

SURVEYING THE FIRST DECADE: VIDEO ART AND ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES / Curated by Chris Hill.--Chicago, Ill.: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1997.--9 VHS tapes in 2 vol.: \$600 / volume, \$1,100 (set) +\$200 for PAL.

The Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago will be familiar to many as the leading distributor of videotapes by and about contemporary artists. Their most recent release is a seventeen-hour survey of experimental and independent video created from 1968-1980. The nine videotapes include thirty-four complete videos and excerpts by more than fifty artists; in total, 62 titles are represented. A four-person team, assisted by a group of consultants selected the key examples of video art and activist documentary that define the survey; Chris Hill, former video curator at Hallwells Contemporary Art Center in Buffalo, New York, curated the project.

The nine videotapes are organized around eight themes: Explorations of Presence, Performance, and Audience; Investigations of the Phenomenal World--Space, Sound, and Light; Approaching Narrative--"There Are Problems to be Solved;" Gendered Confrontations; Performance of Video Imaging Tools; Decentralized Communication Projects; Critiques of Art and Media as Commodity and Spectacle; and Independents Address Television. The selected works include both well-known video art and obscure activist and community-based work; the former has often been preserved, but the latter is in danger of being lost. Video art made by artists exploring a new tool and video art created by activists with a social and political agenda, shared a historical time period, as well as a desire to subvert commercial television productions; by bringing samplings of each together in this survey, the project team has organized a more complete and accurate history, than would have been achieved had either type of work been excluded. The contents of two of the programs will serve to illustrate the breadth of the selections. Explorations of Presence, Performance, and Audience includes work by Dan Graham, William Wegman, John Baldessari, Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas, Shigeko Kubota, and Robert Morris; Critiques of Art and Media as Commodity and Spectacle includes footage from Ant Farm and T. R. Uthco, Richard Serra, University Community Video-Minneapolis, Paul Ryan and Raindance, Tony Ramos, Optic Nerve, and Dara Birnbaum.

The survey was conceived as a preservation and education project, which makes seminal, but difficult-to-locate videos from American counterculture, available to educators, librarians, collectors, and curators. To this end, the videos are accompanied by an extensive study guide. This guide has program notes for each video, artists' biographies and videographies, and an extended bibliography. In addition, the guide has a historical overview of the early video movement, articles on video preservation, and a guide to video collections. By using the tapes and the guide, educators will find they can easily customize the materials to any number of specific needs and interests; for example, a professor might want to discuss video as a democratic medium and pull examples from this survey or a museum curator might wish to present a program on the relationship between the artist and his/her audience. The works themselves will prompt discussion, but the guide supplements the videos and suggests areas for debate.

Without question, this survey is a laudable publication. It is also a bargain, since many of the video titles included would be difficult and costly to track. Though the cost of the publication may prohibit its acquisition in smaller collections, this survey will be particularly useful in universities with media studies programs and museums with large contemporary and alternative art collections.

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