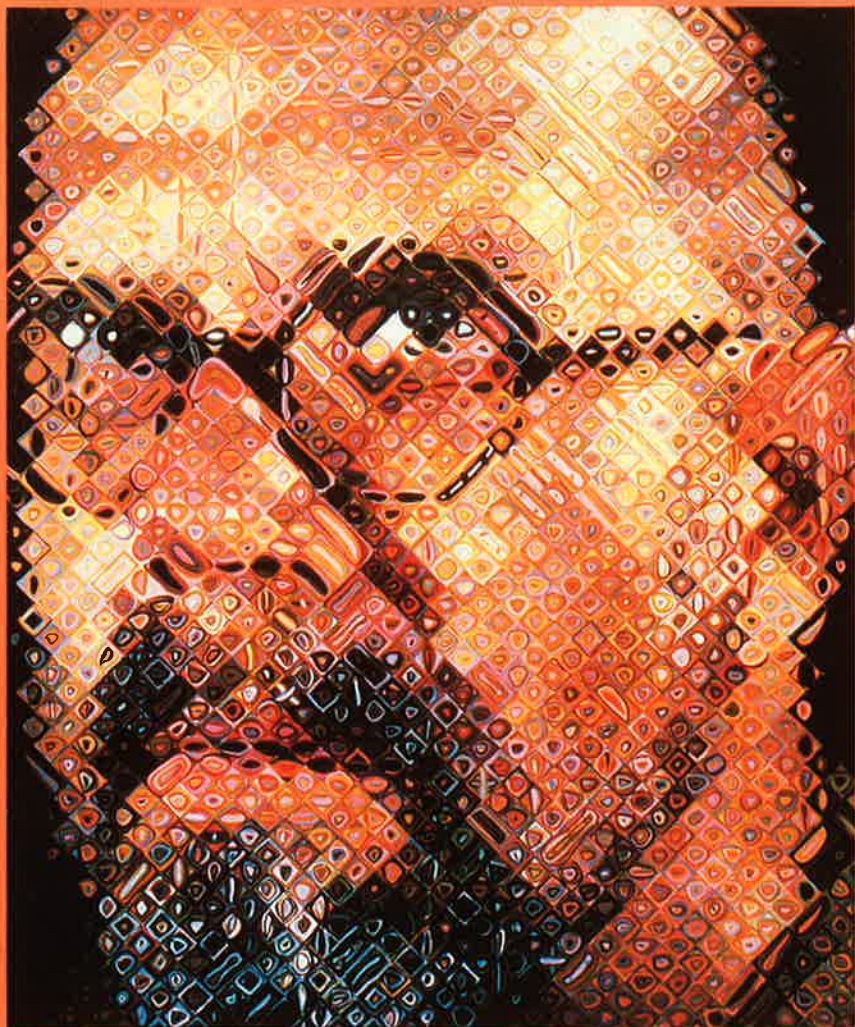


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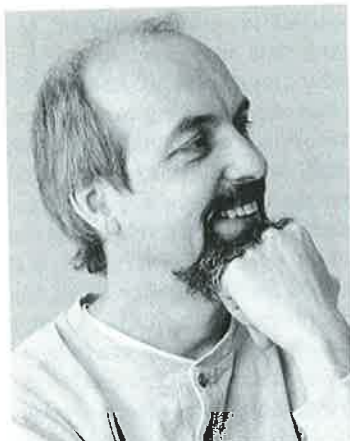
INTERNATIONAL



"CHUCK CLOSE, Self-Portrait" 1997. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, NY

FOCUS ON CHUCK CLOSE AT MoMA

“Video Is a Live Eye” At the Whitney



Bill Viola. Photo credit: Kira Perov

BILL VIOLA's art is innovative, charged and internationally acclaimed. A full-scale retrospective of the California-based video pioneer's work continues through May 10, 1998 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue at 75 Street. The survey is the largest one-person exhibition ever devoted to the work of a video artist. It occupies three floors of the museum and includes 15 environment-based installations, 25 videos, drawings and notebooks of the past 25 years, and 5 offsite installations in NYC and Los Angeles.

In this interview Viola talks about the show, his art, and his humanist concerns.

DC *What made you, as a baby-boomer, develop an interest in video as an art form?*

BV When I was a very young child, we had a television in the house. I was among the first generation, really, that grew up with television. By the time I came of age and went off to college, I had already had some fifteen odd years of viewing experience- including all the old movies which were being shown on television. All of that cinematic language and grammar was circumstantial material just floating around my environment. When I discovered the new portable video recorders which came out in the late sixties, it seemed quite natural to me. (Video) was exciting and different and brand new. It was a natural fit.

There were some models already at that time, which I was aware of. In 1969 Gene Youngblood had written a book called *Expanded Cinema*. This was influential for a lot of us, Nam June Paik had

already done early videos, so had Bruce Nauman and Les Levine.

DC *Is your formal art training relevant to your work?*

BV Of course, art school (he attended the *College of the Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University in the early 1970s*) is more than learning how to draw. It's really learning how to see, being exposed to the great works in Art History. It's ripe for inspiration if you have the right teacher.

You just begin doing the stuff not thinking in historical terms whatsoever, and you wake up one day 25 years later and all of a sudden there's this pathway that you've been on and people are starting to study it and talk about it. And your colleagues also have these trails and you realize that this thing called "History" has appeared. This then creates a framework for younger people to begin studying, and on it goes.

DC Yours is an imposing format with gentle subject matter. Your larger-than-life video portraits and conceptual installations inform a need for dialogue in the viewer. Do you think of yourself as a narrative artist?

BV You brought up an interesting point. I think that narrative is latent in all human beings. It's something that exists within ourselves, not something that exists outside as some kind of cultural convention. When Aristotle first defined the narrative in his "Poetics", 2500 years ago, he was really describing something that came out of people and impressed itself upon the world. That structure is an internal structure based on our encounter with the world through time. It's an essential part of what human beings are and it is always there.

I've found narrative present in encounters with animals, in the forms of the natural landscape, and also in a viewer's encounter with my installation rooms, as opposed to my single channel tapes, where it is more apparent.

Video is a live eye. It allows one to sit in a room with a camera and a monitor and literally observe that room and oneself as an image. The video camera, being something that records fragments of the world that takes slices of time, and, therefore, space and movement from the flow of events and isolates them, holds them, allows them to be retrieved later. This is exactly what we do when through our memory we reconstruct an event that's happened to us.

Continued on page 26

ARTISTS SPACE

SPRING BENEFIT

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 1998

NEW LIMITED EDITIONS AVAILABLE BY LOUISE BOURGEOIS AND MONA HATOUM. | COCKTAIL PARTY AT ARTISTS SPACE, 38 GREENE STREET, 6:30 - 8:00 PM, FOLLOWED BY DINNER AND DANCING. | ON EXHIBIT IN MAIN GALLERY: "DIGITAL MAPPING: ARCHITECTURE AS MEDIA," CURATED BY HANI RASHID. | IN PROJECT SPACE: "THROUGH THE TULIPS" AND "THE RED RED ROSE," AN INSTALLATION/PERFORMANCE BY ANNE GARDINER. | CALL REGINE BASHA AT 212.226-3970 TO PURCHASE LIMITED EDITIONS AND TO MAKE COCKTAIL, DINNER AND DANCE PARTY RESERVATIONS. PROCEEDS HELP SUPPORT ARTISTS SPACE PROGRAMS.

DC *How do you select subjects for your art?*

BV One of the things which I started doing from very early on, following the lead of Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci and others, was to use myself as both subject and object in front of the camera. I think that's correct in some ways for any artist, because everything one does is somewhat autobiographical. The nature of the medium strongly encourages these self-reflexive tendencies.

Early on, I was working primarily with the solitary figure and landscape as subjects. But, once I started working with people a social situation was automatically created. Human beings are always linking to one another in some way. You start a dialogue with this person, even silently and psychologically if it's not expressed through words. It's very profound to be aware of the mental voice that's in you, that's conceptualizing these things, envisioning them. Then, when you begin to work with a person and not an object, you have a malleable, flexible living being in front of you. I've done a number of (very different) pieces in the 1990s involving other people and even working with professional actors: "The Greeting" (1995) which is an installation in this show, and "Deserts" (1994) a *single channel** tape, also in the show, which was done as a film.

DC *What do you think of the Worldwide Web?*

BV I think that it's quite extraordinary! In the late 20th century the Earth now has an envelope of information that is accessible from any point. I can take my laptop into the Amazon Basin and I can pull something from the Web! This is the first step towards some sort of global consciousness. It might make more sense to stop talking about (the Web) as a thing, and to just start looking at it's *function and use...*

That's the power of what it is. It's beyond context.

**In video there's the possibility of multi-channel work, e.g. stacking monitors. "Single channel" work refers to videotapes made for screen projection or traditional VCR playback. Viola sometimes employs single channel tapes in his installations.*

DC *How do you see yourself in the future?*

BV I continually have a backlog of ideas. I also am very cautious about wanting to anticipate what I'm going to do.

DC *So, experience is the focus of your work, not vice-versa.*

BV Right. I try not to let my work be my raw material for a new experience. As the Trappist monk Thomas Merton said, "In an age where there's much talk about being oneself, I reserve the right to forget about being myself, since there is very little chance of being anybody else."

"BILL, VIOLA" is sponsored by VEBA and jointly curated by Whitney Museum Director David A. Ross and world-renowned theater director Peter Sellars. For more information and a schedule of screenings call the Whitney Museum: (212) 570-7722.

Donna Cameron is a New York-based painter and media artist whose films and videos are included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, NY. She is a Visiting Professor at NYU Film School, Tisch School of the Arts.