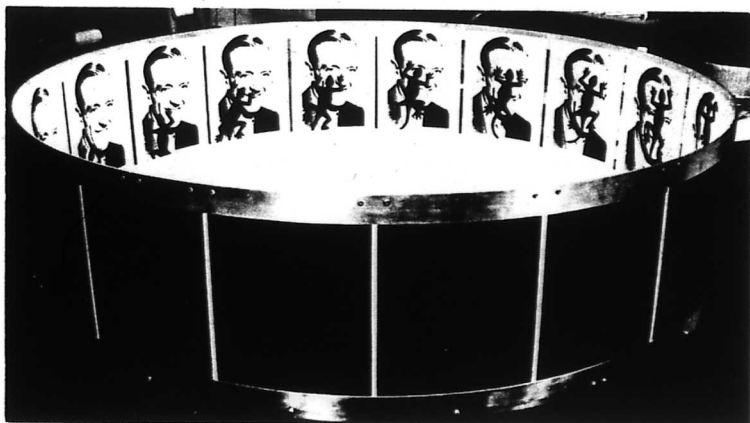


ARTWEEK

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JAMES POMEROY: NEWT ASCENDS ASTAIRE'S FACE, 1974, zoetrope, aluminum, plywood, etc., 4' diam., at the de Saisset Gallery.

POMEROY, REMSING — FORM AND PROCESS

Cecile N. McCann

Santa Clara

Diametric contradictions in surprising quantity are tied together by Jim Pomeroy's consistency of attitude and means in his current exhibit. The work he shows at the de Saisset Gallery, University of Santa Clara, is at once seductive and austere, simple and sophisticated. Some pieces are warmly, openly funny; others are restrained and cool with a remote intellectual beauty. But each piece, in varying degrees, shares all these qualities. Pomeroy's eye and his wit are equally competent, and his control is total.

There is quick, active pleasure for viewers in spinning a big, skillfully made zoetrope and watching through the slots as a newt's shadow climbs flickeringly up Fred Astaire's face. Astaire is such a movie cult hero these days that he's an apt choice for Pomeroy's machine, which reconstructs an early precursor to those movies. Astaire's pleasant, ageless face evokes warm recognition, and the amusing, incongruous newt is sufficiently abstract to stir only faint revulsion. Actually, the entire piece is an elaborate, comically bad pun, Duchamp-oriented. It is more quickly absorbed than described, since the title is *Newt Ascends Astaire's Face*. The time period recalled is Duchamp's, too, since he was living and working when this old publicity still of Astaire was first circulated.

A second zoetrope is sharper in both its joke and its Duchampian reference. Pomeroy's own nude back can be seen coming down a ladder (stripped bare, and he's a bachelor) in the piece titled *New Descents*. It would be as bad a pun as Pomeroy's if I suggested that this nudity was a new artistic low for him, but again, that may be what he had in mind.

A viewer who spins the zoetrope turns naturally to the enticement of 12 brass music box keys protruding from the reverse of a large galvanized pan. When the title of the work is taken as instruction (*Turn Keys Gently*), you find yourself surrounded by a tinkling jumble of pleasing sounds. Two hands can turn only two keys at a time, and each little music box picks up its tune until all blend together in gentle harmonies and discords. Four keys on a smaller galvanized box produce a medley of Beethoven's *Fur Elise* (title — *Four Elise*). A third musical

piece is a wall-hung pan with a chromed faucet neatly attached to it. It is titled *Plays Handel's Water Music*, and a viewer turning the handle (of course) expects more tinkling notes but gets, instead, the monotonous "tock, tock" of a dripping faucet.

All of these pieces are easy to enjoy in a simple, direct way, but there are complex references under the jokes and puns. Process and the exploration of materials are as important to Pomeroy as visual experience and the art history that has affected him most.

Clearly emphasizing process and its visual effect, a series of drawings is placed around the room, flat on the walls and on the sides of a

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COLLECTOR'S VIDEO

Los Angeles

Melinda T. Wortz

Collectors' Video at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art includes more than twenty videotapes produced by both New York and California artists. Durations are from three minutes to one hour. Although one could not view the entire selection in a single day, the viewer can ask the person changing the tapes for specific requests. My comments are necessarily limited to only a few selections I have been able to see during two visits to the museum.

Two tapes by Bruce Nauman, each sixty minutes long, are at first conceptually amusing, but become tedious and irritating if one tries to watch them from beginning to end. *Flesh to Black to White to Flesh*, 1968, records the artist covering his body with cold cream and black make up and subsequently removing both layers. In *Lip Sync*, 1969, the neck and chin of the artist are shown upside down pronouncing the words "lip sync" sometimes in and sometimes out of synchronization. Both pieces are obviously involved with verbal puns as much as visual imagery, and refer back to Duchamp. In trying to correlate the verbal titles with the images, one comes up against a number of actual relationships and a number of associational ones which are absent. The black flesh, for example, is not flesh per se, but black applied to flesh, and so forth. In a number of conundrums set up by Nauman's works the inherent ambiguities and inadequacies of the abstract system of language we so casually take for granted are ironically pointed up.

The sense of boredom, irritation and the frustration which result from watching a simple action, such as the movements of Nauman's lips, over an extended period of time are characteristic of Nauman's work in various media. By setting up a frustrating situation he forces the viewer back upon his own resources. What do we do with boredom? Turn of the TV? What happens if the TV itself becomes boring?

Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People*,
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ROBERT MORRIS: EXCHANGE, 1973, black and white videotape, 32 minutes long.

Morris' tape is included in "Collectors' Video" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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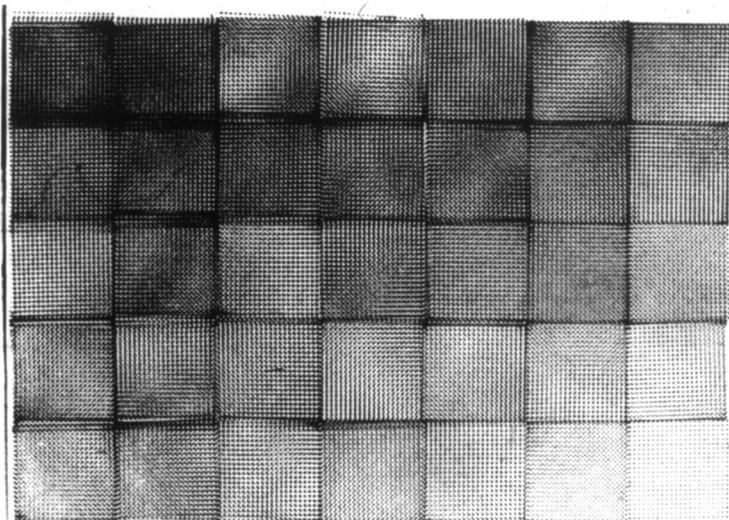
1973, uses words alone, a printed message which moves from the lower edge of the screen to the upper and out of sight, like credit lines. It is essentially anti-commercial television propaganda, presented in a disconcertingly straightforward manner in contrast to the subtle wiles used by advertisers to seduce viewers. The only similarity to commercial television is the incredibly kitsch background muzak which lends a humorous note to the serious tone of the verbal presentation. Ironically Serra uses color videotape — yellow letters on a blue background — for a thoroughly uninteresting image, rather than exploiting the expressive potentiality of color as Sonnier does in his three tapes in the exhibition. Samples of Serra's social protest are: "Television teaches materialistic consumption. It is the consumer who is consumed. You are the end product delivered to the advertiser."

Sonnier's *Mat Key Radio Trick*, 1972, *Animation I*, 1973 and *Animation II*, 1974, on the other hand, incorporate a highly sophisticated melange of fragmented, overlapping, transparent images in psychedelic colors. In the first tape the imagery centers around a light bulb, on which a black spot is superimposed. Both spot and light bulb change from one color to another throughout the sequence, as do the other images which from time to time are superimposed on or supersede the light bulb hero. The light bulb as an image looks curiously anachronistic on a video screen which articulates light in a wholly different manner (I could not help recalling Johns' light bulb which is becoming more and more archeological in character.) Background sound varies from an irritatingly high pitched buzzing to a monotone reading of "unedited excerpts from *Psychology Today*," regarding drug addiction. Example: "addiction is simply a behavior that is repeated for pleasure. Many men in New York are addicted to their wives." Like the images, the verbal commentary moves in and out of legibility. Altogether the work is a highly rewarding and complex audio and visual experience at the opposite end of the pole from the frontal, simple, repetitive use of imagery so widespread in videotape.

Joan Jonas tapes herself, deadpan, in situations which point out the image-making process of the videotape itself. For example, she points to and names, alternately, her left eye and right eye in two sets of images — one normal and one mirror image in a small inset in the upper left hand corner of the screen. Thus the left eye she points at is sometimes on our left and sometimes on our right. From time to time throughout the tape the artist casually hums a tune. Both Jonas' and our perceptions of left-right relationships are further complicated in a humorous manner when she introduces a mirror. Placing the mirror at right angles to the plane of her face, in the middle of her nose, she can use the reflection to create the image of her whole face with either the right or the left half. Eventually the kind of right-left relationships we normally perceive are blurred so as to become meaningless. By making overt the distorting characteristics of image-making, or abstracting from direct experience, Jonas calls the process itself into question.

Another tape dealing with process is Robert Morris' *Exchange*, 1973. A narrator in the background explains the plot, the psychological interactions of Morris and "she" — an anonymous female personage who is apparently working with Morris to make the tape — and the images being used. He describes, in other words, the processes involved. Images and sounds are layered one upon another as were the components in some of Morris' anti-form pieces. Despite the ostensibly explanatory, even pedantic, descriptions which accompany the tape, the sequence lacks logical coherence, in keeping with Morris' oeuvre as a whole. Sometimes the narrator describes actions that are occurring off the screen so that the impression is created that we are being allowed "behind the scenes." Nonetheless, meaning remains abstruse, as if the more content we are given, the less meaningful it becomes.

Nancy Holt's *Underscan*, 1974, deals with



JAMES POMEROY. UNTITLED, 1974, ink on paper, at the de Saisset Gallery, Santa Clara.

JIM POMEROY, GARY REMSING

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freestanding box introduced among the big dimensional objects. The drawings vary in size from less than a foot on an edge to over four, but all are made with repeated ink imprints of 2-inch square or hexagonal rubber stamps, specially made for Pomeroy in patterns of printer's screen dots or the thin, evenly spaced lines of hatching. In some of the drawings abstract forms are shaped by darks that result from repeated stampings. Others are all-over fields where a delicate, pointillistic surface is enhanced by the spontaneous grid that develops as one small block is stamped next to another, and by occasional tiny moiré patterns that develop from the overlapping of imprints. Greys and blacks predominate among the inks, but the drawings are warmed or cooled on the white paper by barely noticeable tinting of some of the thinned inks. Some sheets layer greens and reds, or blues, magenta and green to produce softly vibrant, muted hues. The rich complex surfaces, carefully composed in orderly rows, are so clear a record of a long, slow process that they, like the zoetropes and the music boxes, imply an extended time span. They can also be read as references to obsessive, ritualistic orderings, and to the strength of commitment and the quantity of energy required to produce such works.

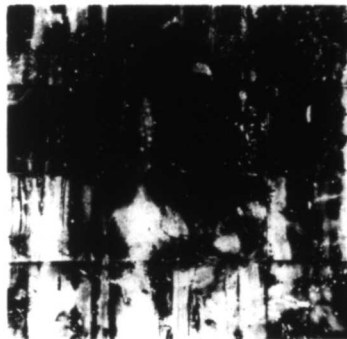
An extension of reference allows analogies to be made between Pomeroy's drawings and the commercial printing process that is the source for the imagery on the stamps. And the music box tunes, building harmonies from individual notes, are auditory analogs for the visual structure of the drawings. One piece, titled *Obsessive Analog*, makes clear that these relationships are all intentional. It is a glossy, 8 x 10 photograph, a strictly commercial sort of photograph, showing at small scale a huge drawing Pomeroy made of the faces on Mt. Rushmore with all the carved

images of banal bathrooms, kitchens, bedrooms. Sometimes the room as a whole appears on the screen, sometimes a closeup detail — wallpaper, bureau, radiator, jewelry case. Autobiographical in format, the narrative describes traumatic events — accidents, deaths, marriages entered into and terminated — against the background of banality. One asks the question, "Are the important events of our lives really so inconsequential?" The dichotomy between visual and verbal content provokes laughter.

The sampling of *Collectors' Video* indicates that some of the artists correlate the audio and visual imagery (Nauman, Jonas), some use them antithetically (Holt, Morris), and some use only visual (Baldessari's *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, 1971, in which a plant is shown large letters one at a time). A good variety of sensibilities is included. All the tapes have been lent anonymously from a private collection with the hope of stimulating viewers into building collections of their own. Jane Livingston points out the suitability of videotapes for a private collector — intimate by nature, requiring time and moderate in price, ranging from approximately \$50 to \$350, all in marked contrast to the inaccessibility of many forms of art being produced today. A hand-out poster available at the museum lists various sources for the acquisition of artists' videotapes.

forms interpreted by repeated stampings of his small blocks.

A group of six photographs, titled *Shadow of a Dead Painting*, establishes a connection between all of the work in this exhibit and that shown last summer in Pomeroy's exhibit at the Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco (*Artweek*, July 21, 1973). The most obvious use of repetitive elements then was in words derived from crossword puzzles. Some sections of one of those works have been cut and recombined so that they have gridlike form, then photographed for this transitional piece.



GARY REMSING: SLATE, 1974, acrylic sheet, 24" square, at the de Saisset Gallery, Santa Clara.

In another room of the gallery, Gary Remsing is showing a group of his acrylic sheet painting-structures. The pieces exhibited cover the period from the early 70s to this year.

Over this period his expression has matured and strengthened. The earlier works have bold bright colors splashed through the formed sheets, creating a free color structure that can be seen, through uncolored areas, repeated on the wall behind as nebulous shadows. Bubbles and swellings on the acrylic surface make a dimensional echo of the color flow, but somehow succeed in adding an extra dimension without much strength.

In his more recent pieces the dimensional form is defined as a loose grid against which the color areas flow and push, sometimes confined and sometimes moving counter to the shaped lines. There are no frames on these works, but the internal structure supplies sufficient visual reinforcement that frames are unneeded. The color, as well as the form, is handled with greater sureness in these recent pieces. Remsing has found an idiom that promises to serve him well.

Other artists are also showing at the de Saisset Gallery. However, at the time I was there William Viola's video piece was not functioning properly and neither Sherri Levine's *Betrayal Series* nor Ronald Croci's paintings had been installed. The gallery frequently overlaps the timing of its exhibitions in this way. Lawrie Brown's photography exhibit was reviewed by Joan Murray in the June 1 issue of *Artweek*.

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