



Smithsonian American Art Museum

Watch This! New Directions in the Art of the Moving Image **Currently on View** **Checklist and Wall Text**

Watch This! New Directions in the Art of the Moving Image is drawn from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's permanent collection. The goal of the exhibition is to recognize the importance of the moving image in the history of twentieth-century art. The exhibition features examples of work that has transformed video into a contemporary art practice. Single-channel video tapes are presented alongside files that have been transferred to digital formats and are projected here in the gallery. Pioneering video art and key examples of American avant-garde cinema are represented here, as well as recent digital media installations. These artworks illustrate the multiple media technologies that artists have engaged with since the 1960s.

1. Peter Campus (born New York City 1937)

Three Transitions

1973

single-channel video, color, sound; 4:53 minutes

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Ford Motor Company

2007.33.12

In his seminal *Three Transitions*, Peter Campus employs techniques specific to video such as chroma-keying—a method for making a composite of two images—and the layering of live and pre-recorded video imagery to explore point of view and redefine the self-portrait.

2. Bruce Nauman (born Fort Wayne, IN 1941)

Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)

1968

single-channel video, black and white, sound; 60:00 minutes

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Ford Motor Company

2008.21.2

The earliest piece in the exhibition, by Bruce Nauman, one of the United States' leading contemporary artists, is from 1968. The portability of video and the ease of setting it up in the studio allowed artists to explore the development of the action in response to the frame of the camera's point of view. *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* features Nauman in his studio as he moves about, tracing the space. The camera, turned on its side, remains in

a static position on a tripod and the artist's movements and gestures echo the repetitive, silent, and precise language of Samuel Beckett's writing.

3. Steina Vasulka (born Reykjavik, Iceland 1940) and Woody Vasulka (born Brno, Czechoslovakia 1937)
Reminiscence from *Selected Works, I*
1974
single-channel video, color, sound; 4:48 minutes
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Ford Motor Company
2008.21.13.2

Nam June Paik's *Paik Abe Video Synthesizer* is an important early example of image processing, a technique developed by video artists in the 1970s. Other pioneers include Woody and Steina Vasulka, a couple who developed an array of tools and created a large body of work collaboratively and individually in addition to being influential teachers and motivators. One of their early collaborations is *Reminiscence* (1974), in which the surfaces within a domestic space are transformed as the artists speak about memory and place.

4. David Haxton (born Indianapolis, IN 1943)
Painting Room Lights
1980
16 mm film transferred to video, color, silent; 9:00 minutes
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist
2011.15.4

David Haxton has worked in film, video, and photography; his *Painting Room Lights* (1980) was originally screened on film. It is part of a large body of work that explores the construction of perspective. Haxton has transferred the original film into a digital moving image projected in the gallery, employing the film negative to create subtle and complex transformations of the recorded film image.

5. Joan Jonas (born New York City 1936)
Vertical Roll
1972
single-channel video, black and white, sound; 19:38 minutes
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Ford Motor Company
2007.33.19

Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll* is a key work in video art. In a long and distinguished career, Jonas has explored performance, dance, video tape, and installation art. *Vertical Roll* comes out of performance pieces that brought the portable video camera into the space of the action. In this work, Jonas explores the disruption of the electronic signal, which creates a rolling and broken-up video image; this reframes the camera's representation of the performer's body and the space in which the action takes place.

6. Ernie Gehr (born 1941)

Surveillance

2010

4-channel video, color, silent; 17 minutes (average, time variable)

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment

2012.8.2

An influential artist in the history of the avant-garde cinema, Ernie Gehr created *Serene Velocity* (1970) and *Eureka* (1974), both of which investigate the filmic composition of space and time and the very properties of the medium. Recently, Gehr has been working with digital technology to create multi-channel installations. *Surveillance*, for instance, was commissioned by the Madison Square Park Art Conservancy in New York City. It frames and reframes, through digital techniques, the action and activities of the park from multiple points of view. The result is an evocative meditation on the movements of people and the place of nature in the metropolis.

7. Peter Campus (born New York City 1937)

Barn at North Fork

2010

high-definition digital video, color, sound; 24 minutes

Smithsonian American Art Museum Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment

2011.55.1

A key work in the history of video art, Peter Campus's videotape *Three Transitions* (1973) offers a compelling representation of the body using the resources of the electronic moving image. In his recent installation *Barn at North Fork*, Campus explores a structure through the manipulation of the image and composition of the scene. Once again, the artist seizes on the capacities of the medium to treat subtle gradations of light, color, and movement. The moving images describe and interpret the building's form through the play of light and color on its surfaces, resulting in an evocative investigation of place and abstraction.

8. Nancy Holt (born Worcester, MA 1938)

Robert Smithson (born Passaic, NJ 1938—died Amarillo, TX 1973)

Swamp

1971

projection on screen, color, sound; 6 minutes

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by the Ford Motor Company

2007.33.18

Swamp is a collaboration between Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, artists whose work in video and land art were important influences on contemporary art practice. It was shot on sixteen-millimeter film and follows the artists' movements through the tall reeds of a swamp as they explore the camera's point of view and their own movements through the space. The camera becomes an active participant in their negotiation of the terrain and their struggle to record their perceptions. The camera looks out on the world around it while, on the soundtrack, the artists reflect on the camera's position and their own actions.