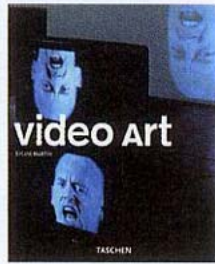


Soft focus

Has video art got vision? By John Mackay.



I grew up at a time when our mothers warned us not so much about odd men with etchings, but video nasties: low-budget horror films that were worming their way into previously respectable living rooms. They went under titles such as *I Spit On Your Grave*, and *Blood Feast*.

Artists, of course, got there first; when they began to experiment with the camera in the late 1960s, it

was only a matter of time before bodily fluids were spilt. Marina Abramovic's *Thomas Lips* (1975) shows the artist naked, her torso smeared in blood after setting about herself with a sharp instrument. US artist Paul McCarthy is of a similar bent: 'He mutilates himself...he shouts out loud, urinates in the corner...'

At times it appears as if video art exists solely to provide ammunition for those who complain that contemporary art is hollow and meaningless. Sylvia Martin begs to differ in *Video Art*, featuring the work of 35 artists and a detailed history of the genre covering some 40 years. Douglas Gordon is here, with *Twenty Four Hour Psycho*, which stretches Hitchcock's film to a playing time of a whole day. Bruce Nauman's *Anthro/Socio* has differently framed shots of the bald head of a man singing "Feed me/help me/eat me/hurt me". Both pieces are intriguing in their exploration of the boundaries of the medium itself, and infuriating in their slightness and lazy conception. The great appeal of video is that it is immediate and accessible. What it should never be – if it is to be afforded the status of good art – is easy.

Video Art, by Sylvia Martin

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