

The Museum of Modern Art

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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY VIDEO: SUBJECT TO CHANGE

November 17, 1988 - January 10, 1989

A major retrospective of videotapes tracing the history and evolution of documentary video is on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 17, 1988, through January 10, 1989. Spanning nearly three decades, AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY VIDEO: SUBJECT TO CHANGE is presented in ten chronological programs which demonstrate different stages in documentary video's formal development. Following its premiere at the Museum, the exhibition begins an international tour under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts (AFA).

Dramatic, engaging, and often humorous, the works in the exhibition range in style from rough-hewn "street-tapes" of the mid-sixties to polished minidocumentaries aired on prime-time television in the late eighties. Vietnam anti-war protests and the forgotten veteran, cult religions and Hopi traditionalism, and Bowery bums and Presidential candidates are some of the diverse topics explored in the retrospective. The exhibition consists of twenty-six videotapes by twenty-eight artists and collectives, including Jon Albert, Les Levine, Skip Blumberg, Michelle Parkerson, Ant Farm, Top Value Television, and Paper Tiger Television.

"Drugs, sex, violence, and jump-rope, these are only a few of the provocative, witty, and often controversial subjects covered by video's documentary pioneers," states Deirdre Boyle, the exhibition's guest curator. "Tackling the establishment of politics, art, and broadcasting head on, these

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video guerrillas have refashioned the documentary into an informal, intimate, and frequently entertaining format for art and communication."

Exhibition highlights include several groundbreaking videotapes from the seventies. In Four More Years, Top Value Television set out to produce alternative coverage of the 1972 Republican Nominating Convention, capturing the frenzy and excitement of the convention floor. The piece has directly influenced the development of network television's electronic journalism and "eyewitness" news. In 1976 Alan and Susan Raymond produced The Police Tapes, a searing night-in-the-life view of urban crime. Focusing on ten real-life episodes involving a murder, a streetgang, and an assault, the documentary served as a model for network television's successful Hill Street Blues and, most recently, The Street. The Continuing Story of Carel and Ferd (1972-75), an improbable chronicle of a porn star and her bisexual junkie lover, was designed by Arthur Ginsberg and Video Free America as a multi-channel installation. It was later edited to a single tape for broadcast on public television in 1975.

Works by artists such as Edin Velez, Dan Reeves, and Victor Masayesva, Jr., suggest the new ways that video producers in the eighties are bridging the gap between art and documentary. The recent revival of underground tactics and idealism suggest how a younger generation of videomakers are carrying the tradition of alternative video into the next decade.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Ms. Boyle is moderating a day-long seminar on Saturday, November 19, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the New School for Social Research. Featured guests include Jon Alpert, independent video journalist for NBC's Today Show; Erik Barnouw, historian of broadcast and the documentary; Skip Blumberg, Emmy-award winning producer; and Julie Gustafson, producer and codirector of the Global Village Documentary Festival.

Admission is \$30.00. For tickets, call the New School's Office of the Registrar at 212/741-5690.

AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY VIDEO: SUBJECT TO CHANGE has been organized by video scholar and critic, Deirdre Boyle. It was coordinated for the Museum by Barbara London, assistant curator, and Sally Berger, assistant, video, Department of Film; and coorganized by the American Federation of Arts. The exhibition has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Sony Corporation of America, and J. Walter Thompson, USA, Inc.

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No. 123

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