

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 1987

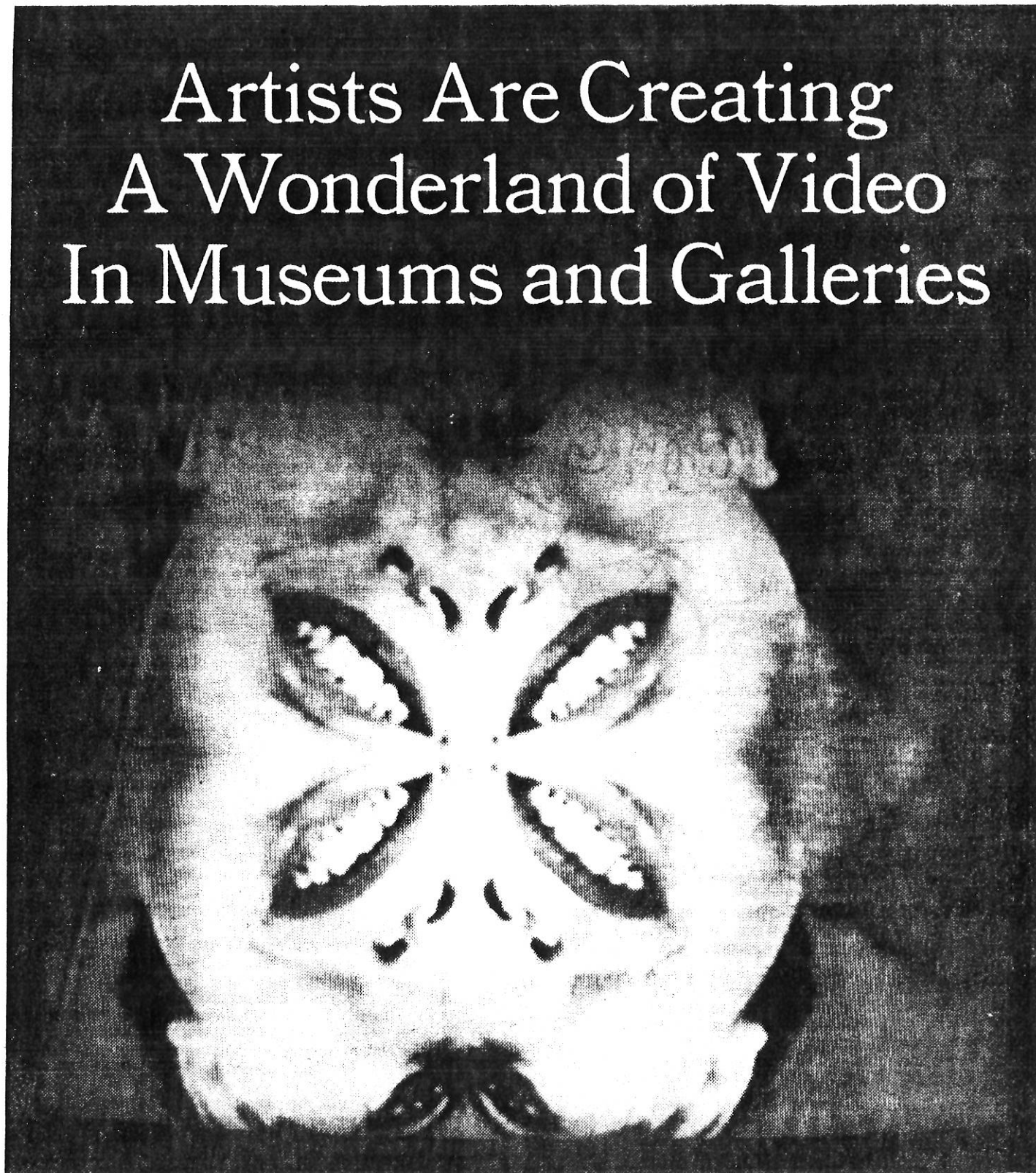
Weekend

The New York Times

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Artists Are Creating A Wonderland of Video In Museums and Galleries



THE video art to be seen around New York City this weekend might make one wonder why television was ever called a vast wasteland. On video screens in museums, galleries and performance spaces, verve and imagination are in flower.

At the Ted Greenwald Gallery, on Mott Street, near Chinatown, two new tapes by the video pioneer Les Levine can be seen; one is a reverie blending visions of Hawaii and Ireland, and in the other, grotesque faces out-Picasso Picasso.

Someone passing the large window of the New Museum in SoHo can mark "real time" by watching Hung Su-Chen on a video monitor slowly ingest a length of red string. At P. S. 1 in Long Island City, Queens, the antics of a cute kitten fill the screen.

As part of a "Video Landscapes" series at the American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, Queens, Bill Viola, who will be the first video artist to have a retrospective showing of his tapes at the Museum of Modern Art this fall, holds our attention as a Color Field painter might, with delicate, shimmering images of barren landscapes in various parts of the world. In contrast, the pace is frenetic at the Kitchen Center, on West 19th Street, with the opening last Tuesday of its annual "Techno Pop" series — short videotapes by a myriad of video artists.

Video art — flickering images on a television monitor — is different from its more staid ancestors. Unlike painting or sculpture, where the gallery patron or museumgoer circulates freely around the work, video art demands that the

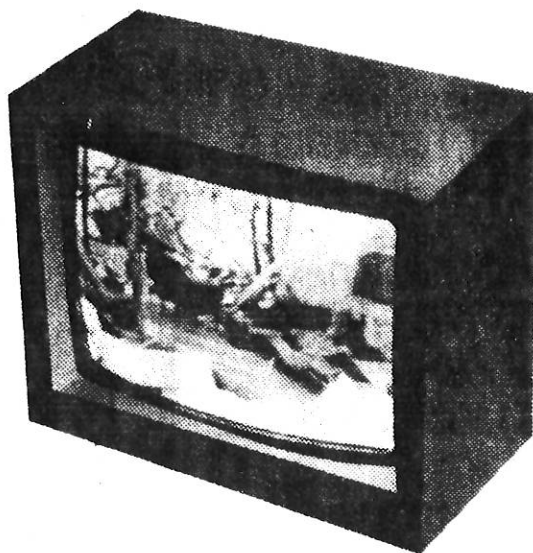
viewer stay put, often for considerable periods of time. And unlike commercial television, the viewer doesn't just passively consume what he sees but has a heightened awareness of the manipulation of imagery.

Video art includes documentaries, and people may wonder at first where the "art" component is, despite the axiom that anything in a gallery context must be seen as art — even a selection of daily fare from Nicaraguan television (on view at Artists Space, on West Broadway in TriBeCa). The preponderance of documentaries in the video-art realm creates no conflict for the assistant curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Lucinda Furlong, who has curated a series of 13 narrative and documentary videotapes on view at the museum, tapes made by women.

Documentaries are a "grass-roots" art, she argues, adding that one should keep in mind the distinction between video art and video made by artists.

It was video made by artists such as Linda Benglis, Keith Sonnier, Bruce Nauman and William Wegman that was responsible for the medium's first wave of popularity in the art world in the late 1960's and early 70's. Video was an extension of their minimalist ideas carried out in other media. Those were also the days when ideas advanced by Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller — ideas about humans mastering their environment through technology — were popular. Images were manipulated to look different from standard television fare and many artists became absorbed in "playing with the signals." Later, such experimenting was no match for the sensuous surfaces of Neo-Expressionist painting, and video art has

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A frame from "Close Frenzies," top, one of two new works by the video artist Les Levine that can be seen at the Ted Greenwald Gallery, and a portion of Carolee Schneemann's "War Mop," a combined sculpture and video installation, at Artists Space.

Clockwise from top left: Bob Marshak; Les Levine; Kenji Fujita; Betti Andrews

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largely been under wraps in recent years, a specialized pursuit usually supported by grants. If one is beginning to see more of it now, it is because of the public's fascination with information, an appetite whetted by the widespread use of computers.

Objectifying Daydreams

Les Levine, who was born in Ireland, says he "didn't grow up with technology," and so was never in awe of it. He made his first videotape in 1964 and now is concerned mainly with making models of how the mind works. As such, he refers to himself as a "media sculptor." He makes that clear at the Ted Greenwald Gallery in his work "Trade Wind" as he constantly shifts from an image of blossoms in Hawaii to one of Dubliners engaged in random conversation, in this way objectifying the way that someone daydreams. Each image is followed by an abstract grid of the actual colors in the image picked up by a computer. The procedure might be extremely up-to-date but there is old-fashioned poetry in the soundtrack, lilting recorder music played by a man we do not glimpse until the end of the tape.

From the limpid beauty of "Trade Wind," there is a shift of sensibility with Mr. Levine's second tape, "Close Frenzies." Young adults on the screen talk seemingly nonstop about what friendship means, but Mr. Levine has manipulated each face like a kaleidoscopic image — everyone has eight eyes and four mouths. This manipulation emphasizes that the person each speaker really clings the closest to is himself.

There is facial distortion of a gentler kind in the tape "East/West" by Hung Su-Chen, as part of the "Reading Art" exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, 583 Broadway. Ms. Hung speaks out of both sides of her mouth, as the screen carrying an image of her face is split. She speaks Mandarin Chinese from the left half of the composite face and English from the right. The implied setting is an immigration office; the moment of truth in Ms. Hung's division comes when saying that, if asked to bear arms, she doesn't know which side she would fight for.

According to Ms. Hung, it is not political confrontation but something more eternal, comparable to the slowness of Zen breathing exercises, that informs "Sweet Red-2," the installation in the New Museum's win-

dow facing Broadway. Last month, the artist staged a performance in which she ingested a red string that dangled in front of rice paper masking the window, with her situated behind the paper. Now on the continuously playing record of that event, the viewer sees what looks like an animated Rorschach blot, moist lips moving against the paper. The event illustrates that favorite theme of video artists, "real time" — the time in which the string was eaten almost simultaneously with the act's recording on tape — but it is also inarguably tinged with eroticism.

The TV Set as Sculptural Form

At P. S. 1, a different experience awaits the video viewer. Hearing the screech from the video room, a visitor walking down the hallway may fear finding a catastrophe inside. But most viewers will be totally disarmed by the playful kitten on the screen. When the cat's image goes off momentarily, ultraviolet light comes on as if Dale Hoyt, the artist, is trying to create a tension between the feline's innocence and the frightening world around him. Elsewhere at P. S. 1, video is used in clearly pragmatic ways as a supplement to more conventional media. Betsy Damon has filled a room with a huge cast-paper installation created in a dry riverbed

in Utah. Her tape documents the casting process, beginning with the gathering of the weeds that went into the paper pulp. Seeing the process makes the finished work all the more stupendous. Buster Simpson documents an ancient cherry tree he tried to save from bulldozers in Seattle. But he also shows sculptures he made from the tree when his efforts failed.

With some installations, it is not only what is on the screen but also the actual cube-like monitor itself that is treated as a sculptural form, an idea pioneered by Nam June Paik in the late 60s. Two installations in this video-art category are at Artists Space, as part of a series of installations called "Dark Rooms." In Carolee Schneemann's "War Mop," a household mop is in an apparatus that lets it continually flagellate a monitor carrying the image of a bombed-out refugee camp in Lebanon. The ludicness of the piece is certainly in

keeping with its political content.

The two widely separated monitors of John Knecht's "I'm Glad to be on the Brink of Fear" carry the smiling faces of President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev. The faces are almost frozen even though one senses that they might move, and this objectifies Marshall McLuhan's famous notion of television as a 'cool' medium: one of static uniformity, in contrast to the 'hotter' media of print, which one must internalize and digest, or of film, whose scale envelops the viewer.

However, the most exotic fare at Artists Space is the presentation of "TV Sandino" — game shows, soap operas, as well as news and public-serving programming, from Nicaraguan television. Certainly, watching this programming helps demystify the Sandinistas. One also appreciates the details in the viewing area, such as a couch with bamboo arms, which sets a semi-tropical mood. (The project's curators were Annie Goldson and Carlos Pavam.)

Links Between Tapes

In a marathon series that has a point, such as the Whitney's, comparisons might be made between various tapes. In the series "Social Engagement: Women's Video in the 80's," there is a grouping called "Critiques of the Media." In one work, Joan Braderman has concocted an appropriate Pop-Art set of flowered wallpaper from which she makes an analysis of The National Enquirer. Though she makes incisive and serious comments, on the screen Ms. Braderman's face and a mélange of Enquirer articles are arranged in a bold way using brightly colored circles and jagged lines. Martha Rosler's "Simple Case for Torture" is much more sober-sided and bare-bones. Her fingers are shown perusing clippings and photos as well as advertisements from newsmagazines to develop a case that the media is an inciter of violence.

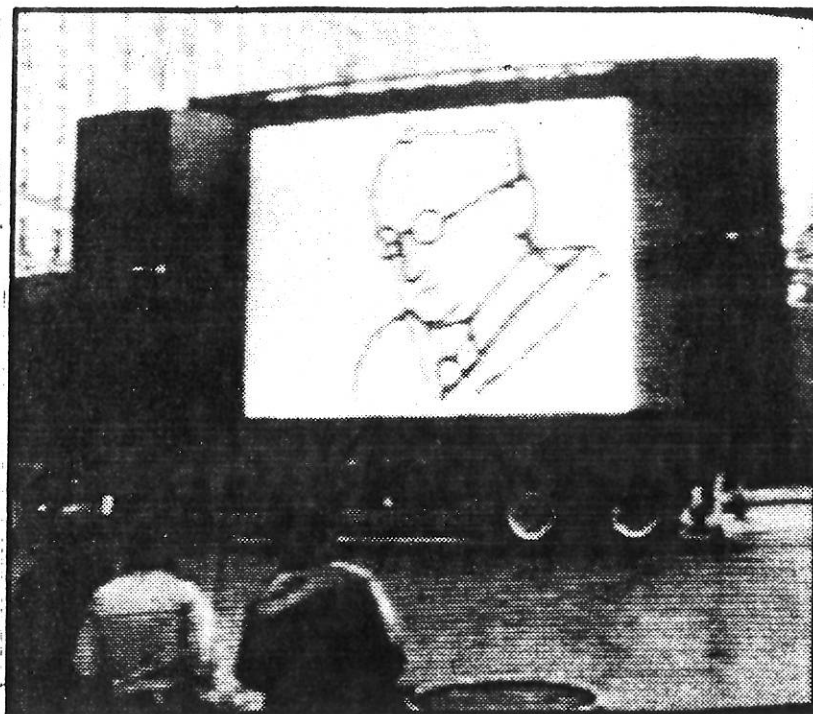
A couple of videotapes are directly concerned with the fine arts. Jenny Holzer, who is known for her elec-

tronic messages, confesses in "Sign on a Truck" that she was attracted to the technology of a truck with an electric sign board on which faces are instantly enlarged to the size of Chuck Close paintings. The tape was made in 1984 and Ms. Holzer's crew asked people who they were voting for in the Presidential election and why. Ms.

the tape. Along with an electronic soundtrack, "Buzz Box" is an example of what Mr. Daniels calls "maximalism."

The Screen as Canvas

A bit far from Manhattan, closed on Saturdays and Sundays, but having the strongest contemporary video on view right now, is the Robeson Center



Jenny Holzer's "Sign on a Truck" is part of series, "Social Engagement: Women's Video in the 80's," at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Holzer's work always has an eerie tinge to it and the effusive remarks she elicited sound chillingly ironic a couple of years later.

Cheang Shu Lea's "Trial of the Tilted Arc" is a straightforward documentation of the hearings concerning the removal of Richard Serra's controversial sculpture "Tilted Arc," situated in Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. The tape makes a good case for those who hold the philosophical position that the words spoken about an artwork become the artwork, while the physical piece becomes a sort of prop.

A perennial showcase for video is the Kitchen, whose screening room is open Tuesdays through Sundays with a varied menu of programming. This weekend is the beginning of the 1987 "Techno Bop Show," curated by Sara Hornbacher. It is a show that highlights the upbeat use of graphics and computers. Survival Research Laboratories, Ed Rankus, Gretchen Bender and Robert Longo are some of the artists. There is a change of pace when Mark Karlin's four-part documentary on Nicaragua weighs in.

This diverse presentation is complemented by David Daniels's "Buzz Box," an installation that includes not only a 15-minute videotape, but also the hundreds of paintings, sculptures and graphic works used in making

Gallery of Rutgers University, in Newark. Some of the tapes here are the visual equivalent of paintings; the screen is treated like a canvas and abstract shapes are created. Highlights are Dan Reeves's documentary "Smothering Dreams," which is about the Vietnam War, and Dara Birnbaum's seemingly pointless "Kiss the Girls," which uses images from the television game show "Hollywood Squares." But the silliness has a point: commercial television is the father of video art.

One bastion of video art in Manhattan has been the Museum of Modern Art. The museum began exhibiting video art on a regular basis in 1974, having been given impetus by shows in its Projects' Space. Keith Sonnier's multimedia exhibition in 1971 was a major stimulus.

Frequently on Monday evenings, the museum presents a "Video Viewpoints" series. On March 30, the series will feature Peter D'Agostino discussing his new work "Double You (and XY and Z)," a work in "interactive video disk," which means the viewer can manipulate the images.

Bill Viola's retrospective will be in the museum's main gallery for changing exhibitions in October and will consist of three new installations in addition to a retrospective of his videotapes.

For the Consumer, Flexibility

One of the advantages of video art is its potential flexibility in relation to the viewer's time and surroundings. In 1969, Howard Wise staged an exhibition at his uptown gallery called "TV as a Creative Medium." Soon afterward, he closed his gallery and founded Electronic Arts Intermix on Mercer Street, billed as the oldest video-art screening room. By appointment, the public may view the collection of more than 700 tapes, at no charge. Items in the collection range from historical tapes by those considered video art's Old Masters, such as Nam June Paik, to the newest experimental work, including tapes of dance and rock performances. Terms that are common parlance here, such as "image processing" and "media reflexive," may make one's head spin, but tapes in these modes are also available.

The fact that almost everyone by now has inserted a rental movie into a video-cassette recorder might mean that it will soon be commonplace to screen art videos at home. The most resourceful video outlet is the Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The catalogue reveals that the bank carries video biographies of many major painters and sculptors and a recent flyer advertises "What Does She Want?," an anthology featuring "the most original women working in film video and in the visual arts." In the salad days of video, the Castelli and Sonnabend galleries operated a video outlet and their vintage offerings are available through the Video Data Bank.

Video has also crossed over into live multimedia performance as one more visual component. Because it is prerecorded, it provides an added narrative element. For some of his dance performances, Merce Cunningham has set monitors on the stage, and directors and playwrights such as Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman have exploited the added texture that video brings to a work. Artist-musicians such as Laurie Anderson and Talking Heads understand how video's beam of light can redouble the intensity of their performances.

Video in performance is widespread in the 1980's, but innovators of the '60s included Joan Jonas — and even earlier, Nam June Paik used videos when he appeared with the adventuresome Fluxus group.

However, according to the director of Media Alliance, Robin White, the real role that video is beginning to play in performance art lies in preserving a performance. Performers such as Eric Bogosian have made tapes of their monologues, performances that were specially staged for the taping.

More Entertaining, More Involved

It is therefore likely that videos will be increasingly entertaining and, probably, increasingly elaborate. Mary Lucier's latest epic, "Wilderness," which will be installed at the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, N.Y., in April, could be called baroque. The piece is shown on seven monitors mounted on antique columns, and the narrative — about the

The curator of film and video at the Whitney, John Hanhardt, sees a greater interest in video everywhere, citing a shopping complex in Atlanta that is holding a talent search for an artist to create a permanent video installation there.

In his introduction to the "Film and Video" section of the 1987 Biennial's catalogue, Mr. Hanhardt credits the "enormous changes in the economy and technologies of production, distribution, and exhibition" that have taken place in the last five years as being responsible for the resurgent interest in video art.

"This doesn't mean," he said in a recent interview, "that video artists are deliberately trying to be entertaining; it's that now everyone feels freed from the constraints of commercial television."

advance of civilization on the environment — uses sites painted by members of the Hudson River School in the 19th century.

And it is likely that video will be more innovative. The 1987 Whitney Biennial, which opens in April, will give a taste of the future through several installations. The redoubtable Nam June Paik will build a couple of human figures out of monitors; Judith Barry will forgo use of the monitor and project her image directly on the wall; the team of Grahame Weinbren and Roberta Friedman will introduce "interactive" video in which the image changes when the screen is touched. Another "Old Master," Bruce Nauman, will bring back video by putting a monitor in his installation.

Places to Watch Video Art

A selection of video art available in the metropolitan New York area or through catalogues follows:

American Museum of the Moving Image, 34-12 36th Street, Astoria, Queens. "Chott El-Djerid" by Bill Viola and "Coast of Cape Ann" by Paul Ryan. Today and tomorrow at 6:30 P.M. Admission, \$2. A \$4 ticket includes admission to the "Play Ball" film series. Information: (718) 784-4520.

Artists Space, 223 West Broadway, between Franklin and White Streets. "Dark Rooms" installations and videos from Nicaraguan television. Tuesday through Saturday, 11 A.M. to 6 P.M. Nicaraguan videos through next Saturday. Free. Information: 226-3970.

Electronic Arts Intermix, 282 Mercer Street, near Eighth Street and Broadway. By appointment, Monday through Friday, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Free. Information: 473-6822.

Ted Greenwald Gallery, 181 Mott Street, between Kenmare and Broome Streets. Les Levine's "Close Frenzies" and "Trade Wind." Shown every hour, beginning at 10:30 A.M. and running through 4:30 P.M., Tuesday through Saturday. Free admission. Information: 219-1642.

The Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street. "Techno Bop Show." Tuesday through Saturday, 1 P.M. (screenings of other works run until 6 P.M.). Through March 28. Also: David Daniels's "Buzz Box," through March 21. Information: 255-5793.

Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53d Street. "Video Viewpoints." Next screening, featuring Peter

D'Agostino's "Double You (and X Y and Z)" is on March 30 at 6:30 P.M. Free tickets are available after 6 P.M. Information: 708-9490.

Neuberger Museum, Purchase, N.Y. Mary Lucier's "Wilderness" will be installed April 12. Information: (914) 253-5133.

New Museum, 583 Broadway, between Prince and Houston Streets. Hung Su-Chen's "East/West." Open Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 6 P.M. (till 10 P.M. on Friday and 8 P.M. on Saturday). Suggested donation, \$2.50. In museum's Broadway window: Ms. Hung's "Sweet Red-2." Information: 219-1222.

P. S. 1, 46-01 21st Street, Long Island City, Queens. Dale Hoyt's "Kitten Season." Open Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 6 P.M. Free. Through March 22. Also: installations by Betsy Damon and Buster Simpson. Information: (718) 784-2084.

Robeson Center Gallery of Rutgers University, 350 Martin Luther King Boulevard, Newark, N.J. Today, 11 A.M. to 5 P.M. Frank Gillette's "Symptomatic Syntax" and Paul Ryan's "Echo Channel Design." Monday, Dan Reeves's "Smothering Dreams" and Dara Birnbaum's "Kiss the Girls." Free admission. Information: (201) 648-5970.

Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 280 Columbus Drive, Chicago, Ill.

Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, at 75th Street. "Social Engagement: Women's Video in the 80s." Today and tomorrow at noon and 3 P.M.; and Sunday at 1 and 4 P.M. Museum admission, \$4 (\$2 for the elderly; students and those under 12, free). Information: 570-3633.