



(L-R) JOAN JONAS: Still from *I Want To Live In The Country*; HERMINE FREED: Still from *New Reel*; CHRISTA MAIWALD: Still from *Aging*; 1977, color videotapes, from the *Everson Video Revue*.

PERSONAL AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES

Berkeley / Mary Stofflet

Watching videotapes on two monitors and an Advent screen at the University Art Museum is not a bad way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Recent programs in the UAM's ongoing series have included works by Martha Rosler, Joel Glassman, Tom Marioni, and occasional personal appearances by the artists. In my experience, the tapes fall into several categories — those that are instantly forgettable, those that seem pleasant (or entertaining) but meaningless, and those that could yield more of their secrets upon a second or third viewing. This last category is a familiar standard by which to appreciate painting or sculpture, and to a certain extent it can work for nonstatic art as well. Since, in a group showing, a second or third viewing is often impossible, the anticipation of a future encounter lends additional mystique to the work.

Five artists — Christa Maiwald, Joan Jonas, Hermine Freed, Paul and Marlene Kos — were represented in the narrative/performance segment of the recently shown, three-part *Everson Video Revue* by tapes that could be classified conveniently into the above categories. Maiwald's three brief tapes contain an abundance of thought-provoking material, but play around with themes of fame, aging and racial prejudice as though they were fillers rather than the main dish. I missed the beginning of *Aging*, but the split screen, yellow face and background music, "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow, yesterday's gone," make a combination of obvious potential. In *Group Shot*, the group continuously changes in size and persona of personnel as various members say, "I can't take this shit," and leave. They fight with each other and find fault with the photographer during the photography session that documents their rise to fame. The tape is disjointed and unnecessarily abrasive, and reflects another idea with possibilities which are not appealingly realized.

Maiwald's *Arab/Angel* is the worst of the three, because it attempts the most difficult subject and leaves in a lot of rough edges where some carefully distributed subtlety could have resulted in a knockout piece. A Santa-like figure in full KKK regalia advises a small girl to give up her "dirty" (black) doll and substitute Naughty Bunny, who is "better and white" ("Just be a good little girl and practice with your toy gun. Just squeeze the trigger." He shows her how to shoot Maria, the black doll. The tape seems a pointless jab at something we are familiar with — subliminal suggestion and institutionalized racism at the pre-school level.

But Maiwald's rough edges seem hopeful when juxtaposed with *New Reel*, Hermine Freed's sly view of the twentieth century, made by combining images from newsreels and such popular cultural landmarks as the appearance of Ingrid Bergman at Rick's Club in *Casablanca* or a gathering of the Mickey Mouse Club anywhere. Freed slips in some provocative questions which temporarily outweigh the importance of the rapidly shown screen images. Amid the Beatles, the death of Roosevelt, Judy Garland as Dorothy, the rise of Hitler, the Hindenburg and a kitchen scene with Ralph and Alice Kramden, the tape asks, "If history is memories, whose memories is it made of?" and "If an archaeologist were to view this tape in 1000 years, do you think he would be able to separate fact from fiction?" Random humor comes from the use of a split screen, the Lone Ranger with LBJ, for example, or nostalgic recognition, as with Superman and the well-known words, "truth, justice and the American way." As *Time Goes By* is an occasional theme song, and the truest comment in the work seems to be that we have been subjected to so much visual information that LBJ seems like a figure from another century, not another decade. He seems to have existed at least a lifetime ago in the normal range of the human memory bank.

I Want to Live in the Country (And Other Romances) by Joan Jonas is a tape that cannot be fully comprehended, at least by me, in a single viewing. (Subsequent viewings could determine whether or not this is a compliment.) Two types of action are presented: long views of rural living with narrative descriptions of associated minutiae, such as

a lost dog and a waving neighbor, and red-framed, multiple interior images that give an illusion of depth as they recede from the gaze of a woman seated on the left. The placement of these visual elements is very important, as the red frame gives the action on the divided screen the appearance of a moving painting. Autobiographical narration holds the elements of dreams and memories together; a horrifying forest fire is relived, and above the noisy hum of insects a voice says, "The windows of the house are small so that when you sit, all you see is sky." A continuing, if interrupted, relationship with rustic life is recounted, in which various intrusions alter the enjoyment of the country peace; the door is chopped down, windows are broken, the dog kills the cat, a hunter arrives. The aftertaste is a bit nebulous, but the images linger in my mind, asking for further attention.

Paul and Marlene Kos, in *Siren*, have achieved video haiku. Four short segments have a syllabic rhythm built up from an opening nature scene, laughter and an unalterable intrusion into the bucolic vista. The first, in which static gray rocks fall away to reveal a woman's face, is more obvious than the fourth, and the segments build up their own standard of reality.

As, also by the Kos team, was the last of the *Everson* narrative/performance tapes, and the one I looked forward to the most for its references to the infamous and compellingly chilling Donner Party cannibal tale. The ax, not the Donners, proves to be the real star, producing sparks as it chips the letters AX into the pavement beneath it. The credits, which include artists Irv Tepper and Jose Maria Bustos as participants, refer to the Donner event: In the winter of 1846-47, forty-two members of the Donner Party starved to death and experienced delirium preceding starvation. Images of endless snow are then interspersed with a chic patio dinner party. A woman says soundlessly, "I'm so cold," and, seen as a distant figure, flounders in the snow. Labored breathing is heard; she becomes weak and ineffective as she struggles up a tree-studded hill. The phrase "Donner dinner" comes to mind as a white tablecloth and wine appear. The conversation turns to capped teeth, mustaches and vineyards, combined with images of manners eating gestures, casual furniture and an expensive cowboy boot. The background breathing slows, and the spark-yielding ax returns in the final frame. I was lulled more toward boredom than toward the illusion of delirium. Somewhere there must be a balance between significant content and judicious editing. I'll keep looking. □

ARTWEEK (ISSN 0004-4121)

ARTWEEK, INC.
1305 FRANKLIN ST., OAKLAND, CA 94612
415-763-0422

editor and publisher: Cecile N. McCann
associate editor: Judith L. Dunham
photography editor: Joan Murray
contributing editors: Robert Atkins, Christopher Brown, Peter Clothier, Hal Fischer, Ron Glowen, Robert Keil, Louise Lewis, Robert H. McDonald, Fred Martin, Adrienne Rosenthal, Janice Ross, Mary Stofflet-Santiago, H. J. Weeks
production editor: Lory Pouison
designer: Marc Rappaport
editorial assistant: Jessica Schwartz
production assistant: Cathleen O'Brien

Southern California editor: Joan Hugo
PO Box 39654, Los Angeles, CA 90039, 213-664-7920

Texas editor: Ned Rifkin
Dept. of Art, University of Texas, Arlington, TX 76019,
817-273-2891

advertising: Lory Pouison, 415-763-0422

accounts: Aliene Emerson, 415-763-0422

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND ADDRESS CHANGES
ARTWEEK, 1305 Franklin St., Oakland, CA 94612
circulation manager: Martha Mullian Kennedy
assistant circulation manager: G. P. Skratz

44 issues per year, published weekly September through May, biweekly June, July, August. Subscriptions: Individuals, U.S., \$14 one year, \$27 two years, \$40 three years; Institutions, U.S., \$16 one year, \$31 two years, \$46 three years (other countries add postage, \$8 per year; all payments in U.S. dollars only). Single copies, current issues: U.S. \$.75, other countries \$1. Back issues, as available, from 1305 Franklin St., Oakland, CA 94612; also as microfilms and microfiche from Xerox University Microfilms and Bell & Howell Micro Photo Division. Indexed by *Art Index* as of January 1979; prior years indexed by *ARTWEEK*. Editorial: Contributions, including photographs, are welcome. They will be handled with care; however, ARTWEEK assumes no responsibility for their safety or guaranteed return. Material will be returned only if accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. Copyright © 1980 Artweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Contents not to be reproduced without permission of the copyright holder. Second class postage paid at Oakland, California and other points of entry.

LESLIE WASSERBERGER
PAINTINGS
Jan. 26 - Feb. 19
Nanny Goar Hill Gallery
3205 Folsom, near Army, San Francisco