

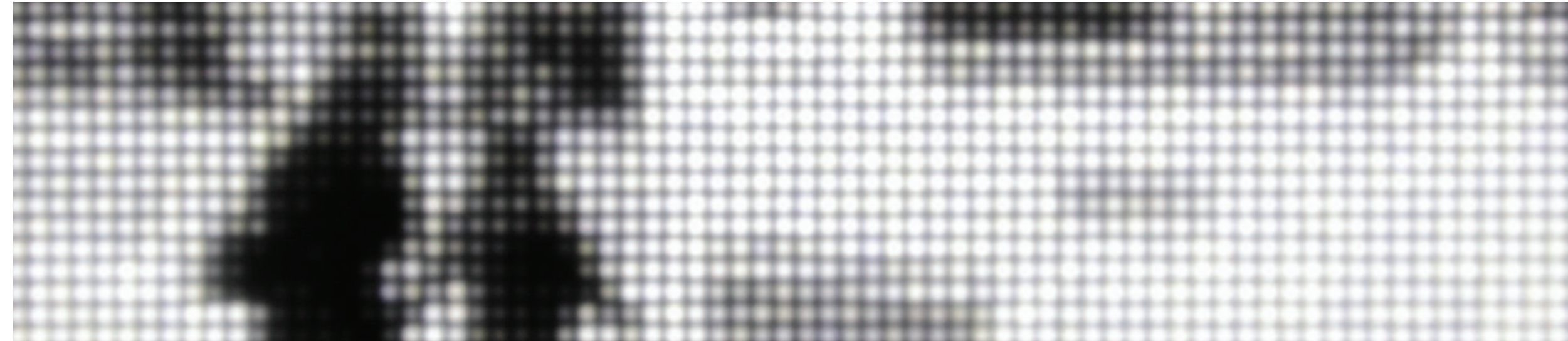
*The evolution of vision is dependent upon machines.* – Gene Youngblood<sup>1</sup>

*The Transformative Surface* presents the work of nine University of New Mexico faculty artists and six guest artists, Jim Campbell, Bruce Nauman, Daniel Reeves, Peter Sarkisian, Woody Vasulka, and Gail Wight. As a landmark exhibition at the UNM Art Museum, the project offers an overview into the wide-ranging possibilities of transformation and surface in time-based analog, video, digital and sound art, 1968–2012. Varying in the intensity of sensory properties, sixteen works of art by fifteen artists are illustrative of the wholly optical, aural, and haptic, or are combinations of the seen, heard, and felt. Complex issues about the planet, its land, trees and water; the minute and sublime phenomena found in the heavens and microscopic realms; sacred monuments abraded by time and conflict; and abstract compositions based upon ancient and machine paradigms, have all been realized by working with highly sophisticated technological programs. The innate, fluctuant qualities of new media constructions have formed a hybrid practice that continues to hone our understanding of vanguard art.

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE SURFACE

For an appreciation of the exhibition's title, Latinate etymology is revelatory. *Trans* (across) + *formare* (to form), or *transformare*, meant to “change the shape or form of.” And, *superficialis*, from *sur* (above) + *face* (look, appearance) was defined as “pertaining to the surface” or the “outermost boundary of anything; the outside part.” The correlation in art between surface and image, the very *skin* that constitutes a painting, in particular, has possessed a paramount place in critical studies since Impressionism, a period in which paint became increasingly independent.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the pigment or the individual daubs and patches of color applied by the hand of Cézanne, Seurat or Van Gogh, among other masters, emphasized the importance of the material, which in turn influenced new artistic strategies. The mosaic of paint eventually became the mosaic that we recognize on our computer screens and cell phones, that is the electronic pixel, an abbreviation for “picture element.” Masterful pixilation is exemplified in Jim Campbell's *Market Street Pause*, Daniel Reeves's *Avatamsaka*, Woody Vasulka's *Light Revisited, No. 4*, and Claudia X. Valdes, *The Sixth Magnitude*, which pulsate with incalculable shifts in surface imaging, that Monet's fields of bright red poppies were once seen to possess.

Cover: DANIEL REEVES Detail from *Avatamsaka*, 2008–2012



The transitive issue between the surfaces of a painting and the surfaces of video and new media art is not only the difference between handcrafted and virtual realms, but, also, the inevitable confrontation with representation and illusionism which is a shared outcome. Consider Bruce Nauman's video, *Flesh to White to Black to Flesh*, from 1968 — a self-portrait that shows the artist as both the subject (Bruce) and the object (a surface to be painted on). He covers and uncovers his upper body and face with white paint then black paint then white paint then black paint in a casual but deliberate performance. Skin-as-surface is literalized as Nauman enacts, through repetition, making and un-making, masking and un-masking, being white and being black.<sup>3</sup>



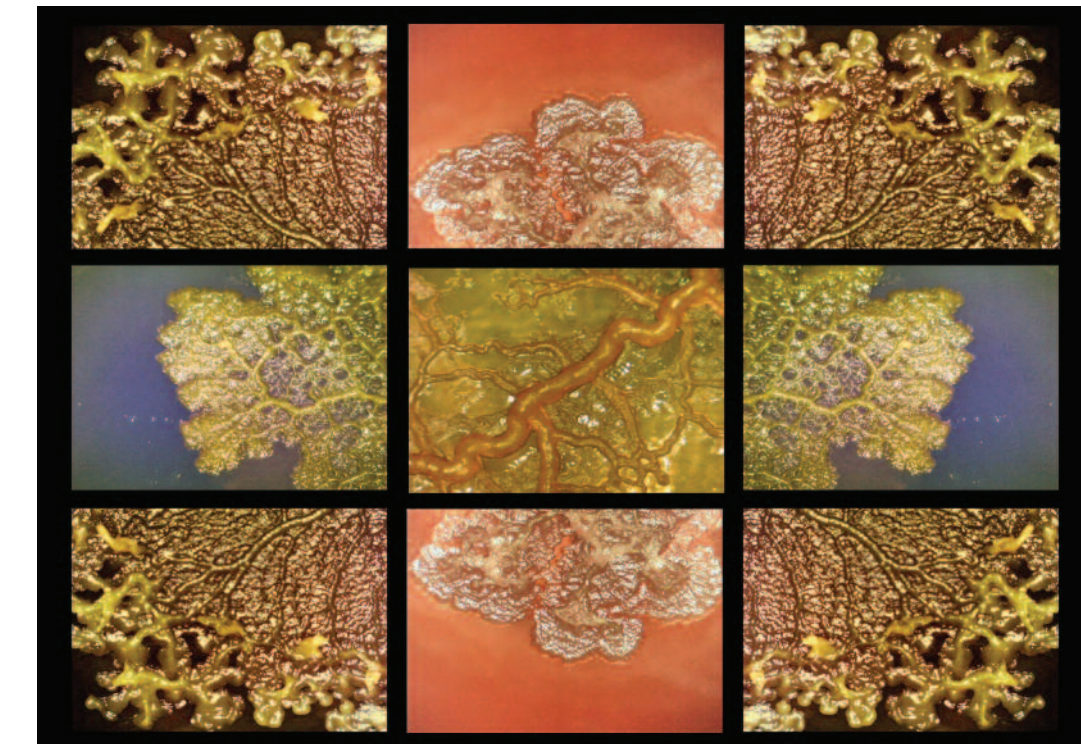
Above: JIM CAMPBELL *Market Street Pause*, 2010 Below: CLAUDIA X. VALDES Detail from *The Sixth Magnitude*, 2011–2012

The surface of video art, and the emerging vocabulary of electronic procedures unique to the construction of “time/energy objects”<sup>4</sup> describe a form of pure video due to the unique properties of the medium. The evolution, as visual dialogue, encompassed the use of new technologies, most importantly the Sony porta-pak which was the first-ever portable video recording system, released in 1967. In the hands young artists and artist-activists, the porta-pak was a vital link in the development of video art as a catalyst for change during the socio-political hotbed of the Sixties. Image-manipulation technology (in the words of Steina and Woody Vasulka, a “dialogue with tools”) and the maneuvering of the effects of light formed a practice that was centered upon a critique of the dominant modalities of representation (TV and cinema). Gene Youngblood, the pre-eminent scholar on alternative cinema and media art theory, was the first to recognize that in video art the frame is not one object, or a mere link within a narrative of other links as it is in film. Rather, it is a time-segment of a continuous signal in which transformation *not* transition occurs. To cite Youngblood, video created “parallel event streams”<sup>5</sup> In other words, it embodied a visual continuum that displayed a flow of data that was not bound by perspective (space) or sequencing (time). Images were thereby treated as objects. This radical transformation literally created a new pictorial language.

In both singular examples, or manifested collectively as a group, the force of the work of art in *The Transformative Surface* crosses into landscapes and zones of infinite depth, environments in crisis, epochs and

mysterious cultures, political [dis]positions, and the incalculable realm of abstract patterning and the effects of light. Taken altogether they give cause for a heightened awareness about our world and those that we do not inhabit. In a real sense, the ideas that are materialized as art, from Campbell's *optics*, Gilbert's *walking*, Harris's *flux*, Ho's *poetic silence*, Kumar's *archives*, Manning's *data*, Montgomery's *channel*, Nauman's *democracy*, Polli's *ecology*, Reeves's *mandalas*, Sarkisian's *magic*, Tsiongas's *touch*, Valdes's *star*, Vasulka's *light*, and Wight's *nature*, exist side-by-side as attributes of Being. Perhaps there is no more to ask of these marvelous works of art than what we see, hear and touch: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.

E. Luanne McKinnon, *San Francisco*



GAIL WIGHT *Hydraphilia*, 2009

## THE ARTISTS

*Note that the numbers before each artist's name indicate the location of their artwork in the Art Museum. Nos. 1-3 and 5-9 are installed in the Main Gallery; no. 4 in the Van Deren Coke Gallery; nos. 10-14 in the Raymond Jonson Gallery; and no.15 in the Museum Window (to the right of the main entrance doors).*

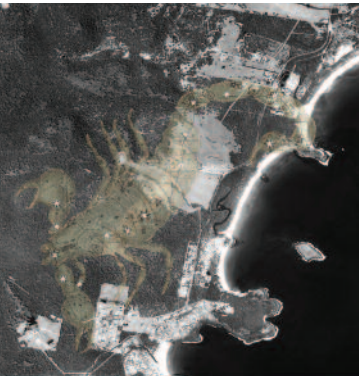
### (6) JIM CAMPBELL

(American, b.1956)

*Market Street Pause*, 2010

Custom electronics and 1152 LED lights set within 14 x 62 x 2 inch diffusion screen. Courtesy of the artist.

The panorama of *Market Street Pause* presents a flickering, wide view of Market Street in San Francisco where cars and pedestrians have been filmed in real time, but captured as a low-resolution video image. In the process of turning the image into a dazzling LED light display, in which the object is part sculpture part movie screen, Campbell's signature construction combines image making with technology in a way that straddles the line between representation and abstraction. What comes into view is created in the viewer's eye which must interpret and complete the pixilated, electronic scene through the organization of optical connections, in darkness and light, created from the enigmatic, blinking image. Campbell's work is found in many public collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Berkeley Art Museum, University of California; Denver Art Museum; Metropolitan Museum of Art, and, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



### (11) BILL GILBERT

(American, b. 1950)

*Celestial/Terrestrial/Navigation: Scorpio*, 2012

Two digital prints; in collaboration with Szu-Han Ho, Jennifer Hudson, and Brian Kimura. Courtesy of the artist.

Bill Gilbert creates 'portraits of place' through a system of walking and inscribing on the land's surface that which he has likewise traced in the sky.

BILL GILBERT Detail from *Celestial/Terrestrial/Navigation: Scorpio*, 2012

In *Celestial/Terrestrial/Navigation:Scorpio*, Gilbert attends to the relationship that desert peoples have with the night sky by walking the pattern of celestial constellations onto landscape in an attempt to mend the rift between heaven and earth created, in part, by light pollution. *Scorpio* connects the San Rafael Swell in Utah with the Kioloa Research Station in New South Wales by inscribing a constellation present in both of their night skies. Using orbiting satellites, in combination with putting one foot in front of the other, Gilbert navigates from star point to star point while recording his encounters in digital photography. Bill Gilbert is Professor of Art and Ecology and holds the Lannan Chair of the Land Arts of the American West program, UNM Department of Art and Art History. He has participated in collaborative projects in the US, Ecuador, the Czech Republic, and Canada.

### (12) CATHERINE PAGE HARRIS

(American, b.1966)

*Climate Lines / Bumpkin Island Perimeter*, 2012

Video projection installation, rip-stop nylon tent, model train and mixed media; 00:10. Courtesy of the artist.

*Climate Lines* continues Catherine Page Harris's exploration into the intersections of ecology and human habitation. In this project, she uses a survey of the water line around the perimeter of Bumpkin Island, located in Boston Bay Harbor, and then translates this data into an exaggerated topographic model of the island realized in an eighteen-foot long white scrim. To marry this topography to the island's ecology, the video image on the scrim's surface projects an idyllic journey which circumnavigates the shore line. Harris is an Assistant Professor of Art and Ecology in the UNM Department of Art and Art History. Her artwork has been shown in the DiRosa Museum in Napa Valley, the Lab and Southern Exposure in San Francisco, the Emily Harvey Gallery in New York, and the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis. She is currently working on understanding lines in the landscape and how built form alters the dynamic patterns of landscape.

### (1) SZU-HAN HO

(American, b. Taiwan, 1982)

*Madrigal*, 2012

Video projection on silkscreens; audio installation with headphones; collaboration by The Electric Ensemble. Courtesy of the artist.

An Assistant Professor of Art & Ecology in the UNM Department of Art and Art History, Szu-Han Ho's multi-media installation, *Madrigal*, considers the many-layered history of the region as an erratic topography—composed of the interaction between peoples through space and time—and heavily informed by the desert landscape. Taken from historical material on the Spanish exploration of New Mexico, this information is overlaid with the sounds of students and communities in the contemporary context, which form a rich texture that moves between melody, dissonance, and silence. Ho works at the intersection of spatial practices, material culture, and affective knowledge, and her research interests have revolved around the shared

metaphors of economics and ecology. After receiving a BA in Architecture from UC Berkeley, she launched a multi-year collaborative project integrating art installation, architectural proposals, performance, and agricultural research on a 250-acre site in West Texas. She received an MA in Visual and Critical Studies and an MFA in Film, Video, and New Media at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



### (13) SHAURYA KUMAR

(American, b. India, 1979)

Five prints from *The Lost Museum: The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasures Series*.

*Eritrea, Bamiyan and Parthenon*, 2007; *Qutub Minar and Amber Room*, 2011 Archival inkjet prints and text panels. Courtesy of the artist.

Shaurya Kumar has written, "Art is powerful. It has swayed votes, rallied armies and incited revolutions. It expresses ideas and concerns.... Yet art itself is far from immortal. Its preservation has always been a battle against nature, time and man.... Countless artworks have been destroyed during military action, or at the hands of ever-changing political regimes. Making use of advanced technology, The Council for Documentation of Lost Art & Cultural Heritage (CDLACH) was formed by concerned museums...to document and preserve artworks, particularly those that had been lost or destroyed. Twenty-five years after the archive was created, much of the database was found to be inaccessible....The seemingly immortal visual archive of once-lost artworks was lost yet again." Kumar's series, *The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasures*, showcases the remains of the corrupted CDLACH database as original works of art. Since 2001, he has been involved in numerous prestigious research projects, including "The Paintings of India" (a series of twenty-six documentary films on the painting tradition of India, and digital restorations of 6th c. CE Buddhist mural paintings from the caves of Ajanta in Central India.

SHAURYA KUMAR *Qutub Minar*, 2011, from *The Lost Museum: The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasures Series*

### (10) PATRICK MANNING

(American, b.1972)

*The Heat of the World One Hour Ago*, 2009–2010

16-channel audio installation. Courtesy of the artist.

In Patrick Manning's, *The Heat of the World One Hour Ago*, sixteen speakers affixed to wood planks emit low frequency sounds that oscillate across the human threshold of hearing. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) collects thousands of hourly weather reports from around the globe and posts that information to the web as part of the METARS project. Consisting of a computer, custom software, amplifiers, and speakers, Manning processes data from the previous hour's METARS, converts the numbers into sound and plays it back to randomly chosen speakers in the sculptural construction. Each weather station's data is a note on a single speaker, lasting for a fraction of a second that is its share of the hour. "Through this noise," he said, "I want to explore the individual within the mass of data, the inability to write experience, and the ways in which knowledge is intertwined with doubt and faith." Manning is an Assistant Professor of Photography in the UNM Department of Art and Art History and has exhibited at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, among other venues.

### (15) R. LEE MONTGOMERY

(American, b.1969)

*Sprawl*, 2012

Single channel video. Courtesy of the artist.

*"The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel."*

—William Gibson, first sentence of *Neuromancer* (1984)

In a recent introduction to *Neuromancer*, Gibson lamented the now-obsolete technologies—payphones and television static—that he imagined would exist in his future world. Assistant Professor of Electronic Arts in the UNM Department of Art and Art History Lee Montgomery continues to experiment with the electromagnetic spectrum as a medium in *Sprawl*. Using an outdated analog TV transmitter that is tethered to a helium-filled weather balloon as a probe into the high desert sky, Montgomery created an invisible sculptural form that extends from the transmitter's aerial location to the ground. The device gradually captures more real estate in the camera lens attached to it. The resulting video exists simultaneously as documentation, as a meditation on the tension between mediated and direct experience of he desert landscape, and as an electromagnetic realization of the poetic opening sentence of Gibson's novel. Montgomery is the recipient of honors including the Walter and Elise Haas Cultural Commons Grant for 2008 Whitney Museum Biennial. He has completed residencies at Stanford University, Hochschule für bildende Kunst, Hamburg, and in Budapest.

SHAURYA KUMAR *Qutub Minar*, 2011, from *The Lost Museum: The Fate of the World's Greatest Lost Treasures Series*



### (9) BRUCE NAUMAN

(American, b. 1941)

*Flesh to White to Black to Flesh*, 1968

Single-channel video, sound; 00:50:58; displayed on a Hantarex™ monitor

University of New Mexico Fine Arts Library Collection

This early work of conceptual art by Bruce Nauman (age 27 at the time) casually presents his bare torso, poised yet somewhat akimbo, as he meticulously applied layers of white pigment then black pigment to his face, arms, and chest. Beyond the link to body art, and the idea of treating the human body as artistic subject matter and material and surface, Nauman enacts a process of self-transformation—a masque applied and removed on himself—as the tape ends where it began 50 minutes previously. In 1967–68 Nauman created a similar work in four separate videos entitled, *Art Make-Up*, No. 1 White, No. 2 Pink, No. 3, Green, and No. 4, Black. Internationally recognized as one of the most influential contemporary artists, Nauman's work is included in countless museum collections worldwide, and his honors include an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute (1989), the Max Beckmann Prize (1990), Wolf Prize in Arts, Sculpture (1993), the Wexner Prize (1994), and the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 2009 Venice Biennale for his solo exhibition, *Bruce Nauman: Topological Gardens* at the United States Pavilion.

### (8) ANDREA POLLI

(American, b.1968)

with CHUCK VARGA (American, b.1958)

*Particle Falls*, 2010–2012

Video projection, nephelometer; with data programming by Ryan Romero.

Courtesy of the artist.

Although air is invisible, it has a major impact on public health. Despite the invisibility of air, modern sensors can detect tiny particulate pollution levels in real time. *Particle Falls* is a real-time environmentally reactive projection that allows viewers to see current levels of fine particulate matter presented as a

BRUCE NAUMAN Detail from *Flesh to White to Black to Flesh*, 1968

digitally generated waterfall cascading down the wall. The project includes a nephelometer that measures the smallest particle, PM2.5. The global monitoring of this particle is one of the most recent developments in aeronomy. Fewer bright particles over the waterfall mean fewer particles in the air. This large-scale installation simultaneously acts as a monitor, an alarm, and a thing of beauty by using particulate air pollution as a basis for a cascading waterfall. Andrea Polli, the Mesa Del Sol Chair of Digital Media and UNM Associate Professor of Fine Arts and Engineering, has created work at the intersection of science, media and technology which has been presented widely in over 100 exhibitions and performances internationally, and she has been recognized by numerous grants, residencies and awards including UNESCO.

### (2) DANIEL REEVES

(American, b.1948)

*Avatamsaka*, 2008–2012

Video projection on 72-inch diameter suspended glass disc, audio on directional sound array; 2:40:49. Courtesy of the artist.

Daniel Reeves's mandala-based video sculptures have been central to his practice for twenty-five years, including *Eingang* (High Museum, Atlanta), and *Jizo Garden* (Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow). Like those, *Avatamsaka*, is an integrated video installation. The title refers to a 5th c. BCE Buddhist sutra known as the "Flower Ornament" that offers a profound vision of the interdependency of all phenomena and a jeweled cosmos replete with infinite realms-within-realms. The sutra also introduced the concept of simultaneity and the web of endless connections that link together all that exists. Through experimentation with fractal generation processes as they apply to image manipulation, *Avatamsaka* displays mandalic patterns that evolve in infinite formations reminiscent of patterns and phenomena found throughout the natural world. Among Reeve's numerous grants and citations are six awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, a John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and three EMMYs. His videos are in collections including the Museum of Modern Art; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. His roster of exhibitions includes the Tate Liverpool, Musée du Louvre, Documenta 7, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

### (5) PETER SARKISIAN

(American, b.1965)

*Book*, 2012

Version 1, exhibition copy 3; found dictionary, powder coated steel and aluminum, video projection, audio. Courtesy of the artist.

Although air is invisible, it has a major impact on public health. Despite the invisibility of air, modern sensors can detect tiny particulate pollution levels in real time. *Particle Falls* is a real-time environmentally reactive projection that allows viewers to see current levels of fine particulate matter presented as a

BRUCE NAUMAN Detail from *Flesh to White to Black to Flesh*, 1968



their own observations. The underlying premise of Sarkisian's work remains committed to using video as an instrument against commercialized media, namely television, in order to transform the act of watching video from an experience-killing act to an experience-creating act. His hybrid constructions attempt to steer the world's most influential medium (TV) back on a collision course with the viewer in order to reintroduce an element of experience, if not surprise, to the act of viewing. Sarkisian has exhibited widely including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Musée Picasso in Antibes, the Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles. In 2008, the University of Wyoming Art Museum organized a mid-career retrospective which traveled to the Knoxville Museum of Art in Tennessee, the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, and the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art.



### (7) MARY TSIONGAS

(American, b. Greece, 1959)

*Dendrochronologist's Dilemma*, 2012

Interactive video installation; technical assistance by Conor Peterson.

Courtesy of the artist.

*Dendrochronologist's Dilemma* integrates dendrochronology, the science of tree-ring dating, in a poetic and metaphoric mode in this interactive video

installation in which the viewer may participate with the work of art through 'touch technology.' In a broad and profound sense, through the study of

cube." As such, his work explores the spatial and perceptive possibilities of video, film, and sculpture by combining three-dimensional objects—in this exhibition, a book and a steel pail—with video projections which cause viewers to question

chemical and physical traces left embedded in the once-living wood, we may see and sense aspects of life as it was lived by the tree and its living contemporaries. Tsiongas, Associate Professor of Electronic Arts in the UNM Department of Art and Art History, has created a body of work over the last ten years that explores our changing relationship to the natural world. Her deep concern for how we as humans are impacting the natural world and how that affects us informs her projects. Mary Tsiongas has performed and exhibited extensively and her work has been shown in over fifty solo and group exhibitions including ARTSPACE, Sidney, Australia; NOGA Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel; the San Jose Museum of Art, California; and at Lincoln Center, New York City.

### (14) CLAUDIA X. VALDES

(American, b. Chile 1972)

*The Sixth Magnitude*, 2011–2012

3-channel immersive audio-video installation, 00:10:00. William Fowler Collins, music. Courtesy of the artist.

The title of Claudia Valdes's installation is derived from the astronomical range of magnitudes, the sixth magnitude being the heavenly star most faintly visible to the unaided human eye, and therefore at the limit of our perception. Her installation incorporates video, motion graphics and algorithmic processes that explore aspects of sight and sound perception. Valdes has stated that, "Conceptually, an aim of *The Sixth Magnitude* is the removal of information directing a viewer's mental process to the cognitive state of image-decoding and semantic processing.... and thus give rise to [a] brain state that is cognitively open rather than focused." The visuals are created in response to "On Perdition Hill," from the album Perdition Hill Radio by William Fowler Collins. Claudia X. Valdes is Assistant Professor of Electronic Arts in the UNM Department of Art and Art History, and she has exhibited widely including screenings and installations at the (ICA) Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; "Pixelerations (V.9) Providence, RI; Mills College, Oakland, CA; National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow; Exit Art, New York; and, Akademie der Kunst, Berlin.

### (4) WOODY VASULKA

(American, b. Czechoslovakia, 1937)

*Light Revisited*, No. 4, 2012

Video projection and audio installation with screens and mirror. Courtesy of the artist.

The source material for *Light Revisited* (No. 4) is Vasulka's *Noisefields* 1973, a canonical work in early video in which a field of colorized video snow, or noise, flashes alternately in a rhythmic pattern producing a mesmerizing image with a dense texture defined by a circular shape set within the rectangular screen. The hyper-opticality here exemplifies Vasulka's intention to visualize the materiality and energy of an electronic signal; while the video noise derives from the rich static sound modulated by its own energy content. This installation continues his explorations with structure. Woody



Vasulka, along with Steina, his wife and lifetime working partner, are renowned pioneers of vanguard video; founders of the new media performance space, The Kitchen in New York (1971); and creator, with Jeffrey Schier in 1976, of the Digital Image Articulator. Through five decades of highly experimental and original contributions, his work has shaped and continues to articulate the structure and materiality of video. The Vasulkas, numerous technicians, programmers, and information technology developers create novel images whose meaning and machine aesthetic overpower their filmic one in what Woody has claimed "speaks of a weird cultural interfacing" with other arts. Gene Youngblood has noted, "Not only were the Vasulkas in the center of electronic culture from its inception, they were the center of that culture during its formative decade and beyond."

### ENDNOTES

1. Youngblood, Gene. "Cinema and the Code," in *Leonardo*, Supplement issue, "Computer Art in Context," 1989; 29.
2. The autonomy of the painted surface was further expounded upon in Clement Greenberg's essay, "Toward a Newer Laocöon," originally published in *Partisan Review* 7, July–August 1940, 296–310.
3. It cannot be overlooked that the issue of race, brought to a tragic climax with the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, and the ensuing race riots that followed gives pause to the question of race in Nauman's skin painting. Constance Lewallen raised this topic in her book, *A Rose Has No Teeth: Bruce Nauman in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2007, in which she wrote, "In *Art Make-Up* Nauman uses his body as a canvas, covering his face and torso successively with white, pink, green, and black paint. Nauman has admitted that the piece had 'whatever social connections it had with skin color,' but also had to do with the idea of 'making up art.'"
4. Meigh-Andrews, Chris. *A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 111.
5. This key idea is elaborated upon in Gene Youngblood's, *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970).

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