

New Canadian Video Art

Curated by Chris Kennedy & Sarah Robayo Sheridan

- trace 1.1** by Michelle Kasprzak, 5 minutes
 - Sleeping Car** by Monique Moumblow, 6 minutes
 - matt 15:9** by Tasman Richardson, 6 minutes
 - ASCII Alphabet** by Dorion Berg, 8 minutes
 - Moohead** by Deirdre Logue, 3 minutes
 - (the other idea)** by Howie Shia, 2 minutes
 - La Salle Primary** by Ho Tam, 4 minutes
 - operetta** by Laurel Woodcock, 5.5 minutes
 - Hamartia** by Louise Lilifeldt & Michail Caines, 11 minutes
 - H₂Oh Oh** by Deirdre Logue, 2 minutes
 - The Stone Show** by Zachary Longboy, 8.5 minutes
 - Absolutely** by Aleesa Cohene, 8 minutes
 - the 400 series: cheatin' heart** by Leslie Peters, 2 minutes
- Total: 71 minutes

These chosen works form an evocative portrait of the assortment of inspirations and styles which have infused Canadian video output of late. While attempting to produce a balanced and considered reflection on recent trends, we were also careful to include pieces which we felt were representative of some key strategies which have determined Canadian video production throughout its history. These categories include: performance, pure video and personal video. The resultant collection ranges in form from the technologically sophisticated to the willfully imperfect, and pairs works by emerging artists with those of more established makers. Amidst this array, a few curatorial themes do emerge: the challenge of representation in the digital age; the (im)possibility of language; and the place of the body in the contested arenas of history and geography.

To begin with the first theme cited - It is difficult to entertain a discussion of digital aesthetics without it quickly transforming into either a nostalgic celebration of "old technology" or an overzealous championing of "new media." In examining these works it is immediately evident that artists' continue to eschew these categorical oppositions. Rather, many of the works presented in this programme highlight a hybrid model of production that encompasses a variety of tools for capturing and editing moving images. While the availability of these varied tools have certainly afforded video-makers a greater versatility in their working method than ever before, this relationship often manifests itself in a complex and contradictory way. Exemplary in this regard are Deirdre Logue's **Moohead** and **H₂Oh Oh**, short pieces which were originally shot on film and later hand-processed only to be transferred to digital video for their final release. An added example of the artist's inventiveness in straddling media is found in Michelle Kasprzak's succinct rendering of the universal theme of man vs. machine in **Trace 1.1**. Here Kasprzak relies on computer software and human hand to perform an accidental choreography of mismatched motions. A seemingly simple device which serves to evoke, in the artist's own words, "a sense of endearing imperfection in the software and the user." If Kasprzak's work points to some of the shortfalls of this interface, Dorion Berg's **ASCII Alphabet** takes digital aesthetics to its literal limit by figuring a visual landscape exclusively through a finite set of sounds and images. This tongue-in-cheek critique of the reductionism of the binary model, which plays out before us in clean,

crisp, digital image, lends an absurd humour to the linguistic problem of the 0/1 syntax. The digital is also the omnipresent theme and content of Tasman Richardson's **matt 15:9**, a work that elicits luscious pleasure out of the formal play of computer character-sets aligned in such a fashion as to perfectly delineate the portrait of Pope John Paul II.

This reduction of the papacy into mere iconography also plays off of longstanding debates on language and image within the arts. With every word said and every image shown, how are artists to create the world anew? Often the path is towards abstraction - further reducing the image into a purer form. This strategy is best exemplified in Leslie Peters' **...the 400 series...** a collection of footage taken while highway driving, manipulated through hours of editing on analogue VCRs. The other approach to this debate is to draw on the vast collective archive of popular culture, and to re-position these familiar sounds and images in order to reinvest them with transformed meaning. In Laurel Woodcock's **operetta**, just such a re-ordering occurs when she samples HAL 9000's voice from *2001: A Space Odyssey* in order to realize the dying thoughts of a fly - perhaps pessimistically underscoring the endpoint of this debate. In **Sleeping Car**, Monique Moumblow also steals words from a film, but in a clever conceptual conceit, she redeploys the monologue from an old Ingmar Bergman by re-writing the subtitles into her own narrative. Thus the original words become something new - a translation of loss across forty years. Aleesa Cohene, in **Absolutely**, beautifully renders a plea for social change across found images, revitalizing their power as an attempt to resolve issues of social responsibility in the face of a decaying social body.

And where does the physical body stand in relation to these challenges? Simply said, it endures. For performance artists like Deirde Logue, Zachary Longboy and Louise Lilifeldt the body occupies central place as they confront the viewer with the physicalness of blood, water and touch. Deirdre Logue's pieces are each isolated endurance tests carried out on herself - in this regard, the formal aspects of arduous hours of hand-processing parallel the artist's obsessive trials before the camera. In **The Stone Show**, the body is an entry point for the telling of the hidden histories of home, family and migration. Similarly, Ho Tam envisions the body as the point of relation in his detailed study of the young bodies that now inhabit his formal school, **La Salle Primary**. It seems only appropriate to a presentation of Canadian works, that the nation is simultaneously defined by both the rural snow-covered landscape of **The Stone Show** and the urban scale of the East Asian cities that appear in **(the other idea)** and **La Salle Primary** (itself a collision of English-speaking Hong Kong, French Catholicism and Chinese Canadian experience). For Canada's history is made up of both of the First Nations that inhabited the lands for thousands of years and the millions of migrant Is who have entered its boundaries in the past 200 years. These tendrils of history reach forward into the present, legible even in the interplays of language, form and content that construct the milieu of Canadian video art.

For more information on these tapes, please contact V tape at wandav@vtape.org (+416 351-1317).

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The logo for Vtape, featuring the letters 'V' and 't' in a stylized, blocky font, with 'tape' in a smaller, simpler font to the right.

Cairo Art Index

Contemporary Egyptian Art Resource
www.cairoartindex.org

15 Ahmed Heshmat, Flat 8
Zamalek, Cairo Egypt
(20) 2-7359744
CAI@cairoartindex.org