

**Aldo Tambellini  
Richard Serra  
Dara Birnbaum  
Martha Rosler  
with Paper Tiger TV  
Harun Farocki  
Lisa Reihana  
Megan Dunn**

**Ryan Trecartin  
and Lizzie Fitch  
Wynne Greenwood  
and K8 Hardy  
Josephine Meckseper  
Mike Heynes  
Arthur Jafa  
Matthew Griffin**

# **Image Processors Artists in the Medium – A Short History 1968–2020**

**Curated by Christina Barton  
11.09.21–07.11.21**

These texts were produced to accompany the exhibition *Image Processors. Artists in the Medium – A Short History 1968–2020*, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, 11 September – 7 November 2021.

Christina Barton acknowledges the assistance of AAG Curatorial Assistant Millie Riddell in drafting the artist biographies.

All images are installation views of the exhibition, photographer: Ted Whitaker.

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Te **Adam**  
Pātaka **Art**  
Toi **Gallery**

*It is only by producing images that the subject of mass culture begins to feel some measure of control over the alienation produced by this condition.*

– Judith Barry, 1986<sup>1</sup>

*Image Processors* surveys a history of artists' moving-image works that take the mass media as their target. Pirating, montaging and manipulating found footage, restaging stereotypical genres, and studying the vehicles and processes that deliver mainstream messages, these artists take a critical standpoint vis-à-vis their subject. They are at once fascinated observers and keen critics of the deluge of information and entertainment we consume daily. And even as they ride the waves of technological change, their aims remain consistent: to intervene in and comment upon the persuasive power and distracting effects of mainstream media and to recharge or defamiliarize images so that our attention is redirected and we are forced to react.

Several of the works in this exhibition are iconic. They hold key places in the history of video art as it has unfolded from the late 1960s to the present. Travelling back in time from Australian artist Matthew Griffin's *Unchained Malady* of 2020 – a compilation of 133 short videos made and posted on social media between 2018 and 2020, now presented as a single work to be encountered physically – *Image Processors* makes the case that there is a strong trajectory of artists who have intervened in the mass media to take “control”, as Judith Barry states, of the medium's alienating effects.

The show strategically calls up the umbrella category of 'video art' (despite some of the works originating as film and all of them now being presented as digital files) because this is a self-consciously oppositional mode of practice specifically taken up by artists as an alternative to the mainstream media in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, artists took to the new lightweight Portapak video camera and recorder as an accessible means to record live action and produce moving images to serve as alternatives to the distractions of television and the movies and the presumptions and exclusions of 'fine' art. Despite evolving technologies and the new media landscape of personal computers and smartphones, the exhibition remains close to a renegade, DIY ethos, in which network TV, Hollywood film, glossy magazines, YouTube clips and social media memes are the artists' fair game. It includes key historical

works by Aldo Tambellini, Richard Serra, Dara Birnbaum, Martha Rosler, and Harun Farocki, which are brought together with more recent videos by international artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy, Josephine Meckseper, and Arthur Jafa. These are interspersed with representative examples of works by New Zealand artists: Lisa Reihana, Megan Dunn, and Mike Heynes.

By turns deadpan, absurd, seductive, censorious, jarring, moving, and shocking, *Image Processors* provides a compelling bridge that links the critical aspirations of an artistic avant-garde to the manipulations and blandishments of quotidian entertainment.

In addition to the artists and estates, who we gratefully acknowledge, there are several individuals and organisations we thank for their assistance in bringing this exhibition together: Christopher Swasbrook, Elevation Capital; Mark Williams, Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand; Ryan Moore, Fine Arts, Sydney; Emmanuel Lefrant, Light Cone, Paris; Emily Martin and Tom Colley, Video Data Bank, Chicago; Karl McCool, Electronic Arts Intermix, New York; Chloe Waddington, Timothy Taylor Gallery, New York; Gavin Brown, Gladstone Gallery; Jane Sutherland; Kara Vander Weg, Gagosian, New York; and Katie Trainor, Circulating Film and Video Library, MoMA, New York.

1 Judith Barry, 'Willful Amnesia', in *Video by Artists 2*, edited by Elke Town, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1986, p. 47.

Note: All images are installation views taken in Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery by Ted Whitaker.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Aldo TAMBELLINI**  
(b. 1930, d. 2020, Italy/USA)

*Black TV*, 1968–69  
16mm film transferred to 4K single  
channel digital video, 10 mins,  
black and white/sound  
courtesy of the artist's estate and  
Light Cone, Paris

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*In the future we will be communicating through electronically transmitted images and Black TV is about the future, the contemporary American, the media, the injustice, the witnessing of events, and the expansion of the senses.*

– Aldo Tambellini<sup>1</sup>

*Black TV* compresses two years of television news reports into ten minutes of montaged and manipulated images and sound. Taped directly from television and then played back at different speeds and filmed on 16mm, *Black TV* is a powerful antidote to the passive consumption of the nightly news. Through its form, content, monochrome colour, and scratch aesthetic, this short, discordant, near-abstract work succeeds in shocking viewers from any torpor TV might induce. Opening with a flare of “white noise” and closing with a slow throbbing fade to black, the split-screen film flashes traumatic scenes and close-ups like “bullets targeting the screen” (in Tambellini’s words).<sup>2</sup>

Race riots, political rallies, victims of war and famine, scenes of military might, mix in quick succession with sporting events, film stars, movie and TV network logos, all to a soundtrack that swells and ebbs around the structural climax of shocked voices witnessing the assassination of US Senator Robert Kennedy. *Black TV* won the Grand Prix at the Oberhausen Film Festival in 1969, and has been described as “an artist’s sensory perception of the violence of the world we live in, projected through the television tube”.<sup>3</sup> It has since been recognised as a presciently chilling response to the first electronic age.

**Aldo Tambellini** was an Italian-American artist and a pioneer of electronic intermedia. His experimental works in television and video art in the early 1960s were coupled with radical political ideas. These led him away from conventional media and contexts, to content that addressed the social, cultural and political upheavals of the era, and forms that synthesised visual art, poetry, music and dance into immersive installations he termed “electromedia”, that were staged in the streets, churches and theatres of New York’s East Village. A distinctive feature of his practice was his exclusive commitment to the colour black, which he argued, in a manifesto written in 1967, was a primal state or condition from which consciousness expands to encompass what he called a “New Reality”. Between 1976 and 1984, Tambellini was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he experimented with his students in alternative forms of documentary, collaborative film-making and live broadcast. Largely forgotten by the art world through the 1990s, Tambellini’s work has enjoyed a revival recently. His work was revisited at the Tate Modern in 2012 (*Restaging Black*) and included in the 2015 Venice Biennale. In 2017, a retrospective of his work was held at the ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. Tambellini died aged 90 in 2020.

- 1 Aldo Tambellini quoted by Gene Youngblood in *Expanded Cinema* (1970), <https://www.aldotambellini.com/film/black-tv>, accessed 1 December 2021.
- 2 From a statement by Aldo Tambellini, <https://www.aldotambellini.com/film/black-tv> accessed 1 December 2021.
- 3 See [https://tambellini.no-art.info/films/1968\\_black-tv.html](https://tambellini.no-art.info/films/1968_black-tv.html), accessed 1 December 2021

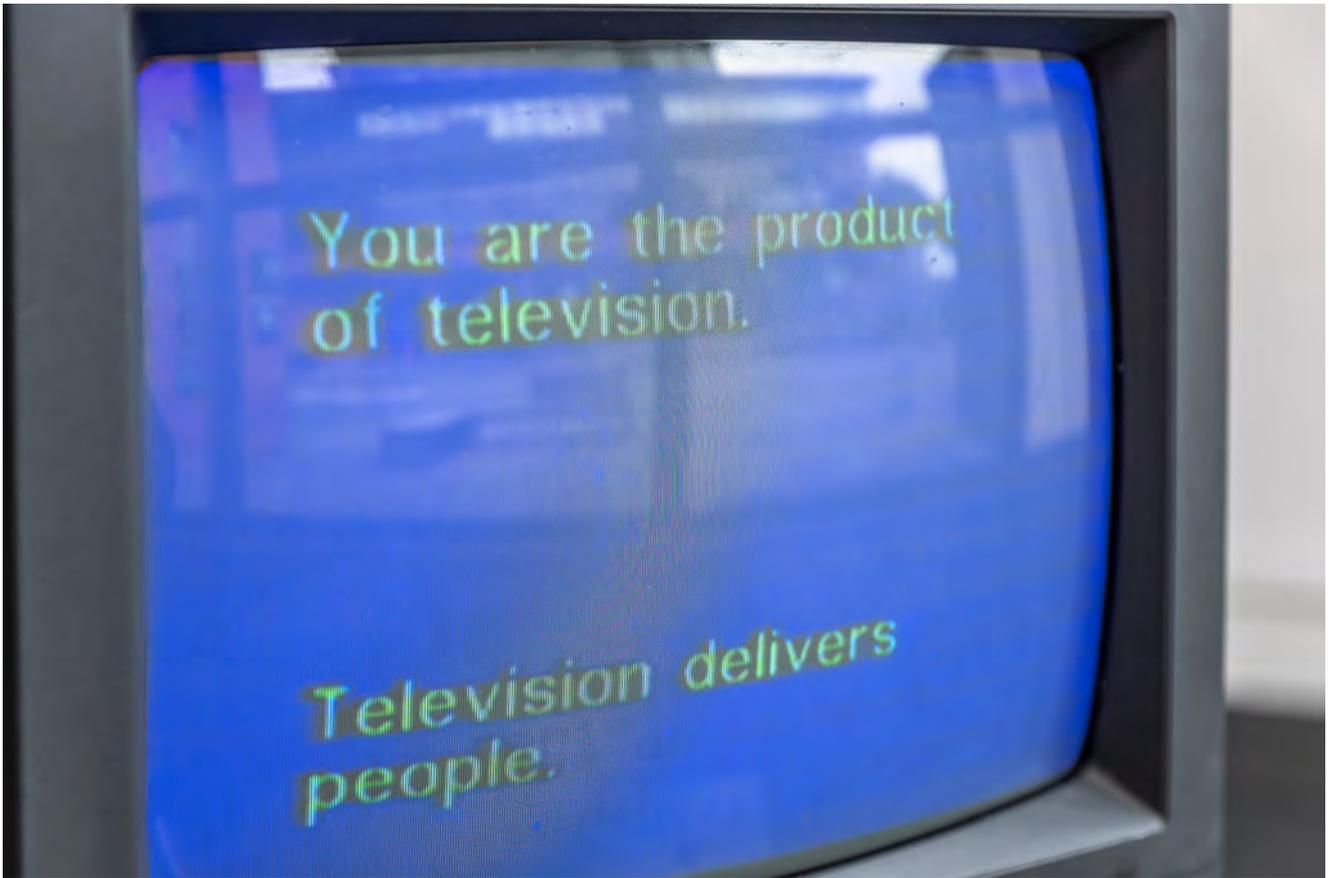


Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Richard SERRA**  
(born 1938, USA)

*Television Delivers People*, 1973  
videotape transferred to digital, 6:27 mins,  
colour/sound  
courtesy the artist, Gagosian Gallery,  
New York and the Film and Video Library,  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

POPULAR  
ENTERTAINMENT IS  
BASICALLY  
PROPAGANDA FOR  
THE STATUS QUO.

– Richard Serra, 1973<sup>1</sup>

Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People* is a searing critique of television delivered through the (then) new medium of video. The piece was commissioned and produced by Carlota Schoolman, an early advocate for video art who worked to bring artists' videos onto public access television. Serra's was one of the first to be made under the aegis of Schoolman's independent production company, Fifi Corday Productions, which was established in 1972. Schoolman remembers locating a local studio run by WNET, one of New York's several stations, that had the facilities to produce the scrolling captions Serra wanted to use as the content of his video.<sup>2</sup>

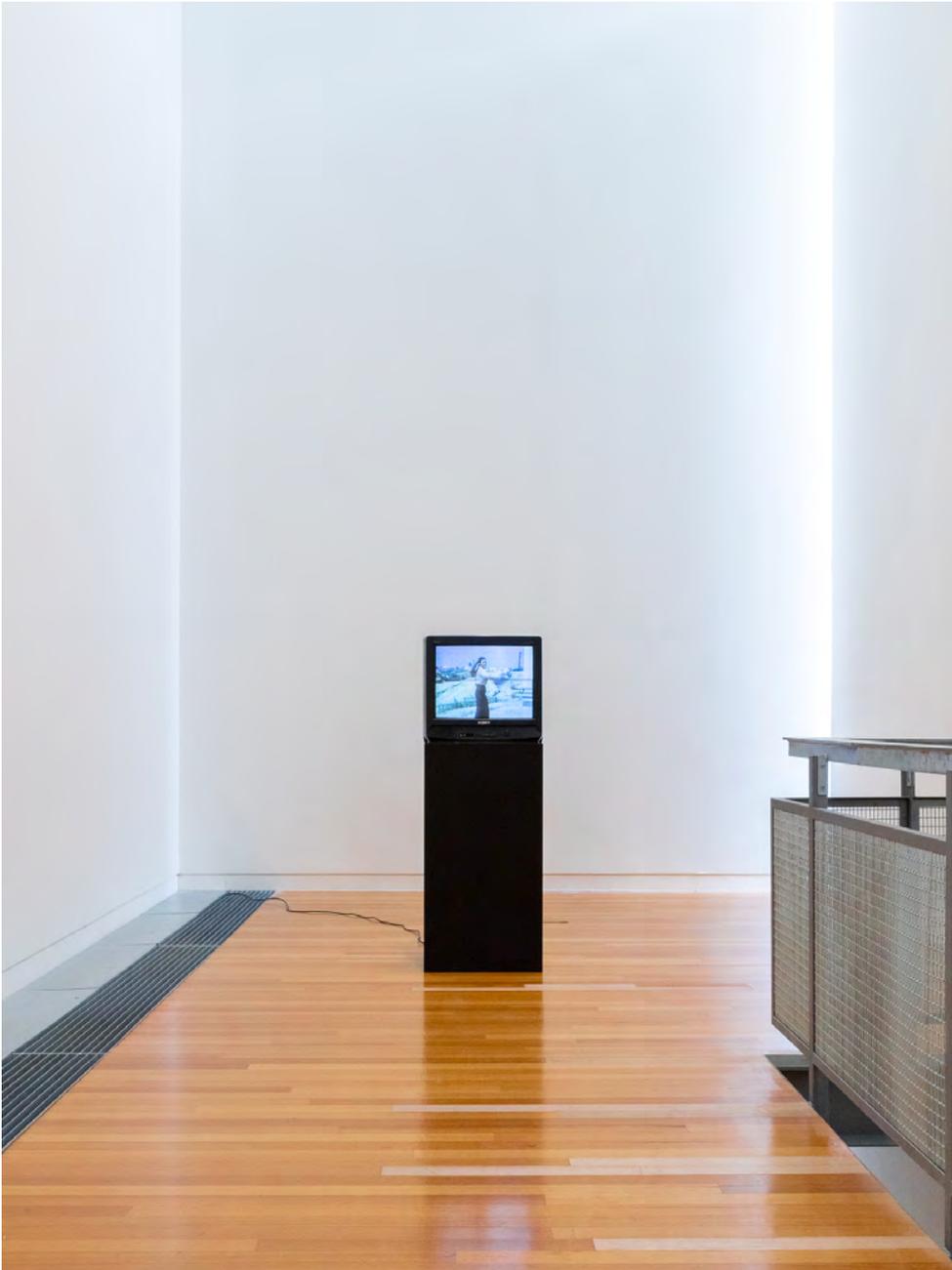
By combining the text with a soundtrack consisting of irksomely innocuous Muzak, Serra cushions the blows landed by his virulent attack on the medium, using the score to drive home his points that TV is a mechanism of control exercised neither by the state nor by shareholders, but by "corporations" and that we "the people" are sedated into buying what is advertised and believing what is shown. Using the televisual format against itself, this is an early instance of the tactics taken up by artists to talk back to the manipulations of mainstream media.

**Richard Serra** is best known for his large minimalist sculptures, though he has worked in performance, video art, printmaking and drawing. Considered one of the most significant artists of his generation, his site-specific sculptures for architectural, urban and landscape settings can be found across the globe, including New Zealand (*Te Tuhirangi Contour*, 1991/2001, located at Gibbs Farm, Auckland). He graduated with a BA in English Literature at the University of California Santa Barbara in 1961, where he also studied art while supporting himself by working in steel mills, which largely influenced his later sculptures. He then completed an MFA at Yale University from 1961 to 1964. He began showing with Leo Castelli in 1968. Serra's works have been included in biennales, at documenta, and in major solo exhibitions in the USA and Europe. He is a recipient of the J. Paul Getty Medal (2018) and he has also been honoured by Republic of France (2015); Architectural League of New York (2014); Spain (2008); Federal Republic of Germany (2002); and the Venice Biennale (2001). Richard Serra is represented by Gagosian.

**Carlota Schoolman** went on to become Video Director (1974–77) and then Associate Director for Television Production (1978–86) at the non-profit venue for experimental film, video, performance, music and literature, The Kitchen, in New York City.

*We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Museum of Modern Art, New York in the presentation of this work.*

- 1 Richard Serra, *Television Delivers People*, video, 1973.
- 2 'Carlota Schoolman', *The Kitchen OnScreen*, <https://onscreen.thekitchen.org/media/carlota-schoolman>, accessed 1 December 2021.



**Dara BIRNBAUM**  
(born 1946, USA)

*Technology/Transformation:*  
*Wonder Woman*, 1978/79  
videotape transferred to digital, 5:50 mins,  
colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist, Marian Goodman  
Gallery, New York & Paris, and Video  
Data Bank, Chicago

American video artist Dara Birnbaum made *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* before viewers were able to record their favourite TV shows on home VCRs. Instead she had to pirate footage direct from CBS's studio where the weekly hit series was made.<sup>1</sup> The resulting video is widely regarded as a key work in the early history of video art and an icon of feminist art history. TV's *Wonder Woman* was rare for its time in its presentation of a female hero, and though the character played by ex-beauty queen Lynda Carter conformed to stereotypical ideals of female beauty, she was recognised by viewers as a new kind of central protagonist. Birnbaum understands her allure and uses her video to emphasise Carter's physical prowess. By tight editing and repetition, she creates a remix that entwines woman and superhero in a single swirl of explosive power.

The image sequence begins and ends with a gigantic fireball that fills the screen, leaving viewers with an ambivalent sense that *Wonder Woman*/Diana Prince/Lynda Carter could be a destroyer rather than a saviour. And as a coda to the work, Birnbaum uses a blue screen for the last few moments to run the lyrics of a disco song that celebrates "Wonder Woman" as someone who, as one memorable line puts it, can "get us out from under".<sup>2</sup> Here video art is utilised to talk back to television, resisting its processes of social control, especially the objectification of women, to release what might be thought of as unconscious feelings and forces that lie latent in the medium.

**Dara Birnbaum** has a BA in Architecture from the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (1969) and a BFA in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute (1973). Her work has been widely exhibited at MoMA PS1, New York (2019); National Portrait Gallery, London (2018); Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (2018); South London Gallery, UK (2011); major retrospectives at the Serralves Foundation, Porto (2010) and S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (2009); Center for Contemporary Art, CCA Kitakyushu (2009); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2006); and The Jewish Museum, New York (2003). She has been included in several group and survey exhibitions, such as *documenta 7, 8, and 9*; *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, MoCA, Los Angeles (2007), and *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1994*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009). In 2016 she was recognised and honoured for her work by The Kitchen, New York, and she has received numerous awards including: The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Arts Residency (2011); a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2011); and a United States Artists Fellowship (2010). She was the first woman in video to receive the prestigious Maya Deren Award by the American Film Institute, in 1987. Dara Birnbaum lives and works in New York where she teaches at the School of Visual Art. She is represented by Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris.

- 1 Dara Birnbaum speaking with Barbara London on *Curator Culture* at The [Virtual] Bass, Miami Beach, 22 October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0svaKSJrMk>, accessed 24 November 2021.
- 2 Lyrics from the song 'Wonder Woman Disco', by Wonderland Disco Band, 1978, RS International, Hippopotamus Productions.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

## Martha ROSLER with Paper Tiger Television

*Martha Rosler Reads Vogue: Wishing,  
Dreaming, Winning, Spending*, 1982  
videotape transferred to digital,  
25:22 mins, colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist and Video Data  
Bank, Chicago

*What is Vogue? ...It is the power of the phallus to transform and fascinate in lieu of real wealth, power and prestige.*

– Martha Rosler, 1982<sup>1</sup>

American film critic Amy Taubin maintains that one of the strongest features of pioneering video artist Martha Rosler's work is her voice. She describes it as "tough, intelligent and unmistakably of Brooklyn origin". In other words, it is "[t]he voice of a specific person who grew up in a specific time, place and social class, her voice is her best argument against the social standardization that is the target of her tape."<sup>2</sup> This is especially true of *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue: Wishing, Dreaming, Winning, Spending*. Here, we watch the artist seated with a copy of the magazine, the carefully marked and annotated pages of which she turns, tracing her fingers over the contours of the faces and bodies of the models who adorn its advertisements and photo-spreads. Reading or reciting in her soothingly measured tones, she slips effortlessly between the seductive language we attach to the imagery – "luxury", "fashion", "allure", "mystery", "romance", "glamour" – and the harsher truths these visual representations belie: "mystification", "voyeurism", "narcissism", "the power of the phallus", et cetera. By so entwining straightforward narration with critical interpolation, and layering positive messaging with its negative effects, Rosler conveys the insidious operation of ideology, which masks the unpleasant truths of social inequality, worker exploitation, and the objectification of women.

This work was made in collaboration with the then newly established Paper Tiger Television and performed live on a public access channel of a cable television station in 1982. Paper Tiger TV was founded by Dee Dee Halleck in 1981 in Manhattan as a non-profit video collective dedicated to raising media literacy and challenging corporate control over mainstream media. Still operating today, it continues to produce material for public access media as well as providing a library of tapes addressed to a variety of social justice causes and training for non-professionals to learn the necessary skills of media activism.<sup>3</sup>

**Martha Rosler** is determinedly political artist who uses photography, video, text, performance and installation to expose and challenge the processes by which meaning is made, enforced, de- and re-constructed. Her work in all its forms is addressed to the powerful systems that control everyday life and perpetuate social and economic inequity. She has also published several books of photographs, text and commentary on public space, ranging from airports and roads to housing, homelessness and gentrification, most recently, *Culture Class* (2013). Her work has been the subject of a major travelling retrospective, *Positions in the Life World* (1998–2000), shown in Birmingham, Vienna, Lyon/Villeurbanne, Barcelona, Rotterdam and New York, as well as a number of solo exhibitions around the world. A restaging of one of her projects from the 1970s was held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2012 (the Meta-Monumental Garage Sale). In 2018 the Jewish Museum in New York presented *Martha Rosler: Irrespective*, a survey exhibition showcasing her five-decades' long practice from the 1960s to the present. A collection of Rosler's writings, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001*, was published by MIT Press and October Books in 2004 and she regularly contributes to *Artforum*, *e-flux journal* and *Texte zur Kunst*. She is at work on a revival of her 1970s manuscript called *The Art of Cooking*. Rosler still lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

- 1 Martha Rosler with Paper Tiger Television, *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue: Wishing, Dreaming, Winning, Spending*, video, 1982.
- 2 Amy Taubin quoted in 'Crossing Borders: Martha Rosler', *Frieze*, 5 November 1993, <https://www.frieze.com/article/crossing-borders>, accessed 1 December 2021.
- 3 Paper Tiger Television, 'History', <https://papertiger.org/about-us/history/> accessed 24 November 2021.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Harun FAROCKI**  
(b. 1944, d. 2014,  
Czech/Germany)

*An Image*, 1983  
16mm film transferred to digital video,  
25 mins, colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist's estate and Video  
Data Bank, Chicago

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German film-maker Harun Farocki's *An Image* was commissioned in 1983 for the television series *Projektionen '83*. Typical of the artist's slow, observational approach to film-making, it consists of a carefully edited but unscripted document of a *Playboy* photoshoot. In the artist's words, written in 1988 and published on his website:

*Four days spent in a studio working on a centerfold photo for Playboy magazine provided the subject matter for my film. The magazine itself deals with culture, cars, a certain lifestyle. Maybe all those trappings are only there to cover up the naked woman. Maybe it's like with a paper-doll. The naked woman in the middle is a sun around which a system revolves: of culture, of business, of living! (It's impossible to either look or film into the sun.) One can well imagine that the people creating such a picture, the gravity of which is supposed to hold all that, perform their task with as much care, seriousness, a responsibility as if they were splitting uranium.*

*This film, An Image, is part of a series I've been working on since 1979. The television station that commissioned it assumes in these cases that I'm making a film that is critical of its subject matter, and the owner or manager of the thing that's being filmed assumes that my film is an advertisement for them. I try to do neither. Nor do I want to do something in between, but beyond both.<sup>1</sup>*

**Harun Farocki** is a German filmmaker who was born in 1944 in Czechoslovakia to an Indian father and a German mother. He studied at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin from 1966 to 1968, where he was politicised by opposition to the Vietnam War and the politics of the Red Army Faction. Based in Germany for most of his career, he is known for his political essay films that re-use imagery and footage from an array of sources, as well as "fly on the wall" cinematography. Directing more than 100 films and staging several multi-screen installations, he analysed the powers of the image and openly confronted subjects such as war, revolutionary uprisings, and capitalist exploitation. He also worked as a critic, editor (*Filmkritik* magazine, 1974–1984), theorist and curator. From 1993 to 1999, Farocki taught at the University of California, Berkeley, and was a Professor at the Academy of Art, Vienna from 2006 to 2011.

In 2014, to acknowledge his death at the age of 70, Adam Art Gallery screened three of his films in a one-night programme curated by Laura Preston in partnership with Goethe-Institut New Zealand. Since then, Farocki's contribution has been widely celebrated with retrospectives at The Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (*Harun Farocki: Mit anderen Mitteln – By Other Means*, 2017), Centre Pompidou (*Harun Farocki Retrospective*, 2017) and The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (*Harun Farocki Retrospective*, 2018).

1 Harun Farocki, 'An Image', <https://www.harunfarocki.de/films/1980s/1983/an-image.html>, accessed 16 November 2021.



## Lisa REIHANA

(born 1964, New Zealand,  
Ngāpuhi, Ngati Hine,  
Ngaituteauru)

*Wog Features*, 1990  
single channel SD 4:3 video, 7:50 mins,  
colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist

...don't look at me like that.

– Lisa Reihana, 1990<sup>1</sup>

Lisa Reihana started work on *Wog Features* when she was on a residency at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney not long after graduating from University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, where she had studied in the Intermedia programme run by the sound, performance and video artist Philip Dadson.<sup>2</sup> Against the backdrop of Australia's bicentenary and New Zealand's sesquicentenary celebrations, and on the brink of the 'culture wars' of the 1990s that saw colonised and indigenous peoples across the globe seeking visibility for themselves and restitution for the fateful legacy of colonisation, Reihana's short animated video is a vibrant portent of the disruptive force of the 'subaltern' voices then beginning to be heard.

Sounding and looking like a cross between an experimental artist film, a music video, and a children's TV programme, Reihana turns herself, several friends, her collection of 'golliwogs', and other racist artefacts into representatives of a new non-western, non-white 'world' culture. She takes on and recodes the language, objects and symbols of cultural suppression by literally mixing them up. For example, white and black plastic skeletons jiggle so wildly that their coloured bones begin to mingle; "Jemima" the black doll is granted the role of "Doctor" to male doll "Michael's" "nurse"; a taunting voiceover repeats "you're a wog" to visuals of a set of false teeth with a giant, red fake tongue consuming the phrase "eat your words", and the world map is redrawn so that the South Pacific, India and the USSR are given more attention than Europe and America. By referencing mainstream formats and redeploying an array of formal tricks, the artist exposes how people of colour have been exoticized and exploited, at the same time asserting her right to lay claim to that self-same imagery and make something of it for herself.

*Wog Features* immediately struck a chord. It was included in the ground-breaking 1990 exhibition, *Choice!* curated by George Hubbard for Artspace in Auckland, that brought together a selection of contemporary Māori artists who chose not to employ the traditional formats and subjects of customary Māori art, speaking instead to detribalised urban realities and identifying readily with American hip hop and other contemporary forms of Black cultural expression. However, at its heart, and true to the way in which Reihana

works through to the present, *Wog Features* rejects a western model of singular authorship. As the credits roll she writes: "Special thanks to my family, friends, and the many other people whose help and inspiration have made *Wog Features*. Kia Kaha."

Lisa Reihana is a leading figure in the recent history of contemporary art in Aotearoa New Zealand. She is known for her largescale video installations and photographs that figure her imaginative work as a creative director overseeing costume, body adornment, choreography, sound design, camerawork and post-production, and which address Te Ao Māori both before and after colonisation. She graduated with a BFA from the Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University in 1987, and from the Unitec Institute of Technology in 2014 with a Masters in Design. Reihana represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2017 with the large-scale video installation in *Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (2015–17), which has since been shown around the world and received widespread critical acclaim. She has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (2008), Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth (2007) and Museo Laboratoria di Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2007), and has been included in major international group exhibitions including, most recently, *Toi Tū Toi Ora* at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2020–21); the Biennale of Sydney (2020), and *Oceania* at the Royal Academy, London (2018). In 2014 Reihana was awarded an Arts Laureate Award by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, in 2015 she was awarded the Te Tohu Toi Ke Te Waka Toi Māori Arts Innovation Award from Creative New Zealand, and in 2018 she was made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

- 1 Lisa Reihana, *Wog Features*, single channel SD 4:3 video, 1990.
- 2 See Chloe Cull, 'Lisa Reihana: A Continuum of Māori Practice', in *He Whare Hangarau Māori – Language, Culture & Technology*, edited by Hemi Whaanga, Te Taka Keegan & Mark Apperley, Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Kirikiriroa, Hamilton, 2017, pp. 203–204.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Megan DUNN**  
(born 1974, New Zealand)

*Obsession*, 1998  
videotape transferred to digital, 2:15 mins,  
colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist and Circuit Artist  
Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand

*The mainstream was the problem and the edit suite was where it could be corrected.*

– Megan Dunn, 2021<sup>1</sup>

*Obsession* is one of several videos Megan Dunn made during her short career as a video artist in the 1990s. It was composed in a linear editing suite at the University of Auckland, where she was a Fine Arts student. Her tactic was to take existing material, borrowing tapes from her local video store and then cutting and mixing these to draw out implicit or unconscious subtexts. Her approach was a reaction against both the original application of video to record live action (especially performance in which the artist's body was the locus of attention) and the critical theory that dominated her time at art school. Instead she was drawn to imagery that compelled her: in this case a young Kate Moss, the definitive new face of fashion and an icon of the era, who was at the time taken up by Calvin Klein as the embodiment of his new fragrance, 'Obsession'.

Combining Klein's TV commercials with Walt Disney's animations of wraith-like spirits and ghoulish riders, Dunn somehow taps all that is dangerous and seductive in the concept of 'heroin chic' which was the look embodied by the model and used as a marketing tool to sell products to an overwhelmingly female demographic. As she explains:

*I have not edited the Kate Moss Obsession (1993) advertisements at all; even the soundtrack is original. I have simply overlaid the visual sequence from Fantasia's (1940) Night On Bald Mountain. The emaciated cartoon demons subtly accentuate Kate Moss's own status as a waif. The towering devil that rises above her (and from within her) could represent a lover or demanding inner critic. Skeletons rise from their graves. What is love? Love is a word. Obsession.<sup>2</sup>*

**Megan Dunn** graduated with a BFA from the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 1998. At the same time she was completing her degree she established and co-directed the artist-run initiative Fiat Lux, a space in Auckland that operated between 1996 and 2000. In 2001 she left for London, and in 2006 she completed a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications including *Art News*, *Circuit*, *The New Zealand Listener* and *The Pantograph Punch*. Her book *Tinderbox* was published in 2017, and her memoir, *Things I Learned at Art School* was published by Penguin Books (NZ) in 2021. She currently works at City Gallery, Wellington, as the Public Programmes Manager. You can see more of her work on the Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand website.

- 1 Megan Dunn, *Things I Learned at Art School*, Penguin Random House NZ, Auckland, 2021, p. 122.
- 2 Megan Dunn, 'Obsession', *CIRCUIT Artist Film & Video Aotearoa New Zealand*, <https://www.circuit.org.nz/film/obsession>, accessed 10 November 2021.

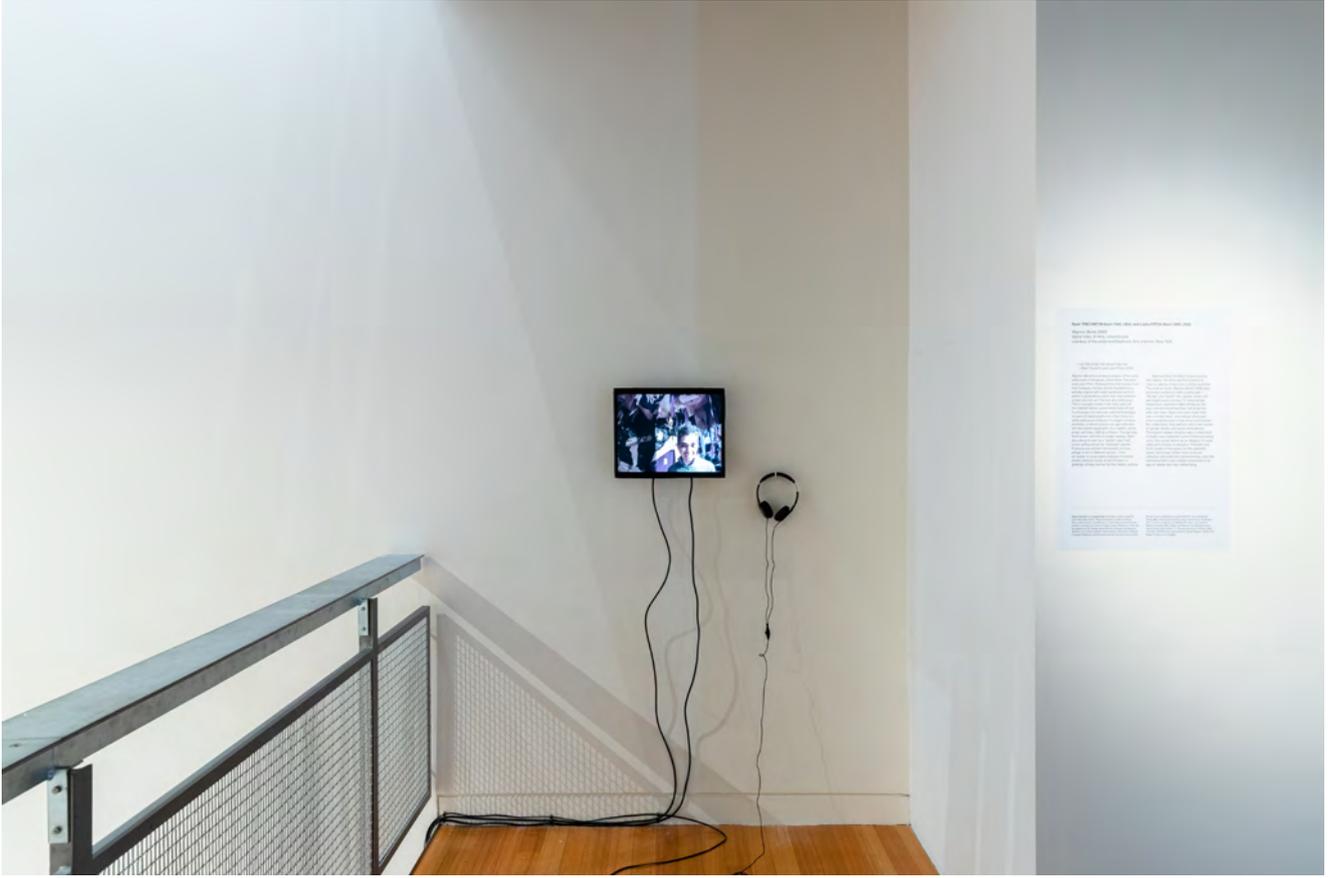


Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Ryan TRECARTIN**  
(born 1981, USA)  
**and Lizzie FITCH**  
(born 1981, USA)

*Wayne's World*, 2003  
digital video, 8 mins, colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist and Electronic Arts  
Intermix, New York

*I see Oprah but she doesn't see me.*

– Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, 2003<sup>1</sup>

*Wayne's World* is a striking instance of the early video work of American artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch. Distinguishing themselves from their forbears, the two artists manufacture a weirdly original self-made world and perform within it, generating a work that slips between screen and set as if the two are continuous. This is a project made in the early years of the internet before social media took off, but it anticipates the rationale and methodologies of users of digital platforms in that there is a wilful and joyous embrace of a hyper-amateur aesthetic, in which anyone can gain attention with the simple application of a camera, some props and basic editing software. The pair play themselves, with mirror-image makeup, Ryan describing himself as a “digital” video “kid”, Lizzie calling herself an “analogue” painter. Prancing around their homemade set they pillage a raft of different genres – from art speak, to soap-opera dialogue, to dance moves and pop-songs all performed in a gratingly off-key manner for the hidden camera.

Appropriating the title of a pop-cultural film classic, Trecartin and Fitch revel in a mise-en-abyme of low-brow cultural quotation. The original movie, *Wayne's World* (1992) also presented audiences with a wacky pair – “Wayne” and “Garth”, two slacker dudes and self-styled public-access TV hosts whose imaginative universe is filled entirely by the pop-cultural references they had grown up with. Like them, Ryan and Lizzie make their own entertainment, channelling references from a widening pool of low-brow touchstones. But unlike them, they perform with a new sense of gender fluidity and sexual ambivalence. The movie's deeper storyline was a celebration of public over corporate control of broadcasting and in this sense serves as an allegory for early video art's critique of television. Trecartin and Fitch create a third space for this aesthetic tussle, using their artistic tools to recast individual and collective consciousness, playfully rethinking how to be creative consumers in an age of twenty-four hour online living.

Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch have been working together since the early 2000s. They are known for their non-linear films and immersive installations, in which they and their friends perform and play out a host of hyper-active characters. They met as students at the Rhode Island School of Design and *Wayne's World* is one of their earliest collaborations. They have exhibited in group exhibitions and biennales all over the world since 2006. Recent major installations include *Whether Line*, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2019) and *Any Ever*, which toured from The Power Plant, Toronto, to MoCA, LA; MoMA PS1, New York; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul; MCA, Miami, and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2010–11). They live and work in Athens Ohio. Trecartin and Fitch are represented by Sprüth Magers, Berlin and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

1 Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, *Wayne's World*, digital video, 2003.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

## **Wynne GREENWOOD**

(born 1977, USA)

## **K8 HARDY**

(born 1977, USA)

*New Report Artist Unknown*, 2005–6  
digital video, 16:30 mins, colour/sound  
courtesy of the artists and Video Data  
Bank, Chicago

20/28 Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery / Image Processors / 04.09.21–07.11.21

*Dear Chelsea,  
... I wonder why you didn't want these paintings.*

–Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy, 2005<sup>1</sup>

New York-based queer, feminist artists Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy have independent practices: Greenwood as a video artist and musician, Hardy as an experimental film-maker, photographer, and founding editor of the art collective LTTR (Lesbians to the Rescue). In the mid-2000s they collaborated on *New Report*, a series of videos that spoof news reports. These were designed to “uncover hidden stories of desire and resistance in women’s lives”, as Tate Modern described the series in 2006.<sup>2</sup> The episode presented here was performed on 11 October 2005. Following the conventions of TV news, “WKRH” presenter, “Henry Steiner-Acker-Hill” (Greenwood), talks live in the studio to in-the-field reporter “Henry Irigaray” (Hardy), as they react to a story about a mystery woman artist seen dumping her paintings. Searching through the rubbish bins in the fashionable art district of Chelsea, they set out to locate the lost canvases, eventually finding five modest works scrawled with hand-painted texts in a dumpster. These are brought back to the studio where the pair read a letter to “Chelsea”, asking why the painter’s works weren’t wanted.

This mock exercise produces an oblique critique of the cut-throat New York art world, where only a very few break into the ‘big time’. Greenwood and Hardy pinpoint gender as one of the obstacles facing the hopeful artist, suggesting that she represents all the women artists through time whose works have not been appreciated. Mixing the make-believe of ‘role-play’ with real-world locations, *New Report* uses the media machine against itself. Cloaking their critique in parody, Greenwood and Hardy insinuate their revolt against the inequities of a system that would drive a woman to destroy the products of her creative labour, vindicating her efforts by granting them exposure and respect on their self-made version of the medium that can manufacture success.

**Wynne Greenwood** has an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts, Bard College (2004). From 1999 to 2006 she created and performed as the multimedia art-band Tracy + The Plastics, which blurred the distinctions between contemporary art and music, playing all three parts: lead singer, Tracy, and her backup singers Nikki Romanos and Cola. After this project, Greenwood shifted her focus to installation and object-based work, and has recently returned to making music and video works. Her work has been exhibited at the New Museum, New York; Reed College, Portland; Fanta Spazio, Milan; Crush Repeat, Seattle; the Whitney Biennial, NYC; The Kitchen, NYC; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, LA; the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; and Soloway, Brooklyn.

**K8 Hardy** explores issues of race, class, economics and gender in fashion and advertising through her work as a video and performance artist, fashion stylist and photographer. She has a BA in Film and Women’s Studies from Smith College and an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College. Her work is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She has exhibited and performed at the Whitney Museum of American Art; MoMA PS1, New York; Artists Space, New York; the Tate Modern, London, and Gerlie Sonja Junkers, Munich.

*New Report* has been presented at Hayward Gallery, London (2006); Tate Modern, London (2006, 2007), and Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, New York (2005).

- 1 Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy, *New Report Artist Unknown*, digital video, 2005–2006.
- 2 ‘Level 2 Gallery: Media Burn: Wynne Greenwood and K8 Hardy’, 2006, Tate Modern, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/level-2-gallery-media-burn/level-2-gallery-media-burn-wynne>, accessed 16 November 2021.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Josephine MECKSEPER**  
(born 1964, Germany/USA)

*0% Down*, 2008

digital video, 6 mins, black and white/  
sound

courtesy of the artist and Timothy Taylor,  
New York & London

*The notion of desire in the context of consumerism is just another propagandistic mode of manipulation in a capitalist society.*

—Josephine Meckseper, 2012<sup>1</sup>

Working with off-the-shelf products, advertising imagery, and the techniques of commercial display, German-born, US-based artist Josephine Meckseper sets out to “subvert normative mass culture” by exposing how it functions as an “instrument of power”.<sup>2</sup> In *0% Down*, she takes American car commercials and reworks them to reveal how they harbour fantasies of aggression and technological mastery. Apart from draining her source material of colour, the artist does not manipulate the footage, even leaving in the manufacturer’s logos and advertising copy. She only edits and streamlines her content into a seamless reel of speeding, spinning and braking vehicles that has the adrenalin rush of a videogame.

The full impact and her deeper point is achieved by the addition of an alternative sound track: ‘Total War’ by experimental musician NON from the album titled *God & Beast* (1997). This heavy, industrial track sets a new furiously confronting beat to the choreographed images, especially when we learn that the lyrics refer to the notorious speech by Joseph Goebbels in 1943, when he posed the question “Do you want total war?” to rally Germans to the Nazi cause. By this ominous twist, German-born Meckseper draws a chilling connection between her inherited history and her video’s context: America’s devastating war with Iraq (2003–2011). Suddenly these gleaming commodities crystallise the unholy alliance between industry and oil, commodity production and the military machine, consumer culture and American triumphalism.

**Josephine Meckseper** is known for her explorations of the paradoxes of consumer culture, through sculpture, installation, publications and films. She studied at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin between 1986 and 1990, and completed an MFA at the California Institute of the Arts in 1992. She describes her experience studying at CalArts in the early 1990s as “formative”, not only for the school’s strongly political and conceptual pedagogy, but also because her studies coincided with the LA riots sparked by the acquittal of police for the savage beating of African American Rodney King (in April 1992). Meckseper’s filming of the unrests resulted in her early film work entitled *04.30.92*, 1992. Meckseper’s work has been included in two Whitney Biennials (2006 and 2010); the Sharjah Biennial (2011); the Taipei Biennial (2014); and the National Gallery of Victoria Triennial (2017–18). In 2007 a major retrospective of her work was organised by the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart. Meckseper’s large-scale public project, *Manhattan Oil Project*, was commissioned by the Art Production Fund and installed in a lot adjacent to Times Square in New York, in 2012. In 2015 her works were featured in *Storylines*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and *America Is Hard to See*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Her most recent survey exhibition took place at the Frac des Pays de la Loire, Nantes, France, in 2019. She is represented by Timothy Taylor, New York and London.

- 1 ‘Josephine Meckseper: The Final Shop, a Conversation between Josephine Meckseper and Sarah Lookofsky’, DIS Magazine, 16 January 2012, <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/27805/the-final-shop/>, accessed 10 November 2021.
- 2 Flavin Judd, ‘Josephine Meckseper’, Bomb Magazine, 10 December 2008, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/josephine-meckseper-1/>, accessed 10 November 2021.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Mike HEYNES**  
(born 1971, New Zealand)

*News of the Uruguay Round*, 2016  
digital video projection, 2 mins, colour/  
silent  
courtesy of the artist

24/28 Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery / Image Processors / 04.09.21–07.11.21

*There's something truly magical about movie logos, especially the classics.*

–YouTube user<sup>1</sup>

*News of the Uruguay Round* consists of a suite of short animations made by Wellington-based video artist Mike Heynes that are loving remakes of those movie company logos we see before a film begins. At first glance, we might be convinced his versions are legitimate, but watch more closely and the illusion dissolves as the clunky, home-made nature of his work becomes apparent. There is skill and inventiveness in Heynes' approximations, enough to suggest that the artist is a fan: who hasn't been drawn in by the clever motion graphics and ambitious self-styling that production companies grant themselves when they choose names like 'Universal', 'Paramount' or '20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox'? But because the artist inevitably, or pointedly, falls short, there is also another agenda at work. His backyard DIY constructions and clunky special effects prove the gulf that exists between the amateur working alone with whatever low-fi props and equipment he can muster, and the massive resources – technological and financial – that the mainstream film industry can access. In this light, Heynes reminds us of the power imbalance between the big studios and their target audiences, and the colonising effects of American mass entertainment as it reaches even this far-flung shore.

Heynes' title makes his critical point explicit. He references the largest and longest negotiations conducted between 1986 and 1995 by the World Trade Organisation on issues ranging from tariffs to intellectual property, that involved 123 countries and set the terms for global trade.<sup>2</sup> In particular, he remembers the moment during the Uruguay Round when New Zealand signed the TRIPS agreement in 1994 that opened the country to the international movie industry and led to series like *Xena Warrior Princess* and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy being made here. While these productions provided work for local talent, Heynes believes that the preferential terms proffered to offshore companies has made it harder for local filmmakers to tell their stories. This is the subtext to which his 'home'-made animations refer.

**Mike Heynes** is a Wellington-based artist with a deep interest in and knowledge of film history and studio-based production. Known for his low-tech remakes that are crude but inventive pastiches of a wide array of film and TV genres, he demonstrates a broad skill-set in model-making, animation, robotics and other home-made special effects. Heynes has a BA in Film Studies from Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington (1997), an MFA from Whiti o Rehua School of Art, Massey University (2013), and he has just completed work for his PhD, also from Massey University. *News of the Uruguay Round* was first shown at Enjoy Contemporary Art Space in 2016 and again at the Auckland Art Fair in 2019. You can see more of his work on the Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand website.

- 1 Buzzcock102 commenting on 'Best Movie Studio Logos', 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjN7x90Jmvc>, accessed 9 November 2021.
- 2 See 'Mike Heynes: News of the Uruguay Round', February 2016, Enjoy Contemporary Art Space Exhibition Archive, <https://enjoy.org.nz/news-of-the-uruguay-round>, accessed 9 November 2021.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Arthur Jafa**  
(born 1960, USA)

*Love is the Message, The Message is Death*, 2016  
digital video projection, 7:25 mins,  
colour/sound  
courtesy of the artist and Gladstone  
Gallery

*By now it's a tradition, an inevitability,  
a promise, a pattern, a curse – which is  
to say a rhythm.*

–Tobi Haslett, 2016<sup>1</sup>

Art critic Tobi Haslett's statement concludes his 2016 review in *Artforum* of Arthur Jafa's *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*. He is referring to the frightful repetition of police violence against Black people and the authorities' seeming impunity when tested by America's legal system. By linking events across time to musical form, the critic recognises Jafa's stated ambition to find a form for a Black visual aesthetic equivalent to the achievement of Black music. It is this that is embodied in Jafa's seven-minute film collage. Montaging one-hundred-and-fifty video clips from myriad sources – including Jafa's own images; police dash-cam videos; archived news footage; shaky iPhone recordings of social gatherings, sporting events and eye-witnessed incidents – he cuts and combines a moving catalogue of Black experience, set to the Kanye West track, *Ultralight Beam*. Part music video, part video essay, this is a work of art and an act of protest.

Launched at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York in November 2016, the reception of Jafa's work has been seismic. Calvin Tomkins in *The New Yorker* called *Love Is the Message...* "the most spell-binding art work of the past decade",<sup>2</sup> and it has subsequently been shown in museums all over the world. Despite its widespread acclaim, and the opportunities for Jafa to which it has led, the artist is clear that his primary audience is not the contemporary art world. As he puts it, "I'm speaking to Black people and everybody else gets to listen in."<sup>3</sup> His aim is not to catalogue Black trauma, but to address and find a form for the beauty and expressivity of Black American culture. Poet Fred Moten was suitably receptive stating that *Love is the Message* shows the "entanglement of absolute joy and absolute pain....It's in every moment. There is no break and this is why it's good that it lasts only seven minutes, because that's as much as anyone can take."<sup>4</sup>

**Arthur Jafa** was born in Tupelo, Mississippi. He studied architecture and film at Howard University in Washington D.C. He is an artist making sculpture, video and installation, who has also worked as a cinematographer for filmmakers such as Julie Dash, Spike Lee and Stanley Kubrick, and has made music videos and TV advertisements. Since showing with Gavin Brown's Enterprise and now with Gladstone Gallery, Jafa has exhibited widely, including solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles (2017); the Serpentine Galleries in London (2017), and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (2018). *The White Album* was first shown at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives in 2018 and subsequently in the Venice Biennale in 2019, where it was awarded The Golden Lion. In 2020, it was included in the 22nd Biennale of Sydney. A major retrospective of his work, entitled *MAGNUMB*, is currently on display at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark.

- 1 Tobi Haslett, 'Object Lessons: Tobi Haslett on Arthur Jafa's *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*', *Artforum*, 9 December 2016, <https://www.artforum.com/film/tobi-haslett-on-arthur-jafa-s-love-is-the-message-the-message-is-death-65183>, accessed 9 November 2021.
- 2 Calvin Tomkins, 'Arthur Jafa's Radical Alienation', *The New Yorker*, 21 December 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/12/21/arthur-jafas-radical-alienation> accessed 10 November 2021.
- 3 Jace Clayton, 'As Brilliant as the Sun', *Frieze*, 22 February 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/brilliant-sun>, accessed 10 November 2021.
- 4 Fred Moten in Calvin Tomkins, op. cit.



Photo by Ted Whitaker

**Matthew GRIFFIN**  
(born 1976, Australia)

*Unchained Malady*, 2020  
133 short videos presented on a large  
screen, 54:46 mins, colour/sound  
private collection, courtesy the artist  
and Fine Arts, Sydney

28/25 Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery / Image Processors / 04.09.21–07.11.21

Matthew Griffin first presented *Unchained Malady* at his dealer gallery, Fine Arts, Sydney, in April 2021. The work consists of 133 short videos originally posted on social media and then played on a large LED screen. Installed in the centre of the small space, visitors had to negotiate footage they would normally have randomly received on their phones at a new and commanding scale. Griffin's clips were cut and edited from various online sources then loaded over time to his Instagram account.<sup>1</sup> There they would be quickly consumed, liked and shared, or disappear as each user's algorithm did its work, and eventually Griffin would take them down.<sup>2</sup>

So here was an opportunity to see all 133 of his mini-montages together in a single viewing and a physical destination. Now at the Adam Art Gallery, visitors can enjoy the compilation in a manner quite other to scrolling through Instagram or TikTok. All together, they could appreciate *Unchained Malady's* cumulative effect and come to experience the logic and perspective of its maker.

Griffin comes across as an artist struggling to cope with current conditions: wondering if the Australia Council might fund his much needed dental work and watching as the Sydney Biennale succumbs to the COVID pandemic. With real life opportunities curtailed, the artist goes online and creates funny and irreverent mashups of the stuff that is clogging his feed. In particular he ridicules political leaders – especially then-American President Donald Trump and his Australian equivalent Scott Morrison – sometimes putting different words into the mouths of his subjects or matching their talking heads with videos of ordinary people seeking social media fame by posting themselves playing their musical instruments.

By these means, *Unchained Malady* reads as a counternarrative to unfolding events. Filtered through the faux-neutrality of a slightly off-kilter observer, the disaster of the spreading virus and the mixed messages delivered by these so-called leaders seem doubly bizarre. Slowly, as the videos unfold, a momentum builds towards an inevitable climax, which is hinted at in the background layer of colourised footage showing the storming of the White House by angry right-wing protesters after Trump lost the election in late 2020. Ending with that symbol of democracy and the 'Free World' assaulted by a mix of crazed survivalists, white supremacists, and QAnon conspiracists, Griffin's gentle riffs seem somehow soothing in their difference.

**Matthew Griffin** lives and works in Sydney. He is an Australian artist working across sculpture, photography, video and installation. He completed a BFA at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne in 1998. His work has been exhibited most recently at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI, 2021), Melbourne; and at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2013 & 2009); Artspace, Sydney (2013); Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (2011); Hayward Gallery, London (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2008); The Physics Room, Christchurch (2007); and on social media platforms including Instagram and eBay. He is represented by Fine Arts, Sydney and you can follow him on Instagram @contemporaryary.

1 Matthew Griffin's Instagram account is @contemporaryary

2 'Matthew Griffin: Content', ACMI, <https://www.acmi.net.au/collection-preservation/commissions/matthew-griffin-commission/>, accessed 9 November 2021.