POETS WITH A VIDEOCAMERA: 1980–2020

Curator's Statement

It was just a matter of time. By the 1920s, cinema was already being promoted for its inherent "poetic" qualities. Tethering itself to poetry, filmmaking would assure its acceptance into the ranks of the "seven arts" just as poetry itself was redefining ways to become more "modern". But the inevitable jump cut, from the 1920s to the 1980s, from filmpoems to videopoetry, came only after technology stepped in – with the immediacy of video, poetry was able to flex its muscles, experimenting with word-and-image and image-and-sound relationships to level the playing field and finally put an end to decades on the sidelines of the mainstream. Here then is POETS WITH A VIDEO CAMERA – a chronological examination of seminal works in the genre of videopoetry collected over the past four decades.

That our exhibition title POETS WITH A VIDEO CAMERA sounds like and looks like the experimental documentarian Dziga Vertov's MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA is no accident; it is a homage to the 1929 ground-breaking film that announced the arrival of a revolutionary new art form, a film that became known as *"one of the great works of a cinema whose subject is an aesthetic definition of the nature of the medium."* All differences aside (and there are many significant differences: the singular modern MAN of the 1920s against the gender-neutral POETS of the postmodern era; the propaganda-driven MOVIE CAMERA against the more democratically purposed VIDEO CAMERA; and Vertov's famous rejection of literature in favour of a "literature of facts") – the two events had articulated their intentions with a Manifesto, MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA in 1922, POETS WITH A VIDEO CAMERA in 2011.

In response to question after question, *What is videopoetry?* and the polarizing *Does it need to have words?* my 2011 VIDEOPOETRY MANIFESTO drew a line in the sand: a pre-existing poem should be viewed as text, plain and simple, the essential *raw material* that goes into the making of every videopoem; "poetry" will then become the *result* of the word-image-sound encounter, a "poetic experience". And yes, the presence of words was a necessary condition of videopoetry. As for the external appearance or the form of a work, the MANIFESTO prescribed 5 categories for the different expressions: Kinetic Text, Sound Text, Visual Text, Performance and Cin(e)poetry. Each of these would describe how the text would be presented, whether voiced or displayed on the screen.

POETS WITH A VIDEO CAMERA features 29 artists from 12 countries and 4 continents; except for the poets John Giorno, bpNichol and Pedro Pietri, all are living and practicing artists. The duration of the works varies in length: Pedro Pietri's *Telephone Booth* is the shortest at :44 seconds; the longest is Jim Andrews' *Checking In*, at 22:07 min. Eighteen works are under 5 minutes. To varying degrees, all the videopoems in this exhibition share one defining interconnectedness: an uncompromising desire to expand and ultimately *redefine* poetry for the "age of the screen" by experimenting with unusual, thought-provoking juxtapositions. With this chronological survey, POETS WITH A VIDEO CAMERA makes a major attempt to historicize current videopoetry trends, but it may turn out to tell us more about itself as an art form, as if it were an existential question, what it should be, and how it should distinguish itself.

Artists: Jim Andrews with Adeena Karasick, Paul Bogaert, Brandon Downing, Antonello Faretta with John Giorno, Kurt Heintz with Patricia Smith, Annie Frazier Henry, Tom Konyves, Nobuo Kubota, Fiona Tinwei Lam, Valerie LeBlanc, Janet Lees, Machine Libertine, Azucena Losana, Matt Mullins, Marc Neys, bpNichol, Pedro Pietri, Arturs Punte, Caroline Reid, Javier Robledo, Peter Rose, Ralf Schmerberg, Hubert Sielecki with Gerhard Ruhm, W. Mark Sutherland, Alejandro Thornton, Sarah Tremlett, and Eku Wand.

Tom Konyves, Curator
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