



1. The Stopping Mind, 1991

Video/sound installation
Exhibition copy; original in the Museum für
Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt

Still images appear on four large screens mounted parallel to the four walls of the room. A voice is audible at the center of the space, quietly whispering a continuous chant that describes the passive loss of bodily sensation in an unknown black space. At random intervals the images simultaneously burst into movement, momentarily coming to life in violent frenetic motion and loud roaring sound. They abruptly become silent and still again as frozen frames, until the next burst of activity once again brings them to life. The room continues in a cycle of sustain and release, as memory and experience constantly interact within the larger stream of the perpetual movement of individual consciousness.



Fourth Floor

Emily Fisher Landau Galleries



2. The Sleep of Reason, 1988

Video/sound installation
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh;
Museum Purchase: Gift of Milton Fine and
the A.W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment Fund

A black-and-white monitor on a wooden chest shows a close-up view of a person sleeping. At random intervals, the lights in the room cut out and large violent images appear on the walls as loud roaring sounds fill the space. After a few seconds, the lights come on and the room abruptly returns to normal, as if a momentary glimpse of another, parallel world has appeared, revealing a dark underside to the familiar well-lit environment.



9. Slowly Turning Narrative, 1992

Video/sound installation
Edition 2: Los Angeles County Museum of Art;
Modern and Contemporary Art Council Fund

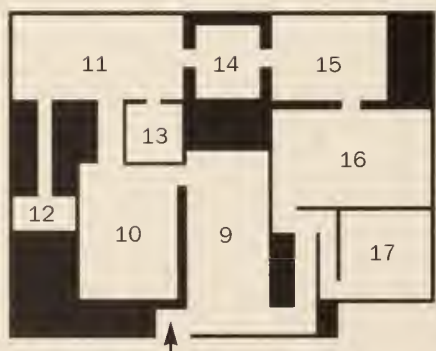
A large rotating screen shows a man's face in black-and-white on one side and a series of color images on the other. One side of the screen is mirrored, and it reflects the viewer's own image, as well as the projected images that travel across the walls of the room as the screen turns. A voice recites various states of being and actions in a continuous repetitive chant. The entire space becomes an interior for the revelations of a constantly turning mind absorbed with itself.



10. He Weeps for You, 1976

Video/sound installation
Edition 2: Collection of Pamela and Richard
Kramlich; courtesy Thea Westreich Art
Advisory Services

A drop of water emerging from a small brass valve is magnified by a video camera and projected on a large screen. The close-up image reveals that the viewer and a portion of the room are visible inside each forming drop. The drop swells and finally falls, and a loud sound is heard when it lands on an amplified drum. The entire room and persons in it are subject to the cadence of the falling drops, which continue in infinite repetition and reflection.



Third Floor

Peter Norton Family Galleries



3. Room for St. John of the Cross, 1983

Video/sound installation
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The El Paso Natural Gas Company Fund for California Art

Through a window in a black cubicle in a black room, a small color monitor on a wooden table is visible. The monitor displays a color image of a tranquil snow-covered mountain. A voice quietly reciting the poems of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross can barely be heard from within. Outside, a large image projected on the wall shows black-and-white images of snow-covered mountains in constant wild, chaotic movement. A loud, roaring sound fills the space like a storm. St. John's poems often describe love, ecstasy, flying, and passage through the dark night. They were written while he was held prisoner in a tiny windowless cell and tortured by the Inquisition for nine months in the year 1577.



11. The Greeting, 1995

Video/sound installation
Artist's Proof 2: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Partial and promised gift of an anonymous donor P.4.95

An image sequence involving three women in an industrial urban landscape is projected onto a large screen mounted to the wall. Two women are engaged in conversation when they are interrupted by the arrival of a third woman. The new woman greets the older of the two, apparently her friend, and ignores the other. She whispers an urgent message in her friend's ear, further isolating the other woman. With an underlying awkwardness, introductions are made and pleasantries exchanged among the three. The action unfolds in extreme slow motion, allowing the nuance of every fleeting glance and gesture to become heightened and remain suspended in the viewer's conscious awareness.



12. Passage, 1987

Video/sound installation
Edition 1: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Accessions Committee Fund: gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald G. Fisher, Susan and Robert Green, Pamela and Richard Kramlich, and Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Walker, Jr.

A long, narrow corridor leads to a small inner room where a large projection fills an entire wall. A videotape of a child's birthday party is being played back in extreme slow motion, taking seven hours to unfold. The room architecture places the viewer uncomfortably close to the image, and the deep rumbling sound of the slowed children's voices fills the space. An architectural structure enclosing time, the hallway and viewing room frame an image that transcends human scale in both time and space, placing the child's birthday party in the internal, subjective domain of ritual, memory, and emotive association.

4. Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House, 1982

Video/sound installation

The Art Institute of Chicago; Restricted gift of Barbara Bluhm, Mrs. Thomas H. Dittmer, Ruth Horwich, Susan and Lewis Manlow, Marcia and Irving Stenn, Dr. and Mrs. Paul Sternberg, and Lynn and Allen Turner, through prior acquisitions of the Leigh and Mary Block Collection

A heavy wooden chair stands empty in front of a TV monitor. The monitor shows a man in close-up as he struggles to stay awake and alert. The room is silent. Headphones on the chair allow the viewer to hear the inner body sounds of the man on the screen—his breathing and swallowing, with multiple voices in the background engaged in stream-of-consciousness chatter. At random intervals, the man is struck violently from behind by an unseen figure, causing a loud explosion of sound to momentarily burst out from two loudspeakers in the room.



5. The Sleepers, 1992

Video installation

Edition 1: Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal

Seven metal barrels are filled to the brim with water. They each contain a black-and-white video monitor positioned on the bottom. Each monitor shows a recording of a sleeping person's face, presented with little or no editing. A different person appears in each barrel, and they remain isolated from one another on their individual screens beneath the water. The soft light from the video screens emerges from each barrel and diffuses in the room.

6. Anthem, 1983

Videotape

Lent by the artist

A young girl in a white dress screams as she stands in the central hall of Union Station in Los Angeles. The original scream of a few seconds is extended and shifted in time to produce a primitive "scale" of tones that constitutes the soundtrack of the piece. Images of an ancient forest, the desolate urban landscape, the mechanics of heavy industry, the technology of surgery, the human body, and the leisure culture of southern California reveal their relation to our deep, primal fears of illness, mortality, darkness, and the separation of the material body from its spiritual base.



13. Angel's Gate, 1989

Videotape

Lent by the artist

A succession of individual images is punctuated by long, slow fades to black. The image sequences, including fruit falling from a tree, a candle being extinguished, and a family having a flash photograph taken, appear as a series of openings or momentary glimpses into nature's essential gestures which, like thoughts, are destined to fade and disintegrate into obscurity and oblivion.



14. Heaven and Earth, 1992

Video installation

Artist's Proof: Collection of the artist

Two wood columns extend from floor to ceiling, separated by a gap of several inches. At this gap, the exposed tubes of two black-and-white video monitors are positioned facing each other and not touching. The upper monitor shows an image of an old woman's face on the verge of death, and the lower monitor shows the face of a new baby only days old. The images are silent and the entire structure is enclosed in a small room. Since the surface of each monitor screen is glass, the reflection of the image on the opposing screen can be seen through the surface of each image, with the birth-face and death-face reflecting and containing each other.

15. The Reflecting Pool, 1977-79

Videotape

Lent by the artist

A man emerges from a forest and stands before a pool of water. He leaps up and time abruptly stands still. From this point, all movement and change in the otherwise still scene are limited to the reflections and undulations on the surface of the pond. Time becomes extended and punctuated by a series of events seen only as reflections in the water. The emergence of the individual into the natural environment becomes a baptism into a world of virtual images and indirect perceptions.



7. **The Crossing**, 1996

Video/sound installation

Edition 1: The Bohem Foundation; Promised gift to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

The violent annihilation of a human figure by opposing natural forces of fire and water is projected simultaneously on two large screens mounted back-to-back. A man approaches from a long distance in slow motion. He finally stops and stands still. On one screen, flames appear at his feet and quickly spread to consume his entire body. On the other screen, water pours down from above, increasing until he becomes completely inundated. In the end, the man is gone and only small flickering flames on a burnt floor remain in the one image, while a few lingering drops of water fall onto a soaked floor in the other. The two traditional natural elements of fire and water appear here not only in their destructive aspects, but manifest their cathartic, purifying, and transformative capacities as well.



8. **Working Notes and Drawings**

A selection of the artist's notebook entries and working drawings for his installations and videotapes, from 1972 to 1996.

18. **Presence**, 1995

A six-channel sound installation sited in the transitional spaces (elevators and stairwell) between the third and fourth floors.

Voices are heard at the edge of audibility, individual presences that whisper their personal secrets and private stories. Two additional sounds, the rhythm of regular breathing and the constant low pulsing of a human heartbeat, occur in the background and become the physical ground for the psychological presences of memory and individuality circulating in the space.

17. **Tiny Deaths**, 1993

Video/sound installation

Edition 1: Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, France

Three large projections appear on the walls of a completely dark room. They exist at the threshold of perception, barely visible in the darkness. Human forms gradually emerge as dim silhouettes on a field of noise. Quiet, indecipherable voices are heard by each image. At random intervals, a light source slowly appears on one of the figures, increasing until the illumination rapidly accelerates to suddenly consume the whole body in a burst of saturated white light. The peak light momentarily illuminates the room and washes out the other two projections. All returns abruptly to darkness until one of the other projected figures moves through the same transformation.

16. **The Veiling**, 1995

Video/sound installation

Edition 2: Collection of the artist; courtesy Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London

Images of a man and a woman moving through a series of nocturnal landscapes are projected into parallel layers of loosely suspended translucent cloth. The two figures appear on separate, opposing video channels, and are seen gradually moving from dark areas of shadow into areas of bright light. The cloth material diffuses the light and the figures dissipate in intensity and focus as they penetrate further into the scrim layers, eventually intersecting each other on the central veil. Recorded independently, the images of the man and the woman never coexist in the same video frame. Only the light from their images intermingles in the fabric of the hanging veils.



"It only takes an instant for an impression to become a vision."

—Bill Viola

This 25-year survey, consisting of installations, videotapes, and working notes and drawings, is the first full-scale overview of the work of California-based artist Bill Viola (b. 1951). It comes at a time when many wonder about the ways in which art and the new technologies will intersect. Although Viola's installations employ highly sophisticated video and computer equipment, the themes he explores are ancient and universal. The simple beauty, visceral impact, and timeless spirituality of his work affect us profoundly.

Viola began experimenting with video as an undergraduate in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University in 1970. Initially influenced and inspired by the artists he encountered, such as Nam June Paik, Peter Campus, and Bruce Nauman, he quickly developed his own vocabulary and vision along with an innovative approach to video. Viola's artistic practice relies on craft, clarity, and a vision of the world that springs from beneath the surface of observable phenomena. Clearly at odds with the cynicism of his age, his work is informed by a set of spiritual values that has had a profound, continuing impact on his development. Drawing its inspiration from eclectic sources such as Zen Buddhism, Christian mysticism, the physics of optics and the mechanisms of perception, the Islamic lyric poetry of Sufi masters like Jelaluddin Rumi, and the distinctly American free verse of Walt Whitman, his art reaches to touch the sources of knowledge that reside within everyday experience.

To produce his art, Viola has traveled to Java, Bali, the Solomon Islands, the Himalayas, and the Sahara desert. From 1980 to 1981 he lived in Japan with his wife, Kira Perov, on a cultural exchange program. There he studied Zen Buddhism with master Daien Tanaka and advanced video technology at Sony Corporation's Atsugi Laboratories. In 1995, he represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in Italy. He is currently a resident scholar at the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities in Los Angeles.

David A. Ross, Director
Whitney Museum of American Art

"Wherever you are is the entry point." —Kabir (15th century)



The Space Between the Teeth, 1976

Screening Schedule

Works are videotape, color, and mono sound, unless otherwise noted. All works are lent to the exhibition courtesy of the artist.

Second Floor

Film/Video Gallery

**Wednesdays and Fridays at noon;
Thursdays at 2:00; Saturdays and
Sundays at 11:30**

I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like,
1986. Stereo sound; 89 minutes.

**Wednesdays and Fridays at 3:00;
Thursdays at 4:30; Saturdays and
Sundays at 1:30**

The Passing, 1991. Black-and-white;
54 minutes.

Wednesdays at 4:30

Tape I, 1972. Black-and-white;
6:50 minutes.

Composition "D", 1973. Black-and-
white; 9:42 minutes.

Level, 1973. Black-and-white;
8:24 minutes.

Cycles, 1973. Black-and-white;
7:04 minutes.

In Version, 1973. 4:24 minutes.

Instant Breakfast, 1974. 5:05 minutes.

Olfaction, 1974. 2:34 minutes.

**Thursdays at 6:30; Saturdays at 4:30;
Sundays at 3:00**

*Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and
Heat)*, 1979. 28 minutes.

Déserts, 1994. Stereo sound; 28:09
minutes. Music by Edgard Varèse.

Fridays at 4:30

A Million Other Things (2), 1975.
4:35 minutes.

Return, 1975. 7:43 minutes.

Four Songs, 1976. 33:33 minutes.

Comprises: *Junkyard Levitation*,
3:11 minutes; *Songs of Innocence*,
9:34 minutes; *The Space Between the
Teeth*, 9:10 minutes; *Truth Through
Mass Individuation*, 10:59 minutes.

Saturdays at 3:00

Silent Life, 1979. Stereo sound;
13:14 minutes.

Ancient of Days, 1979–81. Stereo
sound; 12:21 minutes.

Vegetable Memory, 1978–80.
15:13 minutes.

*Reasons for Knocking at an Empty
House*, 1983. Black-and-white, stereo
sound; 19:11 minutes.

Sundays at 4:30

Hatsu-Yume (First Dream), 1981. Stereo
sound; 56 minutes.

Threshold, 1992

February 18–May 10, 1998
Sony Plaza Public Arcade
550 Madison Avenue,
between 55th and 56th Streets
Monday through Sunday, 7 am–11 pm
Admission is free.

Nantes Triptych, 1992

February 18–April 19, 1998
The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine
1047 Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street
Monday through Saturday, 9 am–noon and
1–5 pm; Sunday, 2–5 pm
Admission is free.

Nantes Triptych, 1992

Video/sound installation
Edition 1: Fonds national d'art contemporain,
Commande publique conçue pour le Musée
des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Ministère de la
Culture, Paris

A central image of a man floating under-
water fully clothed in a black pool is
flanked on the left by an image of a
young woman giving birth and, on the
right, by an old woman on her deathbed.
The three images together form a triptych
based on the traditional altarpiece

form. The two side panels are
documents of actual events. The central
image is projected onto a translucent
cloth scrim stretched in front of an
empty white room, forming an indistinct
luminous cloud of light behind and
beyond the surface of the image. The
projected image of the body underwater
hovers in midair, part material, part
immaterial, held in fragile suspension
before an indistinct, shadowy space
between birth and death.

Threshold, 1992

Video/sound installation
Edition 2: Collection of the artist; courtesy
Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London

Current news scrolls across an electronic
display sign with up-to-date reports on
the daily events of the world. The illumi-
nated text is harsh and bright. A black
open doorway intersects the sign, dividing
it in two and leading to a dark inner
room. Inside this room, three large, dim,
black-and-white projections of the faces
of sleeping people appear on the walls.
The sound of regular breathing can be
heard in the darkness. Occasionally, one
of the figures moves or shifts position
but remains asleep, an unconscious
presence existing beneath the incessant
flow of worldly events.



Off-Site Installations

Course

Video Culture: A Seminar on Video Art
Thursdays, January 29, February 5, 12,
and 19 6–8 pm

David A. Ross, director, and Chrissie Iles,
curator, film and video, Whitney Museum.

Series admission: \$120; members, students
with ID, and senior citizens \$100.

Lecture

A Lecture/Discussion with Bill Viola

Wednesday, March 11 7 pm

Admission: \$8; members, senior citizens, and
students with current ID \$6.

Conversation on Art

Bill Viola, Peter Sellars, and David Ross

Saturday, April 4 7 pm

Co-curators of the "Bill Viola" exhibition,
David A. Ross, director of the Whitney
Museum, and Peter Sellars, theater,
opera, and television director, join Viola
to discuss art, video, and culture today.

Public Programs

Book Signing

Sunday, April 5 1–2 pm

The artist will sign copies of the exhibi-
tion catalogue *Bill Viola* in the Museum
lobby. For more information, call
(212) 570-3614.

Family Fun! Workshops

Switched On! Video Art by Bill Viola

February 28, repeated March 14

9–11 am

Special gallery tours and hands-on
activities engage participants in looking
and talking about the art on view.
Recommended for ages 5 to 10; children
must be accompanied by an adult.

Admission to each workshop: \$6 per family;
members \$4. Pre-registration is required.
Call (212) 570-7710.

Teacher's Workshop

**Image/Space/Sound: Bill Viola's
Video Environments**

Tuesday, March 3 4–7:30 pm

Examine relationships between science,
technology, and art. Find out how this
contemporary artist uses multimedia
technologies to present ideas that are
generated from diverse cultural origins
and a wide spectrum of human
experience.

There is a \$10 materials fee. Registration is
required. Call (212) 570-7710.


Exhibition Orientation for Adult Visitors

Museum-trained docents and Whitney
lecturers will offer daily introductions to
the "Bill Viola" exhibition. No reservations
are necessary. For schedule informa-
tion, call (212) 570-3676.

For more information on these and other
programs, call (212) 570-7722.

Visit the Whitney Web Site

The Whitney site features a special
section on the "Bill Viola" exhibition.
<http://www.echonyc.com/~whitney>

This exhibition is sponsored by 

Significant support has also been provided by Peter and Eileen Norton and the Peter Norton Family Foundation, with additional funding from Pamela and Richard Kramlich, Marion Stroud Swingle, Lynn Forester, Barbara Wise, and the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The installation of *Threshold* at the Sony Plaza Public Arcade is made possible by Sony Plaza, Anthony d'Offay and Jim Cohan, 242 Inc., New York, and Reuters America Inc.

Enjoy unlimited admission to "Bill Viola." Become a Whitney Member today!

Admission fees paid today by you and
your guest (up to \$16) will be credited
toward a membership. As a Member,
you'll receive free admission for two
adults and any accompanying children
under 18 on unlimited return visits to
the Museum; a 20% discount on the
Bill Viola catalogue; and an array of
exclusive benefits throughout the year.
Please visit the Membership Desk in the
Museum lobby today or call (212) 570-
3641 for further information.

Exhibition Catalogue

Bill Viola is a fully illustrated book that
features an informative foreword by
David A. Ross, a selection of spectacu-
lar images by Kira Perov and Bill Viola—
64 major works with texts by the
artist—and an engaging conversation
between Viola and poet Lewis Hyde.
216 pages, 272 illustrations, 198 in
color. Published in association with
Flammarion, Paris, New York. Paper
\$35, Members price \$28; Cloth \$60,
Members price \$48.

Exhibition Merchandise

Poster An exquisite reproduction
from the video/sound installation
The Sleep of Reason. 24 x 36 inches.
\$15, Members price \$12.

T-shirt Available in m, l, xl, 100%
cotton. Produced in collaboration with
Fotofolio. \$20, Members price \$16.

To order, call (212) 570-3614.

The commentaries in this brochure that
describe the installations are extracted
from the artist's writings.

All photographs by Kira Perov except: *Slowly
Turning Narrative*, Gary McKinnis; *Room for
St. John of the Cross*, Kira Perov and Squidde
& Nunn; *The Veiling*, Roman Mensing; *The
Sleepers*, Louis Lussier; *Threshold*, Eduardo
Calderón; *Nantes Triptych*, Musée des Beaux-
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