



Branda Miller

In a bold experiment, a group of "juvenile delinquents" were helped to find healthier options by creating a videotape about themselves.

L.A. WEEKLY JUNE 19, 1987

# Mending With Tape

What's Up will be screened Tuesday and Wednesday, July 7 and 8, at 8 p.m. at EZTV, 8547 Santa Monica Blvd., W. Hollywood; (213) 657-1532. The student videomakers from Masada will be present.

by Linda Frye Burnham

**T**his spring a circus came to Los Angeles. In the center ring was an act that's never been tried before, a balancing act between the Juvenile Court, nine "juvenile delinquents," a video artist, a Chinese-Korean-American blues singer and the Mark Taper Forum. The circus has moved on, but the act is preserved on a 32-minute videotape about teenagers called *What's Up?*

Alistair Hunter, a career administrator in the county's juvenile-court school system, is struggling to establish the arts in the system's curriculum. After years of experience bringing working artists to the juvenile halls, probation camps, group homes and community centers that contain and educate 50,000 troubled kids each year, he's convinced that the art experience provides what they need most: help in learning to think critically, behave ethically and communicate with the world they will face when they are released from the shelter of the juvenile court.

Peter Brosius agrees. Brosius, director of the Taper's Improvisational Theater Project, has spent his career making theater with ghetto kids, and has worked extensively with Hunter in the court school system. Together they hatched a project for the school where Hunter is now assistant principal, Masada Placement Community Day Center School. The plan was to select a group of students to spend eight weeks with artists from the Taper, making videos about their lives.

Masada serves 88 white, black and Latino young men, 15 to 18 years old, all of whom are on probation, living away from their families in licensed group homes. A menacing restlessness bubbles beneath the surface; these teenagers are straining at their leashes, anxious to get out and live on their own. It is Masada's complex assignment to restrain them and "emancipate" them at the same time.

The video project would be a test case and everybody knew it. It could help Hunter toward his goal for the arts curriculum. There was a lot riding on it, and Brosius was carrying the ball. Nobody knew exactly what to expect when he threw it to video artist Branda Miller.



Anne Fishbein

Court-approved photo of Masada High School student videomakers.

**M**iller is the quintessential artist for the '80s. A friendly, articulate young woman, she is both artistically sophisticated and streetwise. View her tape, *L.A. Nickel*, and you'll experience life on Skid Row from the window of her studio at Fifth and Wall. Read her curator's statement for the "Surveillance" exhibition she mounted at LACE Gallery this winter and you'll find her quoting social philosopher Michel Foucault and crafting theory about the politics of technology. An Emmy winner who sometimes works as an editor for the movie industry and such mammoth corporations as AT&T, Miller also understands life on the street.

Brosius chose Miller for the project because of her unorthodox approach to documentary video. The tack they took is risky, but typical of the fascinating experiments going on in community art projects all over California. "Instead of doing a simple documentary, I wanted to just sort of jump over to graduate school, have it be an art experience about collage, montage, juxtaposition, disjunctive storytelling, image work. I liked Branda's use of sound texture, the use of looping, repetition. I wanted to work in that vein." Using as a model her tape about a day in the life of a group of teenage girls, *That's It, Forget It*, Miller made a working outline that allowed for maximum student input. Appropriately

styled much like a music video, the tape collages the everyday sights and sounds of the students' lives and subtly combines them with insights gleaned from the soul-searching theater exercises of Peter Brosius, with all the choices made by the students themselves. "I set up a very defined and controlled structure for freedom and anarchy within it," said Miller. "It's a balancing act. I believed in the boys, that their choices would be the strong ones. That's what you see on the tape."

They decided that the autobiographical tape would have three parts: where I come from, where I am now and where I'm going. Parts 1 and 3 would be montage segments constructed by the whole group. Part 2 would be a series of individual statements, one by each young man, in which he could say or do whatever he wanted, chroma-keyed into a background chosen by him and underscored with music he made himself.

Brosius spent the first month on storytelling exercises, improvisations. "The focus," he said, "was to get personal information, images, dreams, fantasies, role-playing. The goal was moments in your life when you learn something about being a man. The goal was to get them to tell their stories in ways that might be new. I don't think any of us were prepared for

the stories of the violence that has happened to the kids, for the kind of family crisis they'd gone through. A third of the guys, their fathers were Vietnam vets who were in rough shape because of the war and had taken it out on the kids in different ways. Some people go through that and they don't end up running away or doing drugs or joining gangs. Some people do."

At first the students were reluctant to open up, to expose their inner life to teachers and classmates, who they knew would see the tape. "I was kind of edgy at first," said Jim (not his real name). "If they can find one little thing they can pick out, they'll fuck with you."

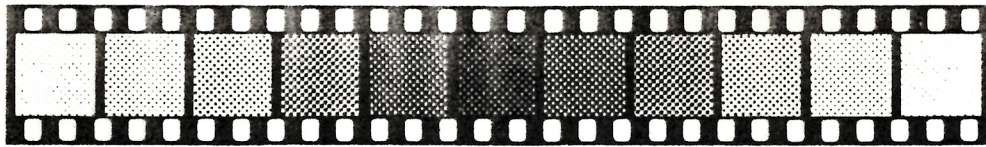
**M**uch of the credit for the candor that poured forth in workshop goes to Gary Wong, a painter also known as blues singer Charlie Chan, brought in by Miller because she felt he would have an important rapport with the students. "There were talks in that room," said Brosius of Chan's influence, "about what it means to be an artist, that were very beautiful and very touching — things I don't think these kids get a chance to hear a lot." Chan found it "an invaluable experience. I wanted them to see they have choices. They're stuck where they are and I'm about unleashing all the stuck places I touch. It was wonderful and heart-wrenching. Fights almost broke out, but that's a sign something volatile is going on."

"The way they approached it just opened everybody up," said 17-year-old Tom. "People were getting deep. Guys I'd known for six, eight months were telling stories I just could not believe — a macho athlete telling about the time his dad stuck his hands in boiling water."

Segments of the soundtrack, from workshop recordings, reveal the oblique angle from which the exercises allowed the students to tell their stories, sometimes in the third person, as if describing a movie:

"It's about a guy who lived a hard life from the beginning . . . It's about a guy who was forced to grow up at a very young age . . . Father's an alcoholic, mother's an alcoholic, they're two people trying to come to grips with their disease. All the time they are trying to find themselves, they are forgetting about their child . . . He shuts out the world, he goes into his own private world, he don't talk to nobody, he don't listen to nobody, just sits in his room all day, just staring at the wall, thinking how in the hell did I get here, how in the hell is this happening to me?" And so on with stories about child abuse, death in the family, gang-banging, getting busted.

If opening up their feelings brought a volatility to the workshop, the skills they developed put the power of technology into their hands. With the guidance of the artists, plus sound engineer Dan Birnbaum, professional cameraman Jules Backus and musician Mitchell Oda, the students recorded the workshops, collected sounds from their environment, logged 12 hours of sound and edited it to 10 minutes, made video shot sheets, shot and edited the visuals and created the soundtrack in Chan's Riffraff Studios. The students made all the choices that make *What's Up?* a portrait of life at Masada.



# 1987 LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL GAY & LESBIAN FILM/VIDEO FESTIVAL

**SATURDAY, March 7**

EZTV, 8547 Santa Monica Blvd.,  
West Hollywood

## The Darndest Things

12:00 PM

Admission: \$4.

A trio of pieces in which youths speak for themselves about the value and complexity of homosexual lifestyles.

## FRAMED YOUTH

(Revenge of the Teenage Perverts)

Trill Burton, Pom Martin, Nicola Field, Rose Collis, Connie Giannaris, Toby Kettle, Jeff Cole, and Jimi Somerville.

Gay and lesbian youths were given complete artistic control to create their own videotape for broadcast on Britain's Channel 4. The result is a powerful, direct statement, and a unique personal record, which counters fear and isolation with openness and courage. Check out Somerville's pre-Bronski Beat rock segment.

England, 1983, 3/4", 50 min.  
Source: Albany Distribution Video, The Albany, Douglas Way, London SE8 4AG, England

## WILD LIFE

John Goss

A portrait of two 15-year-old gay Latinos and their fantasized day in Los Angeles. We see them change clothes on the street, cruise around "Gay City," meet their friends at the park and "throw altitude." As the tape progresses, the positions of fact and fiction overlap, highlighting the contradictions in their stories and in the video's construction of realism.

USA, 1985, 3/4", 39.5 min.  
Source: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus Dr. at Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60603-6487

## NOT ALL PARENTS ARE STRAIGHT

Los Angeles Premiere

Producer: Kevin White;

Co-Producer: Annamarie Faro

A television documentary profile of six families in which children are being raised by gay and lesbian parents. Directed from the children's perspective, the program illustrates the social and emotional issues these unique families face.

USA, 1986, 3/4", 57 min.  
Source: Full Frame Productions, 363 Brannan St., San Francisco, CA 94107  
Producer Kevin White will be present to answer questions.

## Power In Our Image, Part II

3:00 PM

Admission: \$4.

## CROSSING THE 49TH

U.S. Premiere

Mark Verabiolf

Seductive visual effects combined with a disjunctive audio track creates a dream of a utopian nation: "It has been arranged by the Intermale and Underdykes of the United States of America and Canada, to unite in the world's first totally gay nation..." A fantasy of sub-culture nationalism infiltrated by Big Brother overtones.

Canada, 1985, 3/4", 10 min.  
Source: Mark Verabiolf, 871 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211

## MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN QUEERS

West Coast Premiere

John Greyson

An eccentric diary based on the experience of attending the 1985 Moscow youth festival as an "out" gay delegate. Reconstructed adventures in Moscow's gay subculture are cut with lurid Rock Hudson headlines and scenes of Hudson in the cold-war classic, Ice Station Zebra. A tape about the impossibility of escaping recurrent East-West stereotypes, about cultural exchange, about shaping a gay identity and politics from the contradictory fragments of a homophobic culture.

Canada, 1986, 3/4", 27 min.  
Source: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus Dr. at Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60603-6487

## RAW MEET

West Coast Premiere

Jerri Allyn

A humorous recounting of sexual harassment from the men that Allyn worked with in her last and final restaurant job. On screen, she boxes with trainer Zebra Davis while multiple layers of voice and music accompany her stories.

USA, 1986, 3/4", 2.5 min.  
Source: Jerri Allyn, 573 9th Ave., NYC 10036

## SEND LETTER, PHOTO...PLEASE

Alan Pulner

A video which uses the personal ad as a starting point to comically



NOT ALL PARENTS ARE STRAIGHT

explode codes of sexual representation. The frenzied acceleration of sexual poses propels the man out of the body/machine.

USA, 1986, 3/4", 8.5 min.  
Source: Alan Pulner, 1775 N. Orange Dr. #207, Hollywood, CA 90028

## BLEECHIN'

Daniel Brun

A pre-MTV gay rock video using coded collage and rapid, musical editing. A humorous and prescient homage to what would become Calvin's first obsession: the blue jean.

Netherlands, 1980, 3/4", 9.5 min.  
Source: Time Based Arts, Bloemgracht 121 1016 KK Amsterdam, Netherlands

## SIMULATED/DESIRE

Los Angeles Premiere

Mark Verabiolf

Part I: an investigation of day-to-day fetishism of the surface of things and the physical self. Part II: a dismantling of the conventions of sexual representation in rock video, implicating the gay sub-culture audience as consumer.

Canada, 1984, 3/4", 5 min.  
Source: Mark Verabiolf, 871 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211

## DOUBLECROSS

Lyn Blumenthal

A tape based on the pretrial testimony, or rather memories, of a young girl trapped within an indeterminate sexuality. The work ironically juxtaposes sensual sound and images to abstractly examine biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, and current psychoanalytic theory.

USA, 1985, 3/4", 7.5 min.  
Source: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus Dr. at Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60603-6487

## JUST PASSING THROUGH

West Coast Premiere

Director: Judy Rymer; Producers:

Eloise McAllister, Dianne Cadwallader

A haunting and suspenseful feminist television drama, blazing with the lush colors of the New Zealand outback. Two filmmakers are scouting locations for a documentary on Maori myth and legends. They encounter Rhia, a mysterious and extraordinary Maori woman. She

leads them into a world where dreamtime and reality mesh, where life moves forward even beyond the veil of death.

New Zealand, 1985, 3/4", 50 min.  
Source: Women Make Movies, 225 Lafayette St. #212, NYC 10012

## 17 ROOMS

U.S. Premiere

Caroline Sheldon

Britain's Channel 4 refused to broadcast this piece because of its alternate title: What do Lesbians do in Bed? It challenges the titillating promise of that question with home movie footage and inter-titles such as "Sleep," "Sometimes Kiss," and "Tribadism."

An examination of visual representations of women, sexual terminology and semiology. England, 1984, 3/4", 9.5 min.  
Source: Women Make Movies, 225 Lafayette St. #212, NYC 10012

## WOMEN IN LOVE: BONDING STRATEGIES OF BLACK LESBIANS

Sylvia Rhue PhD and Ted Johnson

A documentary account of six women who talk about their lives, loves and coming-out experiences. Humorous and educating entertainment.

USA, 1985, 3/4", 51 min.  
Source: Sylvia Rhue, 3730 Floresta Way, Los Angeles, CA 90043

## Special Showing

6:00 PM

Free Admission

## A TIME OF CHANGE

Producer: Al LaValley;

Producer/Director: Mark Decker

This documentary looks at the political, social and organizational responses to the AIDS epidemic, and its impact on the lives of men with the disease. Issues examined include: death and dying, alternate health care, social rejection of the sick, and support structures. By letting people with AIDS speak for themselves, the piece goes a long way towards demystifying stereotypes about AIDS and homosexuality.

USA, 1986, 3/4", 60 min.  
Source: Mark Decker, 7902 Fareholm Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90046



# Louder Than Words

By Henry Sheehan

Fluency is at the very core of a filmmaker's talent, the ability to take mute objects and arrange them in such a way that they speak clearly to the audience. This clarity is especially important in a resolutely popular cinema like that produced by Hollywood, where a mass language is needed for a mass public. So when a director has a disability that would seem to affect his communicative abilities, it frequently arouses interest. Most famous, perhaps, is the case of Andre De Toth, the man who directed *House of Wax*, one of the most popular 3-D features of the 1950s. De Toth had only one eye, however; he could never see the very effect he was supervising.

Allan Holzman is a young filmmaker with a different, less dramatic and less droll disability: he stutters. Afflicted since a young boy, he has gone through life trying to repress his problem to no avail. When he entered filmmaking, it became a major drawback, costing him at least one opportunity to direct because he simply couldn't manage to get the right words out—or any word out—at the right time. Tension on the set—and as an editor and then director of low-budget features he was on some pretty tense sets—would invariably heighten the problem, and when his stuttering would get worse, so would all sorts of other difficulties. As he points out, people take advantage of stutterers in work situations, often taking the struggling silence of lost words as the silence of consent.

Holzman found relief at UCLA, at a clinic founded and run by the late Dr. Joseph Sheehan and his wife and widow, Vivian Sheehan (neither of whom is related to the writer of this piece). Their theory was that since the cause of stuttering was not known, it was senseless to try to cure it, and impossible to repress it. However, it was possible to control it, and that could be done by stuttering on purpose. It's one of those revolutionary approaches that sounds so simple in retrospect. Vivian Sheehan still runs a therapy group at UCLA, and continues to have great success with it, and among her graduates is Allan Holzman, who has made a one-hour video documentary about the process.

*No Words to Say* (at EZTV, August 3 to 4) is a look at the program in action, with Holzman's camera sitting in on a bunch of group sessions in which individuals,

all in various stages of progression through the therapy, work on their stuttering. Holzman uses a deceptively simple mixture of talking head shots, but though that seems limiting, it's perfectly appropriate. After all, it's their speaking that's causing these people problems, and it takes a certain stylistic self-assurance to just show men and women talking, or trying to talk, more clearly. Of course, people are never more eloquent than when they speak simply and plainly about their pain, and, without reverting to self-pity or self-dramatization, these patients offer a succession of portraits of the steady supply of courage needed to get through a day. A lot of the problem is not with the stutterers so much as the non-stutterers, those of us who let out anxiety about listening to someone with a speech problem become a greater problem for those trying to speak with us. Our anxiety becomes their fear.

*No Words to Say* also moves briskly, thanks to Holzman's skill as an editor; there's a rhythmic flow that lets the subjects' inborn drama ebb and flow. And that's no surprise, since Holzman has spent much of his career as an editor before becoming a director. What is surprising, considering the often onerous conditions that he's had to work under, is the thematic consistency that attends his work and seems to grow out of his necessary preoccupation with his stuttering. One of the tenets of the Sheehan therapy is that a stutterer has to come to grips with the notion that stuttering is not some beast, some other, lurking inside—that stuttering is an integral part of the person it afflicts, and that the problem doesn't affect the worth of the person. There's a notion of dualism that has to be defeated.

Well, that notion of personal dualism happens to figure prominently in Holzman's last two films, *Programmed to Kill* and *Grunt: The Wrestling Movie*. Both are the kind of low-budget action and comedy films that used to attract serious critical attention but, now that large segments of the movie-going public stay home to watch home video, more and more fall by the commercial wayside. *Programmed to Kill*, which also contains strong feminist and anti-covert action elements (which would make the film seem more commercial than ever) is an intricate, extraordinarily well-staged spy film about a Palestinian "terrorist"

who, after being killed in a commando raid, is seized by the CIA and turned into a killer robot designed to infiltrate her old cell and kill her boyfriend, the cell leader. However, committing the murder springs open some memory door, and the woman's old consciousness somehow springs to life; overcome by the horror of her actions, she turns on the CIA scientists who have recreated her. Clearly, the film is preoccupied with notions of dual consciousness residing in the same body, and the futility of trying to deny a person's nature. And this theme is intelligently developed mostly through Holzman's editing of point-of-view shots.

*Grunt* is an equally intelligent, though very broad, comic satire, which may have sealed its commercial doom. The humor is way too elevated for the mass audience such a film is normally aimed at, and its ostensible subject—wrestling—is too vulgar for the young, educated types who could get the jokes. It's a film-within-a-film structure, concerning the misadventures of a hapless filmmaker trying to make a documentary about a wrestler, "Mad Dog" Joe De Curso, once thought to have committed suicide in remorse over his decapitation of an opponent in the ring. However, another wrestler has appeared on the scene, a mysterious figure called "The Mask." No one can see his face, but his style is just like Mad Dog's, and people think he's making a comeback. But the Mask is vicious, a brute who doesn't just beat his opponents, but mangles him. Again, one of the movie's themes is a question of contradictory identity: he looks the same, but he acts so differently; can one person encompass these awful differences?

None of this thematic consistency would make any difference if Holzman wasn't a good filmmaker, and of course he is. These two films—plus his sequel to *Battle Beyond the Stars*, called alternately *Mutant* (Holzman's cut) and *Forbidden World* (the studio's cut)—are minor masterworks of editing, which plays

right to Holzman's strength as an essentially subjective filmmaker. His manipulation of point-of-view maintains dramatic debates beneath the superficial actions of sci-fi, adventure, and broad comedy, and lays big questions right into the seams of the action. There was a time when low-budget films were full of this kind of sophisticated interplay. This is rarer now, but it's nice to see it hasn't disappeared entirely. In the meantime, *No Words to Say* is there as both a sympathetic and moving account of true-life dramas, and an index of artistic preoccupation.

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## A Documentary About Stuttering by Allan Holzman



NO  
WORDS  
TO SAY

# READER.

Friday, May 29, 1987 Vol. 9, No. 32

LOS ANGELES'S FREE WEEKLY

READER'S GUIDE

Cinema



photograph by Adam Kufeld

## Critic's Choice: **Central American Showcase**



This trio of videos about the politics of Central America gain their cumulative power by showing that there is a wide divergence between the official position of the Reagan administration and political realities. Of the three, by far the most powerful is Pamela Cohen's 28-minute *Dateline: San Salvador*. Using a people's protest march from May 1, 1986 as its thematic core, this video documentary - narrated by Robert Foxworth - runs down a quick list of the political, military, and economic forces that are tearing El Salvador apart. El Salvador (thanks in part to the spectacularly corrupt involvement of the White House in Nicaragua) has fallen from the front page over the last year or two, and *Dateline: San Salvador*, using effective journalistic shorthand, reminds us that the status quo being obtained there is oppres-

sive and deadly. *Vacation Nicaragua*, a 77-minute video feature by Anita Clearfield, is a tourist's record of the country. A group of Americans, under the aegis of the official Nicaraguan tourist agency, tour the country, testing their own preconceptions against the reality. These are very real people, and not all of them come across as pleasantly as you might expect, which is a compliment to Clearfield's honesty. The portrait of the country itself is almost secondary, but again there are views you'll never see on the evening news, and not all accrues to the Sandinista's benefit. *Celebrating the 7th* is a record of a sparsely attended rally held in Los Angeles last year to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Sandinista revolution. It's done well enough, but the event itself doesn't seem to deserve the attention it receives. Playing at EZTV, Fri-Sun at 8. —Henry Sheehan

# AND NOW A WORD FROM YOUR LOCAL VIDEO ARTIST...

*TV Screens Are Today's Canvases for Mixing Art With Electronics*

By DON SNOWDEN

## Compared to Movies...

John Dorr of EZTV is filling that low-cost technical vacuum... but he's not exactly thrilled about it.

Dorr, 43, initially brainstormed EZTV as a theater operation—modeled on the film society he ran at Yale in the mid-'60s—showcasing independent productions.

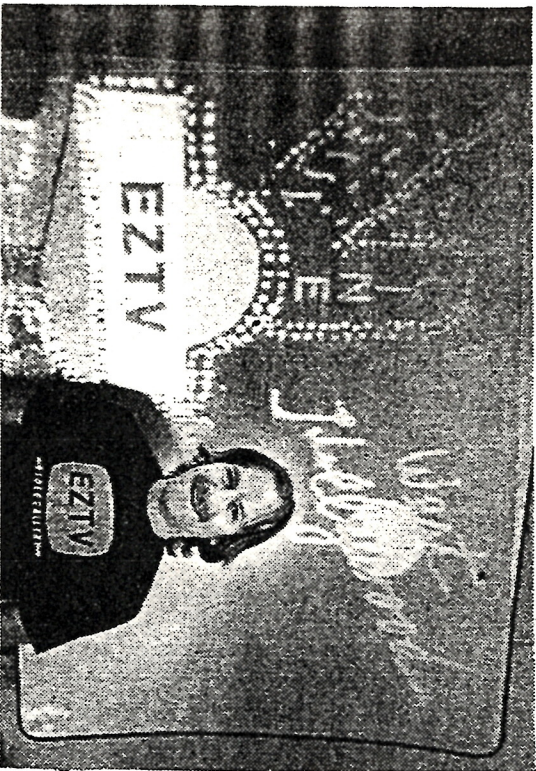
"The facility aspect—doing editing and making copies of tapes, which has become our bread and butter—was not the way I planned it," he acknowledged at EZTV's West Hollywood offices. "I hadn't planned to become an administrator or basically do day labor for other people, which is the reality of this."

The Massachusetts-born Dorr, who recently started shooting his first feature-length video since EZTV opened, began his career in time-honored Hollywood fashion. He worked as a house painter and carpenter and fruitlessly peddled screenplays. Dorr stumbled on to a video camera in the late '70s.

Unlike artists who come to video from a fine arts background, Dorr was enthralled by the medium's lack of expense... especially since he didn't realize video tape could be edited, and shot his initial, full-length feature in sequence.

When Dorr discovered that none of the museums that show work by video artists were willing to screen his early tapes, he and a few friends rented the West Hollywood Community Center to show their works in 1982. A small inheritance enabled him to buy editing equipment and lease the first EZTV office in 1983.

According to Dorr, EZTV is the only organization presenting regular weekend programs of independent video work that isn't supported by grants or under the wing of an art institution. The most popular have been documentaries on underground literary figures like Charles Bukowski and Jack Kerouac or pieces by big-name directors like Jean-Luc Godard. Dorr feels a major breakthrough will only come when a program of fictional works draw turn-away crowds.



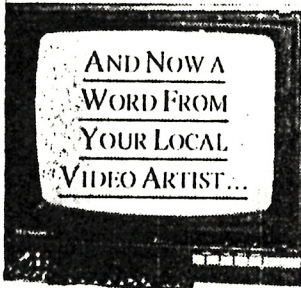
"Video was a low-cost—at the beginning, a no-cost—way of making a movie," says EZTV owner and manager John Dorr.

# The Brave New Artists of Video

# MASUCCI, IN GOOD STANDING, MAKES WAVES AT EZTV

By DON SNOWDEN

**I** say this as a joke but it's largely true: Being at EZTV is a lot like being in the (music group) Ramones," declared video artist Michael J. Masucci in the screening room at EZTV, the West Hollywood facility that serves as a low-cost video production center and presents programs



of independent video work each weekend.

"People may not know your name but everybody [in the film/video/art world] has heard of EZTV as an entity. They don't know specifics about us but they have a very rabid sense about what we do. We're really like punk rock was, and that's fine."

That outsider's role suits Masucci fine, since the Bronx native's original connection with video came through his love of controversial, on-the-edge rock 'n' roll. He frequently attended early '70s concerts by glitter rock heroes the New York Dolls at the Mercer Art Center in New York City, which then housed the Big Apple's principal home for video art, the Kitchen.

But Masucci, 34, didn't get hooked on video then. He became enthralled by the medium in the late '70s when a rock band of photographers and designers that he was playing in was the subject of a graduate student's video project.

It was the hands-on experience of working with the equipment that captivated Masucci. "It's really like



LARRY BESSSEL / Los Angeles Times

Michael J. Masucci in EZTV parking lot, where employees put up their own 'West Hollywood' sign.

a new part of your body, an extension of your senses because it's so instantaneous," he explained.

His affinity for the visual arts had already been nurtured through his job at Modern Age Photographics in New York, a facility specializing in large-scale reproductions. The company's client list ranged from giant corporations to famed artists like Richard Avedon.

*Last in a series examining the Los Angeles video art scene.*

"It was actually an excellent learning experience because we were switching gears all the time, going from a Scavullo to an IBM and having to capture their styles," reflected Masucci. "In a sense, it was art like anthropology—it's understanding that styles are not religions or dogmas. There's no 'appropriate,' just lots of answers."

Eventually, there were lots of questions in Masucci's mind about the physical effects of working at Modern Age Photographics.

"I was dealing with very caustic chemicals, incredible quantities of them, making these prints," he remembered. "My hands were blown up and I was having a lot of health problems. I took a leave of absence and I was very scared."

Masucci left Modern Age in 1982 and wound up in Los Angeles doing video work for a fashion company in Sherman Oaks. He lived in West Hollywood and, one day in 1983, happened to be out for a stroll when fate intervened.

"I saw a bunch of ¾-inch video equipment boxes being thrown out in front of this building," he recalled. "I said, 'There's somebody serious about video in this building.' That was a couple of weeks before EZTV officially opened and I just walked in and said, 'Hello, I

did a video.'

"What I was able to do was just live a video life style—work with other people on assignments and I'd do commissioned stuff. I guess a manager would advise me differently about career planning but it was basically magic timing."

Masucci has no problems accepting the eclectic mixture of programs EZTV presents each week in its theater area.

"The idea of showing lots of different things is curatorially very poor or incorrect," Masucci explained. "Virtually all the museums that show video are genre-oriented and show slices. We get criticized for too much diversity but we take our cue from television: programming as opposed to curating."

But Masucci's personal aesthetic

is at odds with the narrative stories and Hollywood film values of most of the artists whose work is shown at EZTV. He prefers interpretive collaborations with performance artists, dancers and actors looking to stretch themselves.

"The idea is for two people to synergize and create something they don't know about," he explained. "First, there's conversation and arguing, a lot of pushing buttons and trying to out where those buttons are. It's very common during the first couple of days shooting for someone to start crying, scream at me and pick something up to throw at me."

"We agree on the things we want to do, and usually 70% happens and 30% is completely unexpected. You end up using things that are absolutely improvisational and just magic. To take credit for more than just discovering it would be bad."

Ironically, Masucci attracted the most attention for a 1983 tape called "Standing Waves." The piece was intended to satirize what he termed the "lava lamp" genre of video—slowly moving abstract imagery—but wound up being embraced by dance club deejays who used it to accompany their music.

Masucci's current priority is establishing a world-class multidisciplinary theater company with choreographer Zina Bethune that will incorporate his contributions as a video/media artist. That's not a goal destined to earn him the pole position on the Hollywood fast track, but that's OK by him.

"I get a lot of fatherly advice from people telling me what I could be doing to get rich or famous," he acknowledged. "I know those things but I'm not trying to be a film maker because I think that's dead. I get quite rabid about that."

"There's an avenue that I'm walking down and it's definitely not the tried-and-true. It's not the way to get to be the director of 'Star Wars 4.'"

Los Angeles Times

Friday, October 23, 1987 ★

# CALENDAR

April 19-May 2, 1984 • Dallas Observer

## On the Air hosts a voyage beyond music video

Everybody who believes that music video receives far too much attention for the type of commercial, blatantly promotional activity that it is, raise your right hand.

Okay, so I'm in the minority with that opinion. But there is another side to video production: hours and hours of tape produced independently by visual artists and filmmakers either without the resources for film production or with ideas that naturally lend themselves to tape. Such work is seldom seen by a large audience, and no sophisticated network for its distribution exists. Showings are usually confined to university film departments and obscure festivals. Public outlets for the work are rare. In New York there's The Kitchen; in L.A. there's EZTV Video Gallery; and in Dallas, there may soon be an EZTV Video Gallery.

Whether or not this is an idea whose time has come will be tested on April 21 by Mark Kramer, who, in conjunction with the L.A. gallery and On the Air, the video bar on Lowest Greenville, will present a program described as "Bold Television from West Hollywood and Texas." The 90-minute program includes nine short tapes with titles like *Fiddler on the Hoof*, *Adolf and Eva*, and *Conan the Waitress* that pretty well convey the tone of the event.

Kramer says that his purpose is to "create a context that has never existed before for independent video." At On the Air, in addition to the large screen, several smaller monitors will be distributed about the space, and waitresses will be serving drinks throughout. Kramer wants a fluid, relaxed environment, but there will be set showtimes and no late seating.

**"If I were giving EZTV awards, Conan the Waitress would have to win Best Title."**

On the Air is ideal for this initial project, but Kramer would eventually like his own building modeled after the L.A. version. The EZTV Gallery there is open 24 hours, with continuous showings on multiple monitors that patrons can group their chairs around. Production equipment is also available. Kramer admits that such a facility is somewhere down the line and that much depends on the success of this first venture. He is already, however, planning two other presentations, one of feminist and one of gay video.

Kramer assembled this first EZTV production with entertainment value as a high priority. Still, there are a few pieces that fall into the category of things I'd as soon hear about as actually see, although they do have a valid place on a program such as this. There is one piece of video wallpaper, I mean "ambient video," by SMU-based John McMurphy. John Dott, owner of the L.A. gallery, is represented by *City Corn*, an obscure send-up of arty, minimal video that is so arty and minimal itself that Kramer has had the wisdom to schedule it while the audience is finding their seats. *City Corn* is actually pretty good, if one is in the mood to tolerate its pacing and almost total lack of incident. David Hockney fans will be pleased by all the sunshine and beercake.

The negative highlight of the program for me is a tape of L.A. performance artist Joanna Went, who, despite Kramer's insistence that she is the next Laurie Anderson, comes off as a

childish, self-indulgent devotee of the Linda Blair School of Cathartic Frenzy. Went's performances are about rage, sexual politics, repression, and all that good stuff, but after a few minutes of her screaming, gyrating, and fake vomiting, I was ready to tell her, "Joanna, get over it." She doesn't put on much of a show.

The best parts of the program involve either narrative tapes or pieces that engage and subvert the structures of commercial television. The parodied advertisements from *Medha Rare* could easily fit into the *Saturday Night Live* format, but the sophisticated and technically quite impressive *Musical News* would have a harder time finding public acceptance. Created by video special effects artist Arthur Kline, *Musical News* incorporates actual network news footage into a devastating satire on the way we package information.

For *Adolf and Eva*, San Francisco filmmaker Sebastian has found a way to make videotape look just like damaged film stock from the '40s. Sebastian, best known for his work with The Cockettes on the film *Tricia's Wedding*, specializes in the sort of extravagant bad taste that John Waters pulls off better. *Adolf and Eva* is fascinating first for its period look, but mostly for the total loathing which Sebastian directs towards his admittedly despicable characters. He also stars as the Fuhrer.

If I were giving EZTV awards, *Conan the Waitress* would have to win Best Title. It is possibly a parody of music video, but it doesn't seem to have that much thought behind it. While Donna Summer croons "She Works Hard for the Money," a man in drag terrorizes the lunch crowd in a small diner, clubbing them to death and serving dead rats as the daily special. This is the only piece in the show that looks like it could have been the weekend project of a high school film class, but the home movie atmosphere adds to its charm—perhaps "charm" isn't the right word.

Worshippers of Bob Dobbs will be pleased to learn that the program includes *The Authoritative SubGenius Docu-Trauma*. I have admired the good work of Rev. Doug Smith and his Church of the SubGenius from a distance for several years, and although I am still not ready to convert, this documentary of the SubGenius World Convention of 1981 (it took place in Dallas on Nov. 22 of that year) is a very effective evangelical tool. Many in the audience may heed the call when they hear the rousing sermon delivered by Smith, and the sometimes touching, sometimes fanatical witnessing for Bob by those who have found "everything they want in a personal savior." If you are unaware of the activities of the Church of the SubGenius, this tape is a good introduction to their curiously flexible dogma. For converts and enthusiasts like myself, the *Docu-Trauma* offers incontrovertible proof that Smith and his organization deserve both the slack and the small monetary donations they so fervently request.

The program ends with *Fiddler on the Hoof*, Kramer's own tape shot last year at the Chili Cook-Off in Terlingua. *Fiddler* is funny in many ways difficult to explain. Two Hasidic rabbis, played by John Abrams and Buck Naked, ride in from the desert on mules to attend the cook-off. Nothing much happens. There are cameo appearances by the late Frank Toltbert, a man in a funny costume, and a girl with no shirt. My favorite scene depicts the ram-bunctious West Texas goings on while Israeli



A moment from Mark Kramer's video piece *Fiddler on the Hoof*

pop music blares on the soundtrack. One doesn't have to go very far for surrealism these days. If nothing else, *Fiddler on the Hoof* can be praised for its accurate picture of how oddly people behave.

Since there is so little exposure for this type of material, I can't say exactly how Kramer's current selection fits into the Big Picture of independently produced video. However, having screened the program, I can assure the potential audience member that it contains something to alternately amuse, irritate, puzzle, disgust—in a word, entertain anybody. Showings are April 21 at On the Air, 2114 Lowest Greenville, at 12:30, 2:30, 4:30, and 6:30 p.m. Admission is \$5. For more information call 526-8116. ■



# THE DALLIAS DOWNTOWN NEWS

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Twenty-Five Cents

## On the Air gives Dallas sample of new EZTV video concept

A new concept in video viewing is on the horizon — or TV screen — for people interested in something more than cable can offer, at least for the time being.

EZTV, the brainchild of Californian John Dorr, is a novel showcase for independent television art on videotape. Currently these productions include a diverse repertoire of short episodic and feature-length videos that are shown in a movie theater setting on large TV screens.

Dallas will get a sampling of the modern material Saturday at On the Air, 2114 Greenville Avenue. Included in the local premiere is the experimental *Joanna Went Performance Tape*, the comedic *Conan The Waitress*, and the documentary *The Authoritative SubGenius Docu-*

*Drama.* Screenings are at 12:30, 2:30, 4:30, and 6:30 p.m. Admission is \$5.

The innovative medium, often cited as the electronic equivalent of Off-Broadway, gives filmmakers the opportunity to create experimental works at a fraction of the traditional Hollywood costs. Productions have been budgeted for as low as \$1,000 to \$100,000, still well under comparable film expenses.

Currently, the videos are part of a gallery operation in West Hollywood, where audiences can see their favorite videos four nights a week. EZTV also operates production facilities for moviemakers interested in making their films on videotape.

For local information, phone 526-8116. ■



EZTV: video art