

Encounters in Video Art in Latin America. Edited by Elena Shtromberg and Glenn Phillips. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications. Pp. 288. \$65 (paperback). ISBN 9781606067918.

In this lovingly collated and beautifully illustrated volume, editors Elena Shtromberg and Glenn Phillips sketch the contours of the ever-changing cultural form known as video art. Shtromberg, an academic and writer, and Phillips, a curator at the Getty Research Institute, working with research assistants and local experts, have produced a study that is impressive in its range and scope while acknowledging the difficulty of arriving at a definitive assessment of this cultural form.

Despite appearing self-explanatory, video art is not simple to define. For the editors, we are dealing with “an art of telling stories through an electronic medium, first analog, then digital” (ix). But that is at once too broad and too specific. As they go on to state, “ambivalence and flexibility” is central to the medium; “every artist we met considered their work to be video art, even if their individual definitions of the term may differ” (5). Video art is strongly linked to performance, as many happenings of the 1960s and 70s exist today only as registered in video. Some of the artists – Claudio Caldini, for example – produced their earlier work alongside performance and happening artists.

Encounters is based on a 2017 exhibition at LAXART (West Hollywood, LA), *Video Art in Latin America*, which began with work for the Getty Research Institute. It goes back to two screening series curated by the editors in the early 2000s, one on Brazilian video art and another on Mexico and the US. But the volume is more than a catalogue, incorporating interviews, archival material, and scholarly essays. Part of their motivation is a desire to expand understanding of the global spread of video art, away from earlier cartographies

focussed almost exclusively on Europe and the US, with small outposts in, for example, Japan. Research for the book and exhibitions has created a library of materials, some 450 books available for consultation by researchers and scholars at LAXART. The volume contains previously unpublished and untranslated interviews with key participants, including Mexico's Ximena Cuevas and activist and anthropologist Vincent Carelli. The colour illustrations are visually striking; many are very rare (drawn from personal archives, for example), and contribute to an understanding of works now lost.

The volume covers more than 25 years of artistic history, starting in the 1960s when video art emerged as a new, exciting, and potentially democratizing means of cultural production. Video, in particular in portapak format, was portable, immediate, and relatively easy to use. Advantages included "instant recording, transmission, and playback" (1). Video art drew on the technologies of modern mass media while offering a potential critique of them. Video artists soon saw their work as inherently linked to political questions of the day and the possibility of, indeed need for, cultural and social change. The likes of Marta Minujín produced art that was simultaneously sensational and provocative, embracing popular culture, eroticism, and new technology.

The title "Encounters" references the curatorial and promotional efforts of Jorge Gluksberg, an Argentine entrepreneur, curator, and artist who founded and organized a series of "Encuentros" during the 1970s, taking place in the Americas, Europe and Asia. Gluksberg aimed to demonstrate that video art was being produced outside of the major world cities, in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Caracas and elsewhere. The "Encuentros" showcased Latin American video art but also imported art from the rest of the world into Latin America, as in the fourth staging in 1975 in Buenos Aires. In what is the longest section in the volume, Phillips and Sophia Serrano detail the first ten of these encounters, covering various controversies, setbacks and successes in Gluksberg's highly ambitious project.

The second section, “Networks and Archives”, moves away from Gluksberg to examine video art archives, both actual and imagined or potential, in Peru, Mexico, and elsewhere. The section features Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda’s assessment of the role of women video artists, including Pola Weiss in Mexico and members of the CADA collective in Chile. Female artists addressed vital political issues of the day, while also “gendering video” (8), adapting technology and creating new networks. The third section, entitled “Memory and Crisis”, looks at artists such as Oscar Muñoz and Ernesto Salmerón, and how their work addresses legacies of protest, resistance, and political violence. Salmerón looks back at depictions of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and explores how it is remembered today. Sebastián Vidal Valenzuela’s contribution tells the story of the Festival Franco-Chileno de Video Arte, which became a site for cultural resistance and debates over the role of new technology in political dissent during the Pinochet dictatorship.

A fourth section looks at questions around indigeneity and filmmaking by first peoples in the region; long the object of the anthropologist’s gaze and lens, in recent years indigenous subjects have adopted the tools and techniques of video art to tell their own stories, often within the context of resistance to state policies of cultural erasure or neo-colonial extractivism. The Mapuche filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo (writing with the poet Juan Juenan) details his own practice, using video as a novel space for Mapuche art; there are some fascinating reflections on filmic techniques here, for example the role of the sequence shot in depicting Mapuche struggles for land and cultural freedom. Benjamin Murphy assesses the work of Juan Downey and Vincent Carelli in turning cameras over to indigenous groups, helping train them to tell their own stories.

Given the authors’ own caveats about the limits of their work, it might seem churlish to point up absences from the corpus. Nevertheless, readers may want to look at Fernando García’s work on the Instituto Di Tella; Cynthia Tomkin’s recent volume on experimental film; and

Freya Schiwy's pioneering study of indigenous video. There is always more work to be done; this volume is both a necessary reference and an inspiration for further scholarship.

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