

## **ARTISTS FILM AND VIDEO COLLECTION AT KONSTFACK**

**A PROJECT INITIATED BY PROF. MARYSIA LEWANDOWSKA  
IN COLLABORATION WITH SASKIA HOLMKVIST, ALESSANDRA diPISA  
AND ROBERT STASINSKI**

### **1. RESEARCH HISTORY**

Video and film as a means of creative expression came into being in the early 60s and has considerably developed into one of the principal art form in the last 40 years. The developments from the 1980s onwards point to adopting terms such as New Media, which broadens the sphere but slightly obliterates the relationships with art so prominent in the earlier experiments.

From the 1960s onwards the use of video technology rather than more expensive film begun to be used as a tool for memory retention, predominantly through recordings of performance art of the period. Alongside, another exploration emerged and that is the relationship to television, both in a sense of omnipresent daily experience of it, mainly in the USA. The subversion of its ideological status begun to be critically addressed by artists such as Nam June Paik, Dara Birnbaum, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper.

These two currents characterizing video art in its early stages (the imaginary television broadcast and live performance recording) focused on particular approaches made possible through the use of the medium, for example closed circuit, feedback, chroma key, slow motion. The structural experiments were developed in parallel with more critical functions that the portability and low cost of production allowed.

A great number of artists who were often working in diverse disciplines such as installation, performance, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, cinema, dance created works that fall into three distinct approaches such as video (broadcast via the monitors), sculpture (using the TV equipment as building block) and installations (involving a particular relationship to the space of projection and the visitor). This is often occurring as a result of a critical engagement with theory and a sense of responsibility for creating environments directly and often physically examining the response of the audience. These trends are already well established throughout the 1970s through the works of artists such as Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Chris Marker.

The way things developed from the 1980s through to the 90s is a shift of emphasis from referencing television to more closely examining the codes of cinematic production of images. A large scale installations involving complex narratives and proper technical support of film industry (35mm film often later transferred to DVD) appears through works of artists such as Douglas Gordon, Pierre Huyghe, Isaac Julien, Anri Sala, Ehija-lisa Athilla. Concurrent with these

developments is the prevailing presence of New Media, with artists using technological investigations, interactivity and more politically focused approaches exploiting the uses of Internet in both production and distribution of video based work. The possibilities for artists seem to be widening not only in terms of access and creation of new audiences but also by exploring issues related to copyright and its extension through the creative commons licensing, participation in Peer-to-Peer Exchanges and distribution networks circumventing the primacy of commercial art gallery base.

## **2. COLLECTION**

The project of developing film and video collection builds upon my personal interests in film and also recognizes a need amongst students and staff working at Konstfack for such a resource. In the current climate where emphasis often falls on the image production and consumption, it is crucial to be able to link current developments in art practice to the historical material and discourses surrounding it. This kind of knowledge seems essential in the educational environment, which builds its expertise on the understanding of the present through the past. By having a collection on site, students and staff are encouraged to use the material in their teaching and learning. The collection is divided into three sections: Historical, Contemporary and Students Works.

### **2.1 HISTORICAL**

The research into gathering the historical examples has been conducted through visiting already existing collections and meeting with curators responsible for archiving artist's films and video in the European context, as well as approaching distributors worldwide.

In February of 2005 I have traveled to Warsaw and Lodz to meet up with the Members of the Workshop of Film Form, an experimental group of artists active in Poland from 1972. This was an important connection for me personally, as I was able to address a frequent lack of representation of material from Eastern Europe. The visit resulted also in meeting with the curator of a newly established Archive of Experimental Film housed by Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, and a donation of a valuable anthology DVD.

In April of 2005 I have undertaken a 4-day trip to Paris to research the Nouveaux Medias Collection at the Centre Pompidou. I was interested in both the organization, methods of cataloguing and the particular process of selecting artists' works, and the conceptual underpinnings of such selection.

As a result of those trips I, together with the collaborating team, begun drafting a list of names and works, which would be most important to include in the collection. We decided to first of all try and find the seminal examples of the early period dominated mainly by artists living and working in the USA. Our

searches revealed good distribution sources such as Video Art Bank in Chicago, responsible for compiling anthologies of the early works, Electronic Arts Intermix in New York provided us with further works, and from LUX in London we purchased rare footage from the 1930s by F.S. Themerson, early works by Isaac Julien and Sankofa Collective, and political work around censorship by Vera Frankel.

## **2.2 CONTEMPORARY**

In June 2005 I traveled to Berlin to visit the latest edition of E-Flux housed by KunstWerke Institute of Contemporary Art. E-Flux collection has been established by Anton Vidokle as a resource gathering video works by contemporary artists, those with an already established reputation and the emerging ones. Again I was interested in the organizing principles as well as a method of making the works available through an on-site video lounge.

In July 2005 I traveled to Barcelona to meet up with Carles Guerra, the director of Diaporama Festival which was for the first time committed to including works by artists from across Europe who made their works available through the creative commons licenses. Something that I explored further by attending a conference at the University of Sussex entitled Remix Culture. A wide range of practitioners from the fields of music, art and film debated new ways of distribution, payment and sharing creative resources.

Further research into compiling the Contemporary section was conducted by meeting a number of curators and critics active in the field, such as Stuart Comer responsible for Film Programme at Tate Modern, Ben Cook, director of LUX, Lucy Reynolds, curator of LUX online catalogue, Maria Lind at IASPIS, Gunnell Pettersson at Film Form, Mats Stjernstadt of Index.

Many of the DVDs that we now hold as part of the collection have been obtained by approaching artists personally and encouraging them to make a donation. A letter was distributed to 50 artists, out of which 30 decided to donate the works. Those who are represented by galleries or dealers agreed to loan the works. All donated works are backed by an agreement between the Collection and the artist. **(See appendix Artists Invitation, Agreement)**

## **2.3 STUDENTS' WORK**

One of the main reasons of establishing the collection was also to develop a more systematic and consistent approach to collecting works made by graduating students at the school. Some tapes were already held by the Art Department but there was no mechanism in place to continue to add new works every year. Rather than keeping the single student works as VHS or DVD, we embarked on creating a selection according to a graduating year and created

DVDs with a menu facility for simpler use. We archived already existing works and approached additional 15 former students for the material. In the future we are planning to establish a small jury, which will continue to select and purchase students' works as they graduate annually.

In addition I have been able to add a personal collection compiled during my time as a lecturer at Goldsmiths' College, London 1994 – 2002, of works by former students. These have also been turned into DVD compilations.

### **3. GRAPHIC IDENTITY**

As the project progressed we began thinking of a new name and identity.

In September 2005 we established a new name as being **TIMELINE.**

**KONSTFACKS VIDEOTEK.** The name very clearly acts as a sign for what in the future may become a host of activities beyond collecting itself, such as screenings, seminars, film talks, or a festival.

Once the name has been established we approached a number of young graphic designers (recent graduates of Konstfack) with a brief for designing a logo, poster and DVD covers. The results of their efforts were quite unsatisfactory, so the next decision was to ask Grzegorz Laszuk, a polish graphic designer with an established reputation. Within 2 weeks he proposed a design, which we were extremely happy with. **(see appendix logo.pdf, DVD.pdf, poster.pdf)**

The design will be used for creating new covers for the works which artists supplied in a substandard presentation, and also we will continue to use the poster design in all the future publicity.

### **4. VIDEO LOUNGE**

In October of 2005 we begun enquires into the possibility of establishing a permanent home for the collection within Konstfack. It seemed best suited to be located in a small seminar room adjacent to the Library. As the room was not really suitable in its current state, we negotiated with Ivar Bjorkman, our rector to commit further funds which would allow for the room to be transformed into a proper video lounge. Once the funds were secured we ordered two vhs/dvd players and monitors, which have been installed permanently in the room. We then concentrated on changing the feel of the room, to provide a more appropriate atmosphere for long hours of solitary viewing. We now have more of a clubroom with loungers and low light, and the room itself is where all the tapes and DVDs are available for viewing. There is no possibility of lending the material out of the library premises.