State Building in the northeast to the Statue of Liberty in the southwest. Each day, she progressively zoomed in on the sun, while gradually shifting the camera's angle northward to follow the sun's natural movement. And each day, broader marks were burned onto the camera's internal vidicon tube, which manifest on the tape as a series of dark greenish streaks in the sky that trail the path of the sun. 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.

Equinox is the last of eight video installations that Lucier made between 1975 and 1979 exploring "burn," and her first work in color. The artist first encountered the technical video phenomenon, burn, by chance. Trained in still photography, Lucier was videotaping a dance performance outdoors when she noticed what seemed to be evidence of a hair on her lens while looking through the video camera's viewfinder—a tiny black-and-white monitor, with a magnifier in the eyepiece. She cleaned the lens, but the mark remained. It was not a hair after all, but a burn on the camera's internal recording tube, caused by accidentally pointing the camera at the sun, which can alter and can ultimately destroy the photosensitive material on a camera's vidicon tube (although weak burns can erase themselves over time).

Muntadas

b. 1942, Spain; lives and works in New York

Credits. 1984

Single-channel video, cube monitor, wall armature, 27:02 min.
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

Throughout his career, Muntadas—who taught at MIT from 1990 to 2014—has carried out a critical investigation into technology, its cultural functions, and ideological underpinnings. His oeuvre has long considered the relationship between public and private space—spaces bridged and blurred by television and other media, often viewed in the home but transmitted

from outside. Many early video artists gravitated toward the medium of broadcast television because of its capacity to reach broad audiences beyond the gallery or museum.

Slots for artist's productions on public-access TV were limited and purchasing advertising for the most part unaffordable, which complicated the conception of

television as a “public” arena. These questions of access and control are precisely what Muntadas has long critiqued, interrogating power relations behind media including the internet, print publications, advertisements, and of course television, and the ways in which these platforms are co-opted to censor expression and propagate ideology. In *Credits* (1984), Muntadas edited together a sequence of credits, such as those found at the end of films and television programs, and displayed them in a loop. Foregrounding what the artist has called the “invisible”

information underlying mass media productions, *Credits* considers the features of the credit sequence—typography, size, rolling speed, and audio track—as revealing indices of hierarchy and representation. In so doing, Muntadas 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. In a tape that he intends to have no beginning and no end, Muntadas deconstructs and rereads the credits until they become pure information.

Tony Oursler

b. 1957, United States; lives and works in New York

Psychomimescape II, 1987

Mixed media, acrylic paint, wood, glass, resin, 2-channel video with sound
Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

“My early idea of what could be art for my generation was an exploded TV,” Oursler has said. *Psychomimescape II* is one of Oursler’s early monitor-based sculptures, predating the artist’s well-known works involving video projections on dolls and dummies. This work takes the form of what Oursler calls a “model world.” Mounted atop a pedestal, it resembles an architectural model; rendered in somber gray, it depicts a nuclear cooling tower next to a medieval-style tower with a crenellated parapet in a barren landscape. Embedded in the structure are two tiny monitors: one placed at the bottom of a depression in the ground, streaming live-broadcast TV images of fireworks, the other located in the tower, playing back an absurdist short narrative employing hand-drawn and computer-generated animation.

The narrator in this video seems a tad unhinged, if not paranoid. Oursler captures a feeling familiar to many in the late 1980s, when the escalating nuclear-arms race at the tail end of the Cold War instilled widespread uneasiness. The impression of delirium is amplified by the echoed distortion of the narrator’s voice as he recounts the true story of an office employee who plants tiny amounts of plutonium under his boss’s desk each day. “All the elements are there, but they’re slightly different,” the narrator concludes. “The population number, the drunken teenagers, drugs and religion, aplastic anemia, war hero, replica, the stars on the flag—the only thing missing was the logic.” The narrative points to the experience of overstimulation from which no sense can be made: “Options, options...” the narrator continues. “It takes nerves of steel and an iron will to conduct the decision making.”

Nam June Paik

b. 1932, Korea; d. 2006, United States

Charlotte Moorman II, 1995

Nine antique TV cabinets, two cellos, one 13-in. color TV, two 5-in. color TVs, eight 9-in. color TVs, and two-channel video
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Hays Acquisition Fund

In 1964, Paik made his first “robot” sculpture—titled *Robot K-456*, in collaboration with electronics engineer Shuya Abe—in his series of sculptural assemblages that employ TV monitors to depict figures. That year Paik also met his longtime collaborator Charlotte Moorman, a classical cellist who was introduced to experimental performance by her friend and roommate Yoko Ono. The robots remained a consistent part of Paik’s practice: in 1986, responding to television’s outside domestic role and depictions of the nuclear family in TV sitcoms, he began his series *Family of Robots*, which included a grandfather, an uncle, a mother, and so on. In the 1990s, he started making robots of historical figures, such as Genghis Khan and Li Tai Po, as well as of his friends—John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Moorman. The robot

sculpture on view, *Charlotte Moorman II*, depicts his friend and collaborator with a cello for a torso, monitors for extremities that show footage of Moorman (at times distorted), and wires for hair. The work was made after her death in 1991.

Among Paik and Moorman’s most famous collaborations is *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), in which Moorman played the cello while wearing a “bra” made of two protruding TV monitors held in place by Plexiglas boxes and transparent vinyl straps. (Paik and Moorman were later both fellows at MIT’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies in 1982 and 1986, respectively.) A year after he made *Charlotte Moorman II*, Paik suffered from a disabling stroke, making this one of his final works, and aptly reflecting his lifelong muses: music, monitors, and Moorman.

Friederike Pezold

b. 1945, Austria

Die neue leibhaftige Zeichensprache (The New Embodied Sign Language), 1973–76

Four digitized videos with sound, 10:00 min. each
Hamburger Kunsthalle

Part of Friederike Pezold’s major video series *The New Embodied Sign Language*, this sculpture by the same title comprises four monitors displaying videos of close-ups of the artist’s body altered by theatrical makeup. The videos (subtitled, respectively, *Augenwerk* [Eye Work], *Mundwerk* [Mouth Work], *Bruststück* [Breast Piece], and

Schamwerk [Pubic Work]) are shown on monitors stacked on top of each other to reach roughly the height of a human body, though the body parts are not represented in proportion to one another. Pezold painted her body white, and then outlined or blacked out certain features. Her pubic area, for example, is rendered as a triangle,

thus abstracting the body and limiting its exposure to the viewer. As a result, in *The New Embodied Sign Language*, “the female body is no longer the projection surface for (male) voyeurism; instead the high degree of formalization makes us perceive it purely as a sign,” as curator Johanna Pröll writes.

Pezold, who in 1995 founded the Vienna Museum of Video Art and Body Art, was

interested in subverting classic dualisms between painter and model, subject and object. While for feminists the advent of video offered the promise of a medium whose history was still uncharted by men, it nonetheless had to contend with the existing tradition of representations of women in film, painting, and beyond. Pezold, then, sets out to reclaim images of the female body from an objectifying history.

Adrian Piper

b. 1948, United States; lives and works in Berlin

Out of the Corner, 1990

Seventeen-channel video installation with sound, 26:00 min., with seventeen monitors, sixteen pedestals, table, twenty-three chairs, and sixty-four gelatin silver prints
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of the Peter Norton Family Foundation

Piper, “The Artist Formerly Known as African-American,” is often assumed to be white. This fact was the subject of her video sculpture *Cornered* (1989), in which the artist appears on a monitor behind an upturned table. She begins her dialogue by stating, “I am black.” Confronting the gap between the way others identified her (by appearance) and the way she identified (by genetics), she spends the next twenty minutes explaining why passing for white would be self-hating. While she takes herself as a point of departure, she ultimately concludes that “the problem is not just my personal one, about my racial identity. It’s also your problem if you have a tendency to behave in a derogatory or insensitive manner towards blacks when you see none present.” Piper also unpacks conventions of racial classification, including

the “one-drop rule,” which claimed that if a person had one drop of African American blood, they were to be considered black.

Out of the Corner was made the following year, and features a version of *Cornered* alongside sixteen additional monitors with a soundtrack of “We Are Family” by Sister Sledge. The additional monitors show apparently white men and women who carry on her message, repeating: “Some of my female ancestors were so-called ‘house niggers’ who were raped by their white slave masters. If you are an American, some of yours probably were too.” Sixty-four black-and-white photographs of black women that Piper rephotographed from *Ebony* are displayed on the surrounding walls. Piper concludes by asking viewers what they are going to do now that they know they are black, urging them to critically self-reflect.



Diana Thater

b. 1962, United States, lives and works in Los Angeles

Snake River, 1994

Three video monitors, three media players, digital files, 30:00 min. each
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York/London

Thater frequently trains her camera on environmental subjects, often filming flora and fauna, but her investigations of such topics are paired with simultaneous explorations of the video medium’s structural and formal properties. *Snake River* utilizes three monitors, each displaying footage in one of the three primary colors—red, green, or blue—which together are layered to make a full-color image on a CRT monitor. This tactic makes visible the “additive” system of color mixing, which is usually imperceptible, highlighting not only technological standards but also human visual perception, which discerns color

through the red, green, and blue receptor cones in the eye.

The three monitors feature footage of the American West, harking back to the cinematic genre of Westerns yet forgoing any narrative thread. Thater particularly echoes the movies of director John Ford, whose depictions of the West emphasized the land’s vastness to symbolize freedom, opportunity, and sublimity, and also alludes to the work of certain Western landscape photographers who preceded him. Technological advancements in photography were concurrent with westward expansion and instrumental

to the project, justifying the doctrine of Manifest Destiny by representing the terrain as an untouched land of opportunity. *Snake River* sets out to counter the spectacle of video projection, which was

starting to gain traction in mid-1990s, and also resists ideologically-charged representational tropes of the sublime West by way of humble monitors and technically deconstructed footage.

Maria Vedder

b. 1948, Germany, lives and works in Berlin

***PAL oder Never the Same Color*, 1988**

Video installation with twenty-five monitors, sound, 5:32 min.

Camera: Stephan Simon; edit: Martina Kaimeier; music: Uwe Wiesemann, Gerhard Zilligen; produced by Museum Ludwig Köln, Germany
Courtesy the artist

PAL oder Never the Same Color was first presented in 1988, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the introduction of the PAL (Phase Alternating Line) color-encoding system to the European Broadcasting Union. PAL is the system used to standardize color broadcasting in Europe (as well as in Australia and much of Asia, Africa, and South America), developed for analog television. NTSC, an acronym for the National Television System Committee but mockingly dubbed "Never The Same Color," is the competing standard in North America. PAL was developed in Europe in an effort to remedy NTSC's shortcomings, while NTSC, the technically inferior system, remains the norm in the United States.

PAL oder Never the Same Color consists of twenty-five monitors arranged in a grid, with one TV set removed from the matrix and set aside. The monitors construct a wall in a manner reminiscent of bricks or

pixels composing an image. Looped on the monitors is historic television footage designed to test color, including a host who presents herself in PAL and then NTSC to illustrate the difference. Also featured is a German logo that signaled a color broadcast (at a time when black-and-white was still standard) that reads **IN FARBE** (in color). The video cuts to a more familiar color-bar test, and proceeds to individually test the electronic primary colors of television (red, green, and blue). For instance, a "B" for blue appears alongside footage of a sky, a blue rose, and finally, a standard blue screen. Not only, then, does the work nod to different technological systems for calibrating color across cultures, but also their differing symbolic referents. The blue flower, for instance, would have been more widely recognized as the Blue Flower from the Romantic tradition in Germany.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Reception Wednesday, February 7, 6–8 PM

Graduate Student Talk Thursday, February 15, 6 PM

Visible Secrecy

Speaker: Agnes Cameron, MIT Media Lab
Viral Communications Group

Graduate Student Talk Friday, February 23, 12:30 PM

Future of Digital Media Arts in the Museum

Speaker: Rachel Thompson, MIT
Comparative Media Studies/Writing

Catalyst Conversations Monday, March 5, 7 PM

Immersed: Video. Art. Technology.

Speakers: Judith Barry, Professor and Program Director, MIT Program in Art, Culture, and Technology; George Fifield, Director, Boston Cyberarts

Talk and Discussion Friday, March 16, 12:30 PM

Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, and the Video Body

Speaker: Marina Isgro, Nam June Paik Research Fellow at the Harvard Art Museums

All programs are free and open to the general public. RSVPs are required.

For more information about these events and to RSVP visit:
listart.mit.edu/events-programs.

Tour Sunday, March 18, 2–4 PM

Art and Technology Tour at the List Center and ICA/Boston

Speaker: Emily Watlington, Curatorial Research Assistant, MIT List Visual Arts Center

Panel Discussion Thursday, April 5, 6 PM

Screen as Material

Speakers: Sondra Perry, Artist; Tony Oursler, Artist; David A. Ross, Chair, MFA Program in Art Practice at the School of Visual Arts

Moderator: Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions and Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center

Slow Art Day Saturday, April 14, 2 PM

A Closer Look at Art and Technology

Speaker: Emily Garner, Campus and Public Programs Coordinator, MIT List Visual Arts Center

Before Projection: Video Sculpture 1974–1995 is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions and Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

The exhibition is presented as part of a citywide partnership of arts and educational institutions organized to recognize the outsized role greater Boston has played in the history and development of technology. The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston initiated this partnership to link concurrent exhibitions and programs related to the themes of the ICA exhibition *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today*.

SUPPORT

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SPONSORS

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INSIDE Shigeko Kubota, *River*, 1979–81

Three-channel color video installation with steel trough, mirrors, motor, and water, 32:17 min.
Courtesy Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, New York

Diana Thater, *Snake River*, 1994

Three video monitors, three media players, digital files, 30:00 min. each
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York/London