

# RECENT AUSTRALIAN VIDEO INSTALLATION

*Phillip Brophy David Chesworth John Gillies  
Leigh Hobba Randelli Jill Scott*

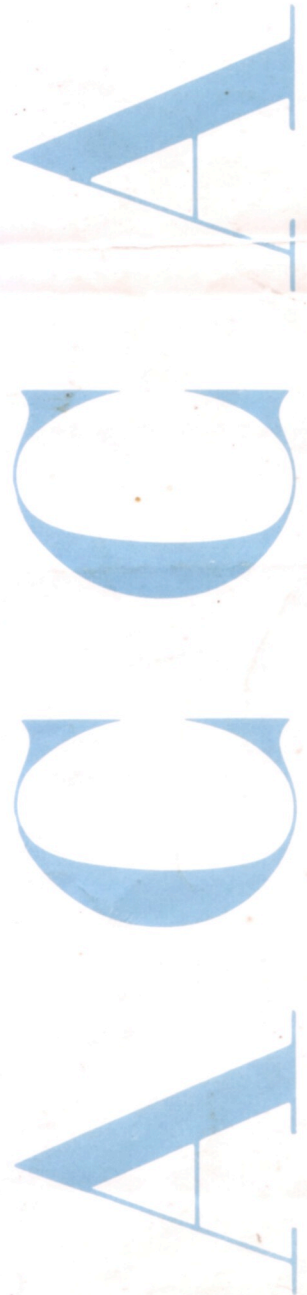
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*Graphic by Randelli. 1986*

**W**HERE ONCE the video installation was an apparatus for playing with immediate audience interaction or performance-oriented gratification (through closed-circuit monitoring, delays or feedback systems); much of the work in this field has moved towards complex spatial mechanisms, sculptural environments, and structured productions using multimedia graphic presentations within specific spatial and temporal constraints.

What remains from the twenty-year history of video installation is the lack of formal constraint regarding public behaviour. Rather than sedentary silence or respectful distance, installation work continues to afford the spectator the possibility of mobility and the chance to adopt new positions and perspectives. If the familiar video art work weaves patterns between sounds and images, the installation as event expands the image-repertoire through the interplay between photos, sculptural sets, environments and forms of projection that allow the eye to shift from its traditional gaze into a dance of glances.



Phillip Brophy's *Club Video* functions equally as an examination of narrative patterns in five historically classic film genres, and as an installation devised as a dual-monitor presentation. The re-shaping that occurs is as much a matter of juggling, as highlighting the constituent elements and fundamental characteristics of each genre: the choreographic environment and startling visual designs of the Busby Berkeley Musical; the push for power by surrogate heroes in the Gangster movie; the sense of location and confrontation in the Western; the subterranean explosive threat of the Youth gangland flick; and the nightmare world of restless suspense in the Horror genre. The endurance and proliferation of these categories as narrative forms indicates the persistence of their cultural mythologies.

The effect of re-working these elements pushes preconceived notions past their familiar resting places. As an installation, the movement, design and rhythm on one monitor is often either mirrored or echoed on the other. At times this is a shot/reaction shot, and on other occasions it is possible to simultaneously view a wide shot next to a close-up or reverse angle. The manipulation of the available material constantly contrasts movement either within the frame or from shot to shot, to develop precise visual juxtapositions and aural motifs.

The strategies and re-arrangements of order, duration, repetition and frequency utilized in *Club Video* disrupt and displace notions of untouchable singular inevitability and conventional linear continuity. In this respect, the installation privileges an audience that doesn't necessarily recognize the details of the selected narrative, but rather revels in the iconographic marks and the underlying narrative codes in each of the genres. It is, as such, well-suited for screening in a multitude of environments – from a club or disco, to an airport waiting lounge.

Although construed for specific circumstances at a particular juncture, there is a sense of persistence contained in much of David Chesworth's video work. From the earliest days of working with video synthesis and performance installation to slide/sound presentations and theatrical or orchestral opera, he has demonstrated the possibilities of cross-fertilization across media using sound as the central source for pollination.

As an installation, *Do The Metaphysical* combines three major components: visuals (video/slides), music and text. The tape itself is divided into three sections. In "The Unstated Weight" a man makes a call from a phone box; in "No Voices" we see shots of sculptured heads on grave stones, and in "Power" the view stretches past suburban rooftops. As a visual assemblage, the piece is bordering on the quotation of cliché by translating and transforming the familiar into the formidable. With regard to the use of the old poetic texts, David Chesworth has stated that "to have made something up myself would have defeated the purpose at hand. That of exploring decentering and re-registering the effect of something so entrenched with all those hard-earned meanings."

In John Gillies' dual-monitor installation *Hymn*, the spectator's attention is distributed as it shifts and pans between two views of an epic scenario. On one monitor a brief cutaway of three graceful devotees react faithfully to the parting of the waters from Cecil B. De Mille's *10 Commandments*. They gesture in a chorus of reverence and adoration towards the divine intervention, in a continuous slow-speed rhythm of ten frames that shuttle to and fro in a ritual rocking incantation. In relation to the shots on the other monitor of the saturated Red Sea and the luminous omniscience of the majestic Paramount statue, this cutaway functions as a supremely eternal reverse shot of revelation and redemption. The slow advance and retrace of these ten frames echoes both the ebb and flow of the waters, and the induced hypnotic mesmerism associated with the adulatory effects of video rays.

As a prefix to his installation, Leigh Hobba contextualizes, *The Continuing Adventures of Albie Quarrel – Tiger Hunter* by referring to Albie Quarrel as the hunter who shot the last sighted Tasmanian Tiger. In this visual and acoustic narrative, the operatic is fused with elements derived from the B-grade horror/mystery genre. The search for the hunted Tasmanian Tiger continues in parallel through the traces of the hunter. The sketchy image of Albie Quarrel is then aligned with the artist's persona through the superimposition of one with the Other.

Across the horizontal plane, a series of three small monitors glow with direct concrete scenes, whilst on a larger monitor this scenery is re-treated and re-shot to incorporate figurative images derived from the raw material. These images are regenerated using technology specific to video, such as imaging and colourization to form with the soundtrack a lyrical ambience. This installation marks the next stage in Hobba's continuing adventures with landscape and mythologies that evolve (and revolve) around the darker regions of the Tasmanian wilderness.

The Randelli installation consists of a shock of the flash mantlepiece memento of *Adam and Eve* in frozen ceremonial innocence, and a large shock of the flesh light-box monotyp panel of the couple at the gateway to the garden of earthly delights. These icons signify the traditional moments of socially accepted innocence: before the forbidden taste of the apple, and the consummate knowledge of the honeymoon suite.

The monitor depicts an episodic documentation from the textbook gestures to the pillow-book positions of a mannered groom and a blushing bride. An opening embrace and a closing kiss frame a series of precisely patterned segments. The decisive moments and structured codes of the wedding photograph genre are transplanted into a static deathly tableau of repetition and convention within the realm of the "can't wait"/"why wait" desperation of the Eden Motel ritual.

The success of this installation will ultimately be tested when it eventually plays continuously in a soft-corn video wedding production company shopfront. "Weddings, Parties, Anything . . . for that special night in your life." At this decisive moment in the history of video, *Adam and Eve* marks and chronicles the movement of functional video into the domestic and industrial shoes once worn by film and photography.

Both of Jill Scott's installations are part of a continuing series of explorations with time travel. From the distant yesterday to the projected tomorrow, time travel is the vehicle used to deconstruct notions and images from historical, mythological and science-fictional worlds. In *Double Time* a water-bearer is saved from her daily tasks by two visitors from another planet's moon. As an installation, the monitor placed inside the watery wishing well invites the spectator to approach and throw a wish to invest in the possibility of hope. *Triple Fate* (Version 1) follows the fortunes of a woman: chased by a Minotaur within a Grecian labyrinth; pursued by a detective in downtown New York, and then in the twenty-first century where flux and fate entwine. Both of these installations feature kinetic images aligned to static sculptural forms that play with the shape and surface of the monitor screen. Each installation is also accompanied by large monochromatic photographic material to highlight and expose the hues on the monitors. Scott's installations exist primarily as sites of sculptural construction within the surrounding space, a videospace that attracts the spectator by inviting participation and engagement.

Most of the works represented in this show are from established video artists, who also work across various media. Because installation is consciously artefact rather than a transparent window on the real, there are many video artists who find installation the most favoured of all exhibition situations. And yet video installation has been mounted only sporadically in Australia. Technological arrangements and sophisticated configurations have not been granted a regular foot in the door within major galleries or exhibition spaces.

Staging *The Luminous Image* exhibition in Amsterdam in 1984, was regarded as one of the most significant events in the history of video installation. With the revived interest in electronic ceremonies, sculptural environments and new forms of exhibition, video installation may well return as an arena in which the spectator is addressed directly with the specifics of spectacle. Video installation would then become the location for the expansion of a video specific audience-oriented aesthetic.

Stephen Goddard 1986.

## LIST OF WORKS

### PHILLIP BROPHY

Lives in Melbourne  
*Club Video* 1985  
Two monitor  
colour installation

### DAVID CHESWORTH

Lives in Melbourne  
*Do the Metaphysical* 1984/85  
Single monitor  
colour installation  
with slide projection

### JOHN GILLIES

Lives in Sydney  
*Hymn* 1983  
Two monitor  
colour installation

### LEIGH HOBBA

Lives in Hobart  
*The Continuing Adventures of Albie Quarrel* 1986  
Four monitor  
colour installation

### RANDELLI

Lives in Melbourne  
*Adam and Eve* 1986  
Single monitor  
colour installation  
with photographs

### JILL SCOTT

Lives in Sydney  
*Double Time* and  
*Triple Fate* 1986  
2 single monitor  
colour installations  
with photographs

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This exhibition has been mounted to coincide with the visit of Mr John Hanhardt, Curator of Film and Video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the tour of the Whitney exhibition, *New American Video: A Historical Survey 1967 - 1980*.

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