



The Official Video Art of the Olympics?



"Auto-Olympia," with producer/director Branda Miller, center, premieres tonight as part of the National Video Festival. It's the first work produced under the auspices of AFI's Television Workshop.

AFI screenings called a mirror of the arts festival, in miniature

By Hunter Drohojowska

In the slim catalog for the American Film Institute's National Video Festival, Robert J. Fitzpatrick writes that the Olympic Screenings may be seen as a microcosm of the larger Olympic Arts Festival. The video explorations of dance, art, music, performance and television mirror the artistic disciplines presented from around the world in L.A. these past five weeks.

In addition, the selections — which are screening in the Louis B. Mayer Library and Mark Goodson Screening Room on Western Avenue — represent sort of a capsule view of video art's evolution over the past decade, a tasty sampler of generally appealing work ranging from a pioneer 1968 black-and-white tape, "Two Virgins," by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, to the premiere of "Auto-Olympia," by Branda Miller. (This tale about the L.A. summer freeways and a misplaced Greek runner is the first work produced under the auspices of AFI's Television Workshop.)

The show was selected in a most democratic fashion. Five arts organizations were invited to develop the programming in the various disciplines. Long Beach Museum of Art, the only museum on the West Coast to present video continuously, was selected — quite logically — to compile a miniretrospective of video it had exhibited. Former video curator

Kathy Huffman included some classics: Linda Montano's stomach-wrenching "Mitchell's Death" (1978) — a black-and-white close-up of the artist's face, pierced with acupuncture needles, as she intones a lament over her husband's death. Bill Viola's "Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)" (1979), one of the masterpieces of the video medium and one of that artist's greatest works. (Viola produces consistently fine video and is represented in the music video category also with "The Space Between the Teeth" from 1976.) Ilene Segalove's more recent tape, "Why I Got into Television and Other Stories" (1983), provides the lighter side of video, with short vignettes on her adolescent addiction to the tube while she lived in Beverly Hills.

"Dance's Partnership with Video," selected by Julie Lazar, curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, surveys the more or less artful methods of taping such dancers and choreographers as Trisha Brown, Rudy Perez, Remy Charlip, Dan Wagoner, Eva Maier, Mary Daval and David Gordon. If you enjoy watching dance on TV, you are in heaven. If not, watch Tony Basil's "Over My Head" (1984) for the costumes and the special effects, go out for a cocktail and come back for the evening presentation of music video.

This fun collection of tapes was assembled by the L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art's video curator Mark Holmes. The eclectic offering ranges from John Cage to Peter Gabriel and demonstrates the obvious: Visual artists using music make more interesting videotapes than do commercial musicians using the medium for their own ends, despite the disparity in budgets. You need only

compare Ed Emshwiller's latest tape, "Skin Matrix," a delicate weave of computer-generated imagery and tape, or Max Almy's tape "Leaving the 20th Century," with Gabriel's "Shock the Monkey." Although Gabriel likely had the greater budget, the imagery is wholly out of sync with the song, a condition that seems to oppress most of what we see on MTV.

The only segment of the festival to attempt a thesis comes from L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions, organized by critic Jackie Apple and video artist Scott Rankin. This group of tapes examines the changing relationship between performance art and video. In the early 1970s, the artists used video to comment on the media through broadcast television, such as Chris Burden's 30-second prime time spots from 1976 promoting himself as an artist. (The crawl of names reads da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Chris Burden.) The tapes also documented performances such as the hilarious "Media Burn," the Antfarm tape from 1975 in which a customized Cadillac rams a pyramid of flaming televisions. The latest tapes, however, demonstrate the artists' urge to become actors-writers-producers, making sophisticated video-performances like "Lowell Moves to New York" by Jill Kroesen with Eric Bogosian, which comment as much on art and life as on the media.

Naturally, the festival needs its Marxist contributions — "Thinking Television" — which were selected by CalArts' Catherine Lord. The emphasis is on low-tech — meaning no money but quick completion and distribution — and the tapes are critical of the media's sensationalism and spectacle. "Joan Braderman Reads the National

Enquirer: Or, Natalie Didn't Drown" is a lengthy 28 minutes but offers a few tidbits. Did you know, for instance, that the National Enquirer, along with TV Guide, are among the top 10 products sold in grocery stores?

In addition, the festival includes video from the 1980 Winter Olympics and a preview of AFI's National Video Festival, running September 20-23. That fall gathering sounds promising, but this Olympic offering is an opportunity for video art newcomers to get a quick overview of the genre, an introduction to both the classics and the state of the art in a single sitting.

Today, 8 p.m., "Auto-Olympia" produced and directed by Branda Miller; "Lake Placid '80" by Nam June Paik; "Olympic Fragments" (1980) by Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn.

Tomorrow, 1 p.m., "Video Art: LBMA Retrospective Selections";

4 p.m., "Dance's Partnership with Video";

8 p.m., "Music Video/Video Music: The Image as a Result of Sound."

Sunday, 1 p.m., "Performance Video";

4 p.m., "Thinking Television: Low-Tech Representations";

8 p.m., "Reprise/Preview: 1984 National Video Festival."

What	American Film Institute's National Video Festival Olympic Screenings
Where	Louis B. Mayer Library, Mark Goodson Screening Room, 2021 Western Ave., Hollywood
When	Today-Sunday Seven two-hour screenings
Cost	\$3
Info:	856-7787