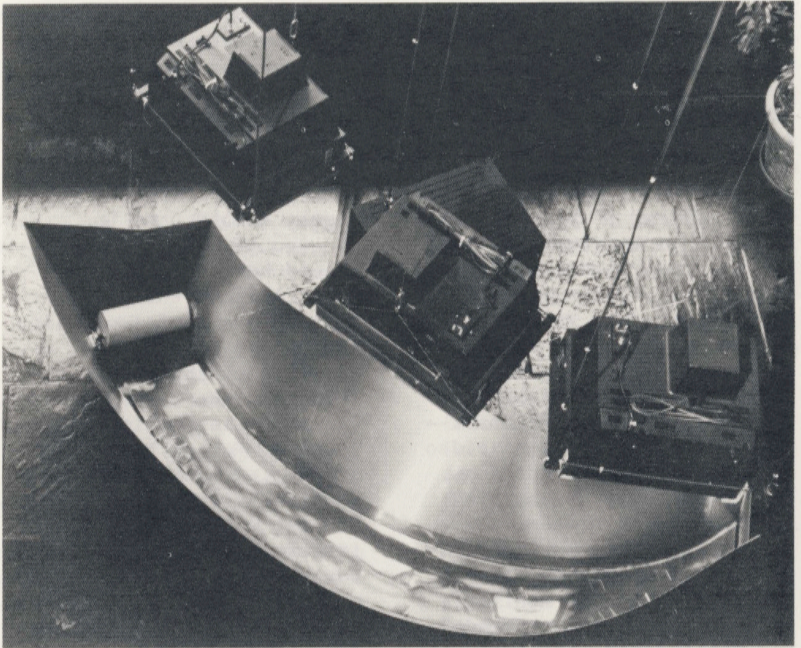


River, 1979-81



In the 1920s painter and photographer Lazlo Moholy-Nagy said, "The illiterate of the future is the man without a camera." His prediction was, of course, accurate--the camera is ubiquitous, and there is evidence that the video camera may soon be as commonplace as the still camera is today.

Many artists became interested in video as an art medium in the late sixties when the equipment became portable and sufficiently inexpensive to be available to those outside the commercial television industry. Over the last decade, several areas of involvement have been defined. Many artists made single-channel pretaped works of narratives or performances designed to be viewed in the conventional manner of television. Other video artists, such as Peter Campus, manipulated space and the movement of the viewer within it in installations that explored live feedback--that unique property of video whereby camera vision is instantaneously transmitted to the monitor screen. In Shigeko Kubota's multi-monitor environments, the images seen on the monitor screens have been pretaped and manipulated, and the emphasis is on the sculptural qualities of video.

Kubota allied herself with the iconoclastic international art movement known as Fluxus when she moved from Japan to New York in 1964. Fluxus artists, including founder George Maciunas, Nam June Paik and others, delighted in making what they called "anti-art" in various unconventional art forms such as "happenings," events, and video, and in blurring the

boundaries not only between the different art forms but between artist and audience. They felt themselves to be the spiritual heirs of the French Dada artist Marcel Duchamp and were strongly influenced by American avant-garde composer John Cage. Paik, a pioneer in the field of video art and certainly its most celebrated exponent, was the first to remove T.V. from its ordinary context and to alter it physically to create video sculptures.

Influenced by Paik, with whom she sometimes collaborates, Kubota found in video her natural medium of expression. Carrying the portable camera on her back, "...as Vietnamese women do with their baby," (Kubota, Video Poem), Kubota uses the camera in lieu of a written diary to record her travels and significant events in her life. In a series of video sculptures of the mid-seventies, Kubota pays tribute to her artistic hero, Duchamp. In Gothic Video Tower of Marcel Duchamp's Grave, ten monitors stacked vertically within a floor-to-ceiling wood column carry identical images of Duchamp's tombstone adjusted to various color tonalities. A 30-foot-long row of mirrors extends from the base of the column, acting as a reflecting pool and creating the illusion that the column penetrates through the floor, emphasizing the idea of burial.

In another work in the series, on each of four T.V. monitors recessed within the risers of a wood staircase construction, a nude woman descending a flight of steps is shown in seemingly endless color changes, speeds, and orientations--a kinetic

reference to Duchamp's painting, Nude Descending a Staircase (1912), in which movement is suggested through shifting, fractured planes.

Landscape is the subject matter of Kubota's most recent pieces. In River, three monitors are suspended from the ceiling, face down, over a curved stainless steel trough. A pump agitates water in the trough, which also contains plastic mirrors. Color tapes of the artist swimming are played on the monitors. Because the T.V. screens are below eye level, her image is seen only in multiple, distorted reflections on the shiny surfaces of the water, mirrors and tank. Kubota herself has described the effect: "The swimming body floats lightly upon the water, spins and dives with ease. Once cast into video's reality, infinite variation becomes possible, not only weightlessness, but total freedom to dissolve, reconstruct, mutate all forms, shape, color, location, speed, scale...liquid reality."

Kubota regards video as a metaphor for the river--both are non-static and reflective; both are continuous streams mirroring nature and reality. In many ways, video has replaced the river as the major artery making possible the transfer of information from one location to another.

Kubota fuses Eastern attitudes about nature with modern Western technological hardware in River. The piece relates both to her childhood experiences of nature in Japan (where she grew up alongside the country's longest river) and her Buddhist upbringing. Nature is seen as a continuum of human life

in Japanese culture, and water is a basic element in Oriental philosophy. It is the "yin" or "female" element, as contrasted with such "yang" elements as fire. Kubota's imagery also may be related to Buddhist beliefs that reflections of reality have the same credibility as reality itself. River is lush, sensual and contemplative; the only sound heard by the viewer is that of splashing water.

Kubota was born in 1937 in Niijata, Japan and received a degree in sculpture from Tokyo University of Education. She currently lives in New York. Kubota has been represented in all the major surveys of video art and has taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York and the Kunst Akademie, Düsseldorf. From 1974 to 1983 Kubota was the video curator at Anthology Film Archives in New York. She has also been the recipient of several awards, including National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships in 1975 and 1978 and a D.A.A.D. Fellowship in Berlin in 1979. It was while working in Berlin that Kubota began the construction of River. The piece was seen first in 1981 and 1982 in Germany and Switzerland, and in the U.S. at the 1983 Whitney Biennial. Most recently it was installed at the Japanese American Cultural Center in Los Angeles under the auspices of the Long Beach Museum of Art. Its presentation in MATRIX is co-sponsored by the San Francisco Video Festival and is concurrent with the 1983 Festival program.

Constance Lewallen

Work in MATRIX:

River, 1979-81, video installation with three 1/2-hour color videotapes, three color monitors, stainless steel trough, plastic mirrors, wave machine, and water. Lent by the artist.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

The Kitchen, NY, '72, '75; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, '73, '75, '78; Rene Block Gallery, NY, '76, '77; The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Projects, '78; Japan House Gallery, NY, '78, brochure; Museum of Contemporary Art, Option 9, Chicago, '81, brochure; DAAD-Galerie, Berlin, '81 (traveled to Museum Folkwang, Essen and Kunsthaus, Zurich, '82), cat.; Japanese-American Cultural Center, Los Angeles (sponsored by Long Beach Museum of Art), '83.

Selected group exhibitions:

First and Second Annual New York Video Festivals, The Kitchen, '72, '73; St. Jude Video Invitational, de Saisset Art Gallery and Museum, University of Santa Clara, CA, '72, videotape, cat.; Kolinscher Kunstverein, Cologne, Project 74, cat.; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Video Art, '75, cat.; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Projected Video, '75, cat.; Kassel, W. Germany, Documenta 6, '77, cat.; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Shigeko Kubota/Taka Iimura: New

Video, '79, cat.; Tokyo, The Seibu Museum, '81, cat.; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Biennial, '83, cat.; Toyama Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan, Art and Technology, '83, cat.

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Frank, Peter. "Shigeko Kubota at Rene Block," Art News, April, '76.

Schneider, Ira & Beryl Korot, eds. Video Art: An Anthology (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, '76).

Perlberg, Deborah. "Shigeko Kubota," Artforum, April, '77.

Tatransky, Valentin. "Meta-Marcel," Arts Magazine, May, '77.

Battcock, Gregory, ed. New Artists Video (NY: Dutton, '78).

Sklar, Robert. "Good Morning Lanesville," American Film (American Film Institute, Washington, DC), February, '78.

Ancona, Victor. "Video Art," Videography (NY), May, '83.

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