

Moving pictures

Interest in video art is increasing as artists, galleries and collectors realise the possibilities of the medium

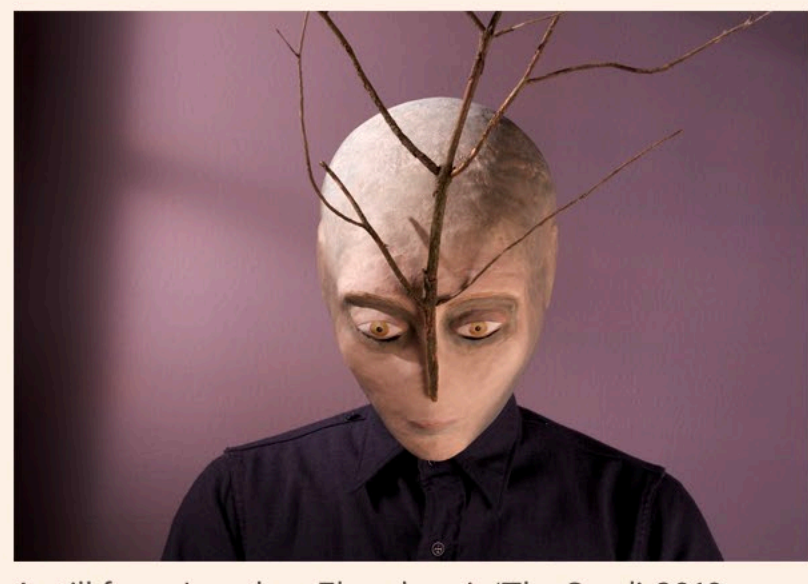
Gareth Harris OCTOBER 11 2011

Video art, often considered the Cinderella sector of the art world, gets to go to the ball in London this autumn. Swiss trailblazer Pipilotti Rist fills the Hayward Gallery (until January 8) with her psychedelic single-screen videos and eye-popping large-scale projections. The Serpentine Gallery will reverberate with the punk anthems emanating from Anri Sala’s film works (until November 20), and at Tate Modern Tacita Dean is showing a film piece in one of the most eagerly anticipated Turbine Hall projects for years.

But devotees of the medium are especially excited about a new London fair dedicated to contemporary video art. Moving Image (October 13-16) will launch at the Bargehouse, a four-floor warehouse in Oxo Tower Wharf near Tate Modern. The fair is the brainchild of New York dealer Ed Winkleman, who launched a New York edition in March – although the London event will differ from its Manhattan sister, with more large-scale installations and multi-channel pieces plus 12 separate viewing rooms.

A press statement intriguingly says that the fair, which includes 27 galleries, will allow “moving-image-based artworks to be understood and appreciated on their own terms”. Winkleman is indeed evangelical about giving video art the space to breathe: there is a consensus among the participating Moving Image dealers “that the usual art fairs do the medium a disservice”. Hammad Nasar, curatorial director at Green Cardamom gallery, welcomes this “specialist platform”; the London space will show a single-channel work by the Pakistani artist Bani Abidi (“I Love You”, 2003) in an edition of five, priced at under £5,000 each.

Minimal organisational costs have also swayed some galleries. “The shipping is non-existent as we’re emailing over all the files,” says Nicelle Beauchene of the eponymous New York gallery, which is showing a single-channel work by Jonathan Ehrenberg entitled “Seed” (2010, edition of five at \$4,500 each). “You can just show up with your discs. It’s all designed to be hyper-flexible,” says Winkleman.



A still from Jonathan Ehrenberg's 'The Seed', 2010

Such factors have prompted Tom Cole of London’s Cole gallery to take the plunge. His sculptural installation by Oliver Michaels (“The Lovers”, 2010) costs £10,000, while four editions of the video cost £3,000 each. “Hopefully the fair will provide some exposure to serious collectors of this medium,” he says.

But whether the fair is a fillip for the moving-image market remains to be seen. Nasar underlines the volatility of this sector: “The moving image has always been deemed less collectible than other mediums.” Production and installation costs can be high, while Noah Horowitz argues in his 2011 *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* that “even successful artists and dealers who work with video tend to characterise it as a break-even enterprise”.

Since the genre was revolutionised around 1965 by the Sony Portapak (the first portable video tape recorder, which enabled artists to experiment with the moving image), major museums and private foundations have led the way in collecting large-scale, complex video art. New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art significantly bolstered its holdings in the 1990s, acquiring works by Tony Oursler, Shirin Neshat and Bill Viola.

The latter dominates the relatively untested auction market. Viola’s “Eternal Return” (2000) fetched \$712,452 at Phillips de Pury, New York, in 2006. Nam June Paik (“Wright Brothers”, 1995: \$646,423, Christie’s Hong Kong, 2007) and Matthew Barney (“Cremaster 2”, 1999: \$571,000, Sotheby’s New York, 2007) jostle with Viola for auction supremacy. And Paris-based gallery Yvon Lambert sold all five editions of a video by another art market darling, Douglas Gordon (“Spiral”, 2010: \$75,000) at Art Basel in June.

Tate bought its first three video works in 1972, all by the UK duo Gilbert & George; of 38 installations it acquired last year, 26 pieces incorporate film or video, including Zineb Sedira’s “Floating Coffins” (2009). Film works, meanwhile, will form an integral part of the new Tate Modern extension display. Tate forms part of the New Art Trust established by San Francisco collectors Pamela and Richard Kramlich in 1997, which funds the preservation of time-based media works at the London gallery, at MoMA in New York and at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The Kramlichs are central to a group of hard-core private collectors that has helped sustain the market. These include Julia Stoschek, who mounts rotating displays from her 300-strong moving-image collection, including works by Cyprien Gaillard and Francis Alys, at her 2,500 sq m exhibition space in Düsseldorf. Another key German figure is Ingvild Goetz, who owns around 500 works which go on show in a specially constructed “media zone” at her Sammlung-Goetz space in Munich.

Take note also of Greek über-collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos’s activity in this field. The Athens-based entrepreneur owns all five parts of Matthew Barney’s seminal 1994-2002 “Cremaster” cycle (MoMA in New York, which has a collection of around 1,500 single channel videos, owns none of the Barney series).

“Video artworks almost always involve complex spatial arrangements and therefore are unsuitable for a domestic environment,” says Daskalopoulos. He lends pieces to museum shows, recently exhibiting Kutlug Ataman’s “Kuba” at the Guggenheim Bilbao in an exhibition drawn from his 500-strong contemporary collection.

But will up-and-coming domestic collectors, essential for market health, think the same way? Beauchene acknowledges that video art still presents challenges for private buyers. “It’s quite a leap for a collector who might not have the room or the capacity to show the work in their homes,” she says. Turkish collector Fusun Eczacibasi, whose Istanbul townhouse is awash with blue-chip video works, echoes the sentiment: she recently grappled with re-installing a projection by Jennifer Steinkamp which required changing the projector lens.

But London collector Anita Zabłudowicz, who acquired her first video works by artists such as Fischli & Weiss and Gillian Wearing in the late 1990s, is unfazed. “Video is not as scary as people think. Artists are fluid so collectors have to be too,” she says, giving details of her latest home installation: a film by Albert Oehlen projected on to one of his paintings. The latest exhibition at 176, Zabłudowicz’s Camden gallery (until December 11), includes four moving-image works by Laurel Nakadate, whose works range in price from \$2,500 to \$25,000 for feature-length works.

Video art hardware is ever more compact, with digitisation aiding conservation; crucially, collectors acquire a hard drive with a high-definition digital file. Neil Wenman, director at London’s Hauser & Wirth gallery, which represents Rist and Sala, says that plasma technology has changed the way collectors view video art. “Video art has become more accessible through technological innovations. With the birth of the iPad, galleries can now upload videos and carry them around, instantly accessible for collectors to view.” In this tablet-driven age, video’s easily portable format appeals: Latin American collectors apparently avoid import duties simply by popping the videos in their handbags.

Moving Image runs from October 13 to 16 www.moving-image.info