

Stansfield / Hooykaas

Everything Is Round [A Footnote To History]

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'Revealing the Invisible' is a major exhibition and retrospective focusing on the art of the seminal visual arts duo Stansfield / Hooykaas in a series of video, sculpture, photography and sound works from the 70s to recently completed works hosted across Street Level Photoworks and CCA. The artists are considered pioneers in the field of video art with their work influencing many multimedia artists today.

In their installations they developed unique associative principles between images, words and sound. Their work is about space and time: the tides, the cycle of seasons and natural elements of physics such as radio waves and magnetic fields. In addition, they use video and photography, combined with materials like stone, aluminium, glass, phosphorus and water. In almost all their work, they refer explicitly to the earth and nature, and spirituality is part of their life philosophy. Elsa Stansfield died unexpectedly in 2004, however Hooykaas continues to create visual artwork in the spirit of their collaboration.

About the Artists

Elsa Stansfield (Glasgow, 1945) and Madelon Hooykaas (Maartensdijk, 1942) began their artistic collaboration in the early-seventies. The background of both artists included film and photography, subjects which eventually led them into the making of video tapes and installations. Their first video works were of a distinctly conceptual nature, whereby the investigation of characteristics of the - at that time - new artists' medium, played a prominent role. Their work places strong emphasis on factors such as 'time' (its passing/duration) and 'space'. Countless journeys form the initial inspiration for new works. Recurring subjects are natural phenomena and the elements.

The year 1975 marked the beginning of their productive partnership with video in an exhibition 'What's It To You', a two screen installation made for the Third Eye Centre (now CCA) in Glasgow. Their final installation as a living collaboration was at Centrespace at Dundee Contemporary Arts in 2004 where they exhibited 'Day for Night', the results of a residency at the Visual Research Centre.

The practice of Stansfield / Hooykaas is very well known internationally and their works have been exhibited in Sydney (Biennale), Kassel (Documenta) and London (Whitechapel Gallery), and their work is included in the collections of the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

A richly illustrated book (in English) highlighting their work has been produced to coincide with the exhibition - 'Revealing the Invisible - The Art of Stansfield / Hooykaas from Different Perspectives', published by De Buitenkant, Amsterdam, and includes 11 international authors. The book is available from Street Level and Aye Aye bookshop at CCA.

Video 'Art' emerged out of the turbulence of the late 1960s. Video playback systems became available at the same time as the rise of counter-cultural tendencies and manifestations – a time when cultural, technological and social energies intersected and transformed one another in new and previously unseen ways. The work of Stansfield / Hooykaas surfaces from these cross currents, and from the vantage point of 2010, offers a rich trajectory which tracks the evolution of video art from its first outings as real-time black and white recordings to the focus on projection and the present day convergence of media within immersive environments.

They might be called the younger breed of the first generation video artists to start exhibiting their work in the 1970s and whose work has had an influential affect in Britain and in Europe and which in turn has helped to define the expanded area of video installation. Their first and last 'video environments' were made in Scotland in 1975 and 2004 respectively, and whilst the latter was the last made when Stansfield was still alive, it is neither appropriate nor indeed accurate to call it 'final', as Hooykaas has continued to produce artworks in their name and in their oeuvre.

'What's It To You?' was shown in Glasgow's Third Eye Centre in 1975 (now the CCA), quite possibly the first video experiment in a public gallery space in the city, and embodied elements that have maintained some continuity through their practice. It makes reference to the site it is located in, combines live and pre-recorded video, includes photography, and involves a questioning of the role of the viewer. It comprised two monitors playing tapes from a flea market ('The Barras') with the aforementioned arts centre which is situated on one of the busiest shopping streets in the city (Sauchiehall Street). A third monitor teases passersby to stop, and presumably draws them in. A camera is offered to record viewers thoughts, or for them to write their comments, which are in turn displayed alongside the photographic panels. The title refers to the Glaswegian dialect and mannerism of rebutting a question with a possible hostile response: – 'How are you today?', answer – 'What's It To You?' It is this interactivity and site-specificity that gives their work, like that of others experimenting with video at the time (the 70s), a contemporaneous link to new media. That is to say, it translates well over time.

The tapes were shown again a year later in Glasgow during the conference 'The Future of Video in Scotland' organised by Tamara Krikorian to coincide with the second exhibition of video in the city 'Video: towards defining an aesthetic' (again held at the Third Eye Centre). The potential of video as a tool for change and democratic access to the media, as well as a mode of artistic expression, was the topic of the conference. This was a pioneering time for artists and for organisations – the Third Eye Centre had invested in a video Portapak for artists to use but also to document their own activities, which included exhibitions, poetry readings, recitals, music, dance, and the experimentation that the ethos of 'arts centres' then embraced.

A flurry of video environments driven by conceptual themes followed in the next few years year at places such as Whitechapel Art Gallery, Air Gallery (both London), de Appel (Amsterdam), and Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff), as the reputation of the artists spread with the increasing interest in the art world around video and installation. This period represented an expansion of the British/European aspects of their

exhibition practice, in tune with the Scottish/Dutch synthesis of their collaboration. In mid-1970s Britain, the context for the production, cultivation, promotion and critical appreciation of time-based art was dramatically shifting with a series of interconnected individuals, organisations and initiatives cropping up – in the UK for example with 2B Butlers Wharf (1975), London Video Arts (LVA) (1976), and the Ayton Basement (1976, Newcastle), which became The Basement Group/Projects UK. Many of these venues or projects played important roles as being international ports of call and points of contact in the developing European and International video art scenes.

Stansfield/Hooykaas used the first accessible facility for video, Fantasy Factory, which was set up in 1974, and through that were introduced to artists and facilities at LVA, which had formed itself on the crest of the critical wave of the exhibition 'The Video Show' at the Serpentine in 1975. While LVA had a core nucleus of artists involved who were active in building a culture for video art, there were a great many others whose association with LVA helped fortify the wider climate for the reception of video art, Stansfield/Hooykaas amongst them. This was significant in asserting video as a distinct time-based art form, with its own aesthetic features which set it apart from the discourse and theory around experimental and structuralist film.

In the Netherlands, things were changing too, with new initiatives galvanised by social ideals, such as that of 'Videoheads', formed by Henry Jack Moore in 1971 and based in the Melkweg (Milky Way) - a facility used sporadically by Nan Hoover and Raul Marroquin and also by Stansfield/Hooykaas - and artists spaces such as the 'In/Out/Center' (1972), part of a number of new venues attracting international artists to Amsterdam for its 'tolerant, artistic and grant-friendly climate, and whose innovative and refreshing presence had a stimulating effect on developments, particularly Dutch video art'.^[1]

The origins of the term 'time-based art' is largely assigned to that of David Hall, who set up a course at Maidstone called 'Time Based Media', with a focus on video, in 1972. Elsa Stansfield was to be the first recipient of a video bursary from the department, funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and this was the first of a number to take place with different artists over the course of several years. Elsa Stansfield moved to Maastricht to set up and head a post-graduate video department at the Jan van Eyck Academie, a research institute in 1980.

A 'landmark' exhibition took place at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1984 called 'The Luminous Image' which profiled the diversity and energy around the areas of video installation, with each work created for or premiered at the event. It included a number of European and International artists, including Dara Birnbaum, Max Almy, Nan Hoover, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Vito Acconci, Michel Cardena, Marcel Odenbach, Tony Oursler, Bill Viola, Nam June Paik, Robert Wilson and Brian Eno. Stansfield/Hooykaas were also included and they responded to the invitation by installing a camera mounted on a wind vane on the roof of the museum, which, when moved by the course of the wind, would change the images transmitted to the four monitors 'arranged on the four cardinal points of the compass. The images on monitors in the gallery were directly affected by the direction of the wind, providing an experience of the relationship between past and present, with natural forces as an active participant in the creation of the work'.^[2]

'Stone TV – Broken TV', a two part site-specific sculpture, marked a return to Scotland as part of a group show 'Holland at the Festival' in 1989. The work combined a stone TV on Calton Hill, which overlooks Edinburgh, and another in a medieval Abbey at Inchcolm Island in the Firth of Forth.^[3] Hooykaas discusses the work in her interview in the Rewind Collection (www.rewind.ac.uk): 'The stone TV had an antenna and phosphorescent paint on it. It was like when you switch off a monitor and you see the phosphorescent material. We have used that a lot in our work also because phosphor is part of a monitor. So, in the Abbey we had another stone TV with an antenna and a phosphorus screen. They were five miles apart but they related to each other. We also had a speaker cone as a kind of sculpture with silver leaf on it. In the room, we opened the window and you heard the sea and the seagulls and many people thought that the sound came from the speaker. But there was no electricity used in 'Stone TV – Broken TV'.'

The theme of navigation re-emerges in their work 'Intermittent Signals', shown for the first time in Liverpool as part of Video Positive 91. Inspired by visits to Scotland and its 'powerful' landscape, the work is part of a

series of installation works entitled 'From the Personal Observatory' – it references the ancient stone circles found in Callanish in Lewis and the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney, as solar or lunar observatories, 'Like giant fossilised antenna'^[4] which are seen as metaphors to excavate the past. The work also responds to the copper plaque that was sent up with the Voyager spacecraft as a symbol of our civilisation should any extra-terrestrials encounter it. The work took up a large space at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool and comprised a number of projections of images deemed by the artists to have similar significance, and in contrast, small liquid crystal display screens as points of the constellation. In the middle of the space was a platform, an observatory, from which to view the work.

Stansfield/Hooykaas' work displays the emblematic characteristics of video installations as spatial, temporal and hybrid forms – intuitively-felt explorations which included such media and materials as video, photography, audio, and natural materials such as earth, stones, copper, steel and electronic detritus. Because of the themes embraced they invite multiple readings that are more significant than those confined to art world discourse.

Their last work together in 2004, 'Day for Night' was shown in Centrespace, in the Visual Research Centre in the bowels of Dundee Contemporary Arts, and was the culmination of a short residency the artists undertook there. Works after 2004 were invariably dedicated to Stansfield – 'Daydreaming', an audio/video installation consists of a hammock hanging in the middle of the room from where the viewer can watch a projected image onto the sloping ceiling and look out to sea. It's very much a metaphor for what drives their practice. Immersion and contemplation are very much sensorial factors in the reception of Stansfield/Hooykaas' work - this would seem to complete the cycle in the task for wholeness that is typical of their installations and public art works. Whilst it can't be described as didactic, it is, insofar as it relates to ecological and spiritual matters, work that asks deep questions of our relationship to the world around us, and contrasts with the values of a material and competitive culture. It is that search for something 'other' and the challenge to indifference that makes it resonate as art and as energy.

*'...for us life is like a circle.
coming from nowhere and going everywhere.
touch a stone, the dream reawakens in a moment.
the echoes return, listen in a shell.
a message in a bottle, who was it for?
I come back on my birthday to celebrate
many happy returns of the day.'*

Elsa Stansfield, 1977^[5]

This abbreviated article is from a longer essay in the book 'Revealing the Invisible: The Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives' (see reverse for details). The title 'Everything is Round' is borrowed from Elsa Stansfield's exhibition at L.Y.C. Museum in Cumbria, May 1977.

1: Rob Perrée, 'From Agora to Montevideo: of Video Institutes the Things that Pass', introduction from the book, *The Magnetic Era: Video Art in the Netherlands 1970 - 1985*, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2003. **2:** Meigh-Andrews, Chris, *A History of Video Art: the Development of Form and Function*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 2006. **3:** An inscription is set in the Abbey which reads: *Stet domus haec donec fluctus formica marinos ebibat, et totum testudo permabulet orbem* 'May this house stand until an ant drains the flowing sea, and a tortoise walks around the whole world'. **4:** Video Positive 91, catalogue, pp. 19-20 • **5:** Quoted from Elsa Stansfield's exhibition catalogue at L.Y.C. Museum in Cumbria, May 1977.