



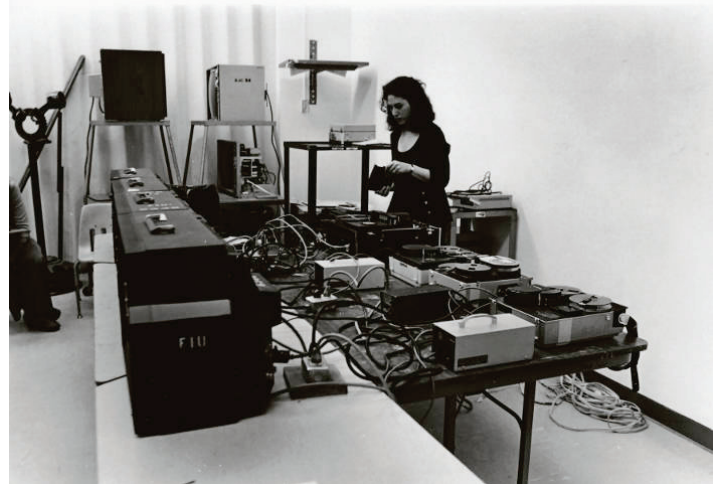
## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### How To Weave Stories in Fabric and Film,"

Pac Pobric | June 18, 2014

Time is video art's chief referee. It sets the rules and maps out the field, regardless of whether a piece lasts five minutes or five hours. In either case, time dictates that a work must begin and end at fixed points, so that as soon as the play button is pressed, the end steadily approaches. Arriving late is always a problem; something important may have already happened in the work. But arriving too early can be an issue: what if it looks like you've already missed a screening before it has even begun?

"My timing wasn't exactly right," the artist Beryl Korot says. By 1980, she had a decade's worth of video art behind her. Her best-known early works, *Dachau* 1974, 1974, and *Text and Commentary*, 1977, had been shown in some of New York's most important institutions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Leo Castelli Gallery and The Kitchen.



Korot at work in her video suite in the 1970s.  
Photo courtesy of bitforms and the artist.

She was also the founding co-editor, with Phyllis Gershuny, of the magazine *Radical Software*, an early print forum for artists interested in video and television. After it ceased publishing in 1974, Korot went on to co-edit an anthology of writings on video art with Ira Schneider, a colleague at the magazine. In the 1970s, she was firmly entrenched in a burgeoning field.

But timing is everything. "Just as video art was becoming really important, when people starting looking at who was making video work, I wasn't doing it any more," Korot says. On 5 December 1980, Grace Glueck published an article in the *New York Times* entitled "Video Art Emerges as a Fine Arts Movement". Korot's work was highlighted in the very first paragraph, but by then, the artist had put away her cameras and video-editing equipment and had picked up the loom. For the next eight years, she focused exclusively on making hand-woven canvases that never made it out of her studio. "No one ever saw them," she says. "I would have liked to have shown them, but sometimes people get an idea about you—so I was a video artist, and people just asked: 'What is she doing?'"

Yet her shift, Korot insists, was not so radical, and her woven-canvas pieces sprouted directly from seeds that had been planted earlier on. When *Text and Commentary* was first shown at Leo Castelli in 1977, the five-screen video piece was accompanied by weavings that hung in the gallery. Even earlier works like *Dachau* 1974, Korot says, were based on the pattern of the loom. The four-channel installation, which was filmed in the first Nazi concentration camp built on German soil, is based on a rhythmic interplay between screens. Like a tapestry image made of multiple threads, the video clips are interlaced to show various shots simultaneously. They come together in the service of a larger narrative that takes viewers from the entrance of the camp, past the guard towers, beyond the barracks and through the crematorium. "It was my first weaving piece, absolutely," Korot says. "It was the first time I applied that structure to my work."

Was something lost in translation when Korot moved from her video work of the 1970s to her loom art of the 1980s? The artist thinks so. "I don't think that people in video circles really understood the canvas work," she says. "They thought the work was metaphorical, but it was structural." But maybe the problem was exactly the opposite: maybe her colleagues understood the shift of her art all too well, and recognised that it marked a turn away from art based on time towards art based on construction. If Korot had abandoned anything with her canvas pieces, it was time as her guide. While other artists anxiously held on to the temporal fact of the video medium, Korot was happy, instead, to let go and focus on the static scaffolding of her art, which was the very thing that propped it up and made it visible. "I was a formalist, I guess," she says. "I was an eccentric in the field of video, but not in the context of what else was going on. I felt more related to what was happening in Minimalism, and that was definitely a link I had with Steve when I met him."

Korot is referring to Steve Reich, the Minimalist composer she met in 1974 and married in 1976. Throughout the 1980s, the two worked on parallel but separate tracks: while Korot questioned the structural possibilities of the loom, Reich explored his interest in sustained musical tension achieved through rigorous repetition. His work, like Korot's loom-based art, was architecturally inclined: it focused on the basic units of sound and investigated how they could be engineered to make something greater than the sum of its parts.

### **Working with Steve Reich**

Their shared interests led to collaborative work. From 1989 to 1993, the pair worked on "The Cave", a sprawling opera that features Reich's score and Korot's video visuals, which she was just then beginning to use again. The work is based on interviews they conducted with Israeli Jews, Palestinian Muslims and (mostly Christian) Americans in which they were asked about Old Testament figures. Who, for you, is Abraham? Who, for you, is Isaac? The result is a discovery of the old world inside the new one. "The old isn't even old," Korot says. "It creeps up in ways that you don't expect. 'The Cave' is really about finding that continuity and seeing how it manifests today."

Continuity, yes; but "The Cave" is also a record of how time catches up with us. Just as biblical figures are still truly alive in the imaginations of many, time was still alive as a motivator for Korot's work, even if it had been shelved for most of the 1980s.

After going through a period in which structure took precedence over all else, old ideas started to look fresh again, enlivened by the passing of time. It was with renewed vigour that Korot was able to return to video with "The Cave" in 1989, as the artist recognises. "I think a lot of my thinking was probably early," she says. "But it seems like all of a sudden things are catching up to me."

Art Basel Salon (featuring Beryl Korot discussing her work Dachau 1974 with Mark Godfrey, a curator at Tate Modern, London), Friday 20 June, 1pm, Hall 1