

# Moving pictures and 'Planes of Memory'

Exhibit explores the impact of video

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"Planes of Memory" is an exhibition that anyone with a serious interest in the art of the past two decades should see. It's not a large show, in terms of the number of works included, but it's certainly big on rewards for time invested.

Long Beach Museum of Art curator Jacqueline Kain has brought together three video installations that would easily do justice to the claim of being classics: Bruce Nauman's "Live Taped Video Corridor" (1969); Beryl Korot's "Dachau 1974" (1975); and Peter Campus' "mem" (1975). The selection is not random, though. As the title of the show provocatively suggests, memory has a lot to do with this work and with our experience of it.

I remember seeing these three installations shortly after each was made (to my knowledge, only the Nauman installation has been shown in Los Angeles, first at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery, in 1970, then at the big Nauman show at the county museum a few years later). In fact, it was an encounter with the "Live Taped Video Corridor" when the LACMA show traveled to New York's Whitney Museum of American Art that convinced me of two things: first, that I should forget whatever vague notions I might have had about any occupation other than one that would involve art; and second, that Nauman is a primary artist of our time.

I've seen the "Live Taped Video Corridor" on several occasions since, and its devastating simplicity is partly responsible for its power. The corridor is slightly bigger than the width of a person's shoulders, while exactly fitting the width of two television sets, stacked one atop the other, placed on the floor at the end of

the longish hallway. From the entrance to the corridor you can clearly see that each TV picture consists of an image of the empty hallway itself. As you walk into the corridor, however, something odd begins to happen.

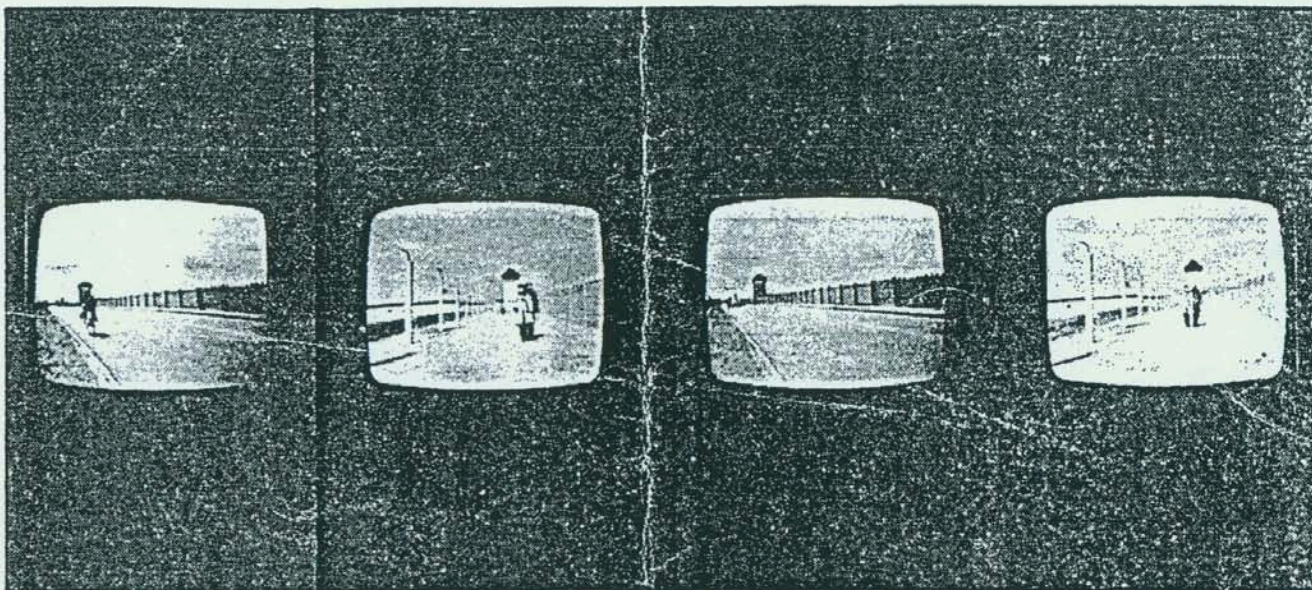
Because the TV on the bottom is receiving a live feedback signal from a television camera installed high overhead at the corridor's entrance, an image of the spectator, seen from behind, suddenly appears on the lower screen. You know in a flash that it's you — the image moves when you do, is dressed as you are and so on — and you know, too, that there must be a surveillance camera somewhere behind you.

A quick turnaround confirms the camera's presence. But what soon becomes horribly apparent is that, no matter which way you move or how quickly you turn your head, it is virtually impossible for you to position yourself in such a way as to see your own face on the TV screen.

Instead, you see your faceless self as if spying, from a voyeuristic vantage point outside your own body. The image on the screen is like a projection of mind that refuses to fully identify itself. The only way to confirm its reality is through a physical check of your body.

Still, Nauman isn't about to let you off the hook too easily. For soon you notice that the image on the second TV has remained maddeningly unchanged: The corridor in which you are busily experiencing psycho-physical trauma is shown to be virtually empty.

This second image, of course, has been made with the assistance of an unseen video recorder that plays a continuous tape picturing the empty corridor. (Nauman tells you as much, too, in the title of the piece.) Among much else, the ways in which one's experience is split apart, turned inside out and recon-



Art grows by one dimension through video technology, as seen in Beryl Korot's "Dachau 1974," part of the "Planes of Memory" exhibit.

gured by modern technology is a subject of the work.

The curator's perceptive conjoining of these three installations suggests a certain common thread among them. Like Nauman, albeit in a very different way, Campus also uses video technology to vivify the intimate tensions between physical space and psychological space.

With "mem" — the title is a wonderfully chosen non-word that is potently allusive — Campus transforms an initial shock of recognition into an almost melancholic meditation on the vanished self.

Across a darkened room you dimly perceive a haze of light projected on the opposite wall. Approach the light tentatively, slowly and — WHAM! — with great suddenness and speed a distended image erupts rakishly across the wall. It is, of course, your own image as projected at a very sharp, distorting angle.

You try to bring your self-regard into some semblance of normalcy by moving back and forth around the room, approaching the video camera or the wall, moving away and slowly re-entering, but all to no avail. The field of your experience is guided

through a subtle choreography with your own image, but still it never comes into sharpest focus.

Nauman's and Campus' installations were made within a decade of the arrival of portable, relatively inexpensive video equipment onto the market. They would be unthinkable, too, without a whole host of developments in the art of the 1960s.

The new genre owed much to the minimalist revolution, which made the spectator's theatrical perceptions very much a subject of art; to pop, which also forced the issue of the social space in which art is made; to the experiential emphasis of earthworks; to the moribund condition of painting (you could say that standoffish color-field painting of the day gave indirect impetus to interactive art reliant on video fields); and even to formalist theory, in which the unique properties of the medium shifted from a consideration of painting's flatness, lateral spread and canvas edges to television's unique features of time, space and electronic image.

Feminism, too, was important to the early development of video art, and Beryl Korot's haunting "Dachau 1974" gives one important indication how.

In 1974, Korot visited and videotaped the notorious German concentration camp. As with Nauman and Campus, disjunctions between physical space and psychological space — here compounded by the difference between Dachau in the present and Dachau in the past — became a central focus of the work.

The installation is composed of four television monitors set in a blank white wall. The arrival at, walk through and departure from the concentration camp are presented as a sequence of 18 brief images that are rhythmically interwoven across the row of TV monitors.

The four-channel tape runs for 24 minutes, and an increasingly harrowing 24 minutes it is. The images on the screen merely show architecture, landscape and visitors, but they assume an odd tangibility and power. Part of the reason is that Korot has deftly structured the installation in the manner of a tapestry.

Much feminist art of the early 1970s explored artistic mediums traditionally ascribed as "women's work." Korot pointedly called upon her experience as a weaver to provide a method for her video installation: She literally wove together threads of

images into a carefully articulated pattern in which time and context are warp and woof. No less than a Navajo blanket or an Amish quilt, "Dachau 1974" has a quality of visceral presentness in which memories are movingly embodied.

Because of the space they take up and the equipment they require, video installations don't often get seen in museum collections. They tend to recede from memory, to become shadow figures in the history of art. If there's anything missing from "Planes of Memory," which is simply and beautifully installed in the Long Beach Museum's galleries, it is only a substantive catalog that could fully address the countless issues raised by these three installations. (A brief brochure is provided, but it's barely adequate to the task.) Here are the beginnings of a reconsideration of the recent past that is well worth undertaking.

"Planes of Memory" remains at the Long Beach Museum of Art, 2300 E. Ocean Blvd., through Feb. 28; additional videotapes from 1968 to 1976 by Nauman and Campus are also being screened, together with recent tapes by David Bunn, Paul Kos, Donna Matorin, Paul McCarthy and Jim Shaw.