

ART

Exhibit of video artworks in Long Beach — it's about time

Television, at its root, is about time. We prove that we believe this when we make distinctions between so-called "live" TV and the other kinds ("live on tape," "previously recorded before a live audience," "tape-delayed," "pre-recorded," and, presumably, "dead").

We see it also in our attempts to save the past, as when we videotape a wedding or the antics of a young child.

Television, a hybrid of photography and radio, gives us a kind of control over the recollection of events, and the illusion that we can control time itself.

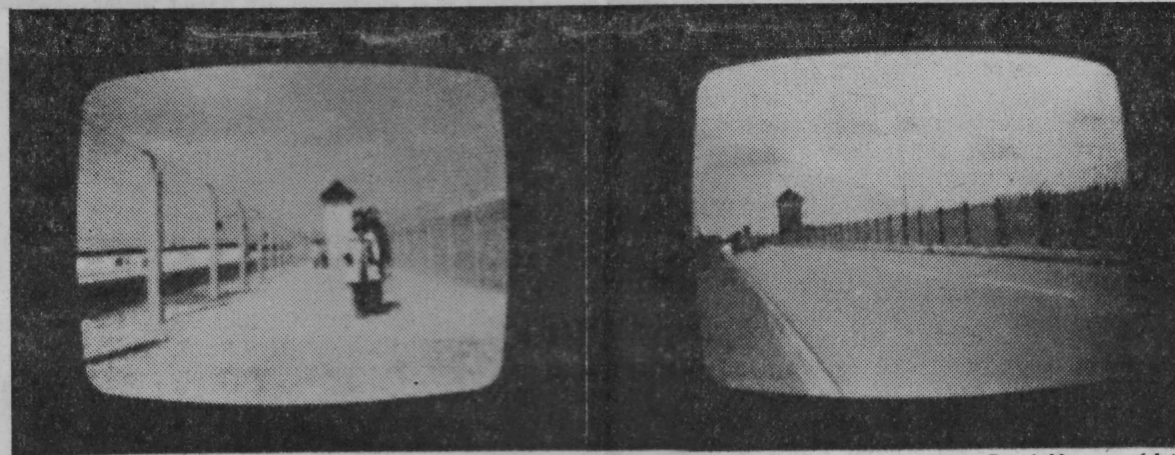
"Planes of Memory" an exhibition at the Long Beach Museum of Art, deals with time and memory, using television in a refreshingly direct and compelling way. By curator Jacqueline Kain, it is a remarkably satisfying exhibition, rich with ideas and heavy with emotional substance.

"Planes of Memory" consists of installations — room-size environments — by three artists well-known for their video experimentation. It is a retrospective show presenting works, all more than a decade old, which have had a substantial impact on subsequent art: Peter Campus' "mem" (1975), Beryl Korot's "Dachau 1974" (1975), and Bruce Nauman's "Live Taped Video Corridor" (1969).

All three pieces are concerned with time, each taking a different approach. Korot is most interested here in history, while Nauman presents three parallel moments and Campus concentrates on the present.

More important, each artist has developed a unique representation of the concept of memory — a visual/temporal metaphor that rings absolutely true in every case.

Korot's "Dachau," for example, the only piece in the exhibition with a traditional beginning and end, is 24 minutes long. Four monitors, lined up end to end, are at one end of the gallery, a bench at the other, creating a bare-boned theater of a sort. The program that unfolds on the screens, however, Korot sees as more



Long Beach Museum of Art

Two of the four monitors from Beryl Korot's "Dachau 1974" (1975) at "Planes of Memory" at the Long Beach Museum of Art.

On Art

Charles Desmarais



related to weaving than to film or drama.

The camera never moves to change its point of view. It cuts, instead, from sequence to sequence. A succession of rather mundane images (a couple walking down a barbed-wire-lined path, tourists milling through a wooden barracks, a back-lighted gate) is duplicated, repeated, repeated again. We are brought through series and sequence, in fits and starts, to the climactic panorama: for the first time all screens show the same image, of a huge, gaping pair of ovens.

This multiple repetition of images and sound

(the incidental noise of shuffling feet and passing traffic) has the effect of imprinting them on the viewer's memory.

But the technique also stands for the idea of memory. Viewing "Dachau 1974" leaves you with the impression not that you are viewing an artwork about the Nazi death camp, but that you're remembering a visit there. And "remembering," too, other memories, generated by other lives.

Korot's model of memory is the interwoven threads of personal experience, history, and geography. Campus, by contrast, presents a simpler yet equally enigmatic construct in his piece, "mem."

The viewer of "mem" is also its subject. To see the piece correctly you must interact with it.

One wall of a darkened room glows like the soft light of a blank television screen. As you enter the room and walk toward the wall, an image appears, faintly at first. It is yourself, and yet it is not yourself. By an ingenious placement of the video camera and a projector, Campus assures

that you see a reversed and distorted picture — not a reflection, as in a mirror, but a soft and dreamlike image.

It is the other you, the one that other people see, the one you know exists only because when people describe you, you think they're talking about someone else. It might take you a minute or two to realize who the picture's of, in fact. It's someone you remember, but whom you just don't know very well anymore.

Nauman's 19-year-old environment, "Live Taped Video Corridor," provides a surreal experience of time and space. You enter a shoulder-width hallway, about 15 feet long, walking toward a pair of monitors stacked one above the other.

On the monitors is the image of the corridor, but while one shows the corridor to be empty, the other shows you walking away. To add to the confusion, the video picture from the camera aimed at your back is delayed slightly, creating yet another layer of time — another "plane of memory."

One of the most charming things about this exhibition is its lack of pretension. The working methods of all three artists are, by today's standards anyway, low-tech (all the work is in black-and-white, for one thing). Nauman's "Corridor" stands out in this respect. By a minimal action, Nauman suggests a whole range of questions about the nature of time and our relationship to it, about representation, about truth, and, yes, about television.

In 1969, Nauman's work was considered to be on the furthest fringe of the avant-garde, and even by 1975 the choice to work in video was rare. The current show at Long Beach is proof positive that much of that early work was supported by a conceptual and emotional foundation of considerable substance.

The Long Beach Museum of Art is at 2300 E. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach. The show is open through Feb. 23.