

# Manhattan Arts

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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COVER AWARD WINNER:  
**NICK PALMISANO**

"Scaffold Boy"  
oil on canvas  
74" x 36"

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**BARBARA LONDON**  
CURATOR, MoMA

ALSO FEATURING:  
"ARTISTS IN THE 1990's"

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# Barbara London

## Curator of "Video Spaces: Eight Installations" at the Museum of Modern Art

By Donna Cameron



Barbara London in her office at MoMA. Photo credit: Donna Cameron

**W**hen television was introduced to the American public at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, it thrilled those who saw it. The cameras, lights, gigantic equipment, and hordes of technicians were as impressive as the miracle of the instantaneous transmission of image and sound. In the early decades, the development of TV paralleled the development of film: both depended on a studio setting for recording. However, in 1967 Sony introduced the first small format recording system, and the Video Art Revolution had begun.

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Video Spaces: Eight Installations", curated by **Barbara London**, offers the public a chance to encounter video sculptures and environments created by eight of the foremost video artists in the world. These visions address issues surrounding video technology: its history, its current flowing through our daily lives. The show runs from June 21 through September 12.

The artists in this exhibition are **Judith Barry**, **Brad Miskell**, and **Tony Ousler** (New York), **Gary Hill** (Seattle), **Stan Douglas** (Vancouver), **Chris Marker** (Paris, France), **Marcel Odenbach** (Cologne, Germany), **Teiji Furuhashi** (Kyoto, Japan), and **Bill Viola** (Long Beach, CA).

In this exclusive interview London offers insight into current video trends.

**D.C.** Why are you doing this particular show at this time?

**B.L.** The exhibition is very timely. It is an opportunity to show the public the maturity of this field.

**D.C.** How do these artists use video art as a contemporary social tool?

**B.L.** To me these are works that are addressing such issues as memory and history. Time is an element in all of them. One of the works, Teiji Furuhashi's "Lovers", is questioning what the word *lovers* means in this day, when we do live with the plague called AIDS.

**D.C.** How do you think that your video exhibitions stretch the limits of the aesthetic represented by this museum?

**B.L.** I think it is more here that we choose work that stretches the parameters of the tools. The Museum of Modern Art has as its mandate to show the art of our time and the art of our time is the art of the 20th century. so here we are at the end of the century and video is the primary tool. It's part of the landscape that we all live in and anyone who walks in the door walks in knowing that this is the Museum of Modern Art, so they will find Picasso and they will find Chris Marker and they will find Alfred Hitchcock, but they will also find recent work -- like the works in this show -- and that's going to stretch them a little bit. It's going to stretch their imagination differently than something made 80 years ago.

**D.C.** I call to mind a development in oil painting in the 1830s, when there were no tubes of paint, and painters were constricted because they had to mix their own pigment. Then Rand, an American painter, invented the collapsible tin tube, making it possible for painters to work outdoors, and, ultimately, for the revolution of impressionism, and (sic) our current trends in modern art. How has the advent of video expanded the traditional visual arts?

**B.L.** I think these things are always relayed back and forth. I don't think that painting is ever going to die, and I don't think that photography is ever going to die either. And certainly as photography developed in the 19th century, that affected how painters painted, how they say, and yes, the tubes of paint. It meant that one could go out of the studio and work outdoors. Accessing video tools has similarly affected contemporary sculptors, performance artists,

filmmakers. So we've thought out the parameters -- what is specific to video? What does an **image** mean today?

**D.C.** Getting back to the exhibit, take Chris Marker for example. What were his reasons for working with video?

**B.L.** Oh, I think for Chris, well, he's always worked alone. And, now he can do all kinds of things at home with his simple computer. He's interested in memory and history. He's the oldest artist in the show. He's been making video for 30 years, and films for 50 years. In this piece he's limiting himself to the vernacular of film from the early silent cinema. And that's the title of his piece, "Silent Movie." The piece is really all about montage.

**D.C.** What about Bill Viola's piece "Slowly Turning Narrative"? Does this relate to narrative filming or storytelling?

**B.L.** Well, I could just use the words random access. For Bill, that title "Slowly Turning Narrative" is relating to, not necessarily film narrative, but to the narrative that we have that runs in our mind. It's very much happening in a room with two projections. There is a wall in the middle, 13' wide, and it revolves twice a minute. One side is matte and one side is mirrored. Those images fly all over the room when they hit that mirrored surface. It's a lot about the mind.

**D.C.** What personal or social issues will confront viewers here?

**B.L.** Each one of these works is a vision. Each one comes from the artists and so they are related to their lives. For example, for Marcel Odenbach, in "Make a Fist in the Pocket," it's his struggle to find his place in German history. He's a German who's around 40 years old, who was in high school in the 60s. then he saw all that idealism dashed by what's been going on with the (neo-nazis) now. The Hitler chapter that we all thought was a closed book is not closed.

**D.C.** Which of the pieces work with space like a traditional sculpture, for example, 360 degrees, viewer approach, a free-standing work of art?

**B.L.** There are three. One is the Gary Hill, "Inasmuch as It Is Always Already Taking Place", which you can think about in terms of a still life. It is a body represented in actual size on 16 different rasters (the video monitor screens without the outside casing), so it has the feeling of a still life. You look at front on, as in a painting. Only this still life happens to be three-dimensional -- it's a shelf in space.

**D.C.** How does video art happen? Do people learn a technical vocabulary and master it, or can anyone pick up a camcorder and make a great work of video art?

**B.L.** I think it is a combination of things. A visual vocabulary. Someone who's really been working and thinks about image-making. Some kind of clarity. Some kind of vision. Since the late 50s, with Bob Rauschenberg and after Black Mountain, people were really combining and trying their hands at different things. Painting became sculpture like sculpture became painting or film became painterly.

**D.C.** Or film became video and video became film. Complete circles.

**B.L.** Or like what's video and what's film -- they're both moving; they both have montage.

**D.C.** From the beginning of time, the artist has had a vision of his or her time and place. Certainly the modern video artist is no more or less limited than the prehistoric people who painted on the walls of their caves. suppose a natural catastrophe were to happen, and the Museum of Modern Art were buried for thousands of years. What type of video art would you like to see excavated and why?

**B.L.** What kind of work -- **excavated?** Well, I could look at all of the works in this show and say that they represent this moment... Stan Douglas's "Evening" looking at how information is processed through the news... Tony Oursler's little fetish standing by the doorway of his installation "System for Dramatic Feedback" screaming "Oh, No!" so that people will either laugh or stand back, or else become involved. Or, like Barry and Miskell's work "Hardcell" -- setting up a psychological situation. Twisting normal storytelling convention. doing it in a way to make you stop...

**D.C.** Does this fine art provide more of an "experience" of reality than the new virtual reality technology because of the human approach?

**B.L.** As with any object that's in the Museum of Modern Art, every viewer is going to have a different experience, because he/she comes to it from their own life. And each experience is valid.

**D.C.** So, not to exclude, but to include.

**B.L.** Yes. Virtual reality is so hyped, it's such jargon -- putting on headsets and then having the control to move around a computer designed space -- in contrast, I see these pieces in "Video Spaces" as being more environmental social, and raising a lot of questions.

**D.C.** So, it's a rich, varied exhibit, which employs the various media which have developed in or persisted through the 20th century. It's a really nice way to work towards the end of the millennium.

**B.L.** And, discover the world of the artist: **nothing** comes from nowhere.

*Vladimir Ovchinnikov, Alexander Sigov  
Vladimir Dukhovlinov, Aron Zinshtein  
Yuri Jarki, Alexander Goutchine*



**SAVVA  
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*Aron Zinshtein. Girlfriends.  
Etching, 1983*

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