

ARTS

# Video Imagery Projects Restless Meditations; Hopper Inspires Film

*Two exhibitions make vivid contributions to the fields of film and video artistry*

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FILM and video are bursting out all over — not just on theater screens and TV sets, but in some of Manhattan's major museums, too.

Edward Hopper and the American Cinema, on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, examines the influences that crisscrossed between the great painter and motion pictures.

**Video Spaces: Eight Installations** fills a hefty portion of the Museum of Modern Art with room-sized works that explode ordinary notions of what video imagery can accomplish.

Not that video installations are new. Numerous artists, including some represented in the Museum of Modern Art show, have been probing the possibilities of physical space defined by video — in the way a sculpture defines the area around it — for years. What distinguishes this exhibition is the pungency, audacity, and high-impact originality of its best offerings, which reach out to the spectator with unusual directness.

The finest of these works are by Bill Viola and Chris Marker, two artists with long achievement records.

Viola (who is currently representing the United States at the Venice Biennale) has concocted an extravagant piece called "Slowly Turning Narrative." It fills a large room with a rotating screen that catches

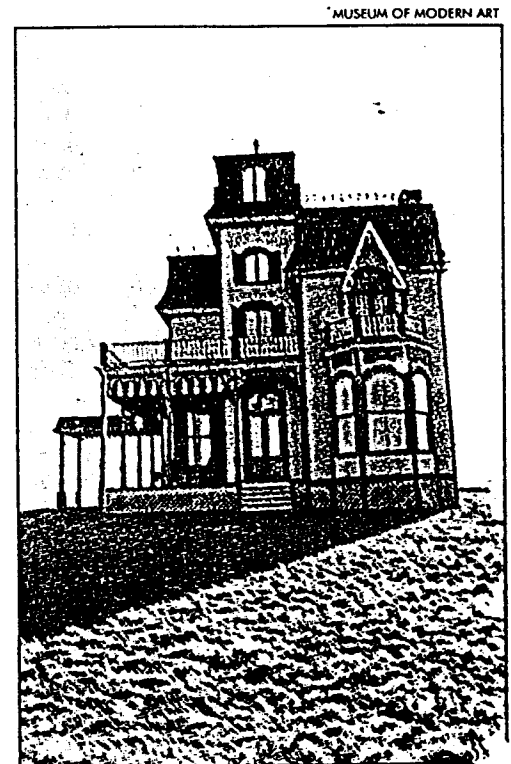
an ever-changing stream of video images on its two sides, one of which is mirrored. Standing to the side or walking around the room the viewer becomes part of the spectacle, reflected in the mirrored picture-wall during gaps in the video flow.

Viola describes the work as his impression of a mind absorbed with its own ruminations, but it strikes me as a new expression of his longtime interest in remembrance, which is the explicit subject of Viola classics like "The Theater of Memory" and "The Passing," two of his best accomplishments. Then again, what is human memory but a person's

journey into the ruminative fragments of the past? The aptly titled "Slowly Turning Narrative" is at once a fragmentary story, a restless meditation, and a fascinating new direction.

Marker, a veteran French filmmaker and video artist, is more whimsical in "Silent Movie," which shows a blitz of silent-film images on a stack of video monitors, accompanied by a display of still photos and ersatz "movie posters" that are as hilarious as they are phony. Juxtaposing computer-controlled TV images with old-fashioned content, the work confounds all conventional ideas of art and entertainment. It's also fun to watch.

Other outstanding works include "Lovers," by Japanese artist Teiji Furuhashi, which leads the viewer into a room populated with ghostly projected figures; "HardCell," by Judith Barry and



Brad Miskell, which invites the spectator to peer at high-tech debris in an overloaded packing crate; and "System for Dramatic Feedback," by Tony Oursler, which projects phantasmic faces and bodies onto inert surfaces, making a chilling comment on imagery's ability to objectify human suffering.

Many of the films on view in "Edward Hopper and the American Cinema," part of the Whit-

GARY MCKINNIS/MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK



'SLOWLY TURNING NARRATIVE' (1992): In the installation by Bill Viola at the Museum of Modern Art, the viewer becomes part of the spectacle, reflected in the mirrored picture-wall during brief gaps in the video flow.

ney's ongoing New American Film and Video Series, have little in common besides a shared rapport with Hopper's sensibility.

Once one starts contemplating the Hopper connection, however, the logic of the exhibition becomes clear. Like many great films from both the Hollywood and avant-garde traditions, this sensitive artist combined a skep-

tical love of the American scene with a visual style that insists on compositional precision, psychological clarity, and accessibility to gallery connoisseurs and casual viewers alike. Hopper also had a fondness for framing devices that function like the edges of a movie screen, often with a rectangular shape that vividly evokes the CinemaScope aesthetic.

Far more eclectic than the Hopper paintings on the Whit-

ney's walls - familiar to most art-lovers through years of wide exposure - the films in its screening room cover an extraordinarily broad spectrum. The program begins with a burst of experimentalism via such fine efforts as "Rose Hobart," a surrealist collage-movie by artist Joseph Cornell; the evocative "Loose Ends," a humanistic montage-film by Chick Strand; and "Eureka," a stunning work of re-photographed "found footage" by Ernie Gehr, one of avant-garde cinema's most inventive figures. All blend potentially nostalgic material with rigorous stylistics that render them as challenging as they are enjoyable.

Among the program's Hollywood offerings are several from the "film noir" cycle that popularized dark, shadowy tales in the 1940s and '50s. Movies like

"Laura" and "The Killers" have a dour view of human psychology that accords with Hopper's refusal to sentimentalize the lonely people he depicted. Other selections call Hopper to mind in other ways - through the expressive colors of "Written on the Wind"; the social analysis of "Dodsworth"; the magical light-manipulations of "Days of Heaven"; the on-the-sly intimacy of "Rear Window"; and the surreal starkness of "The Big Gamble," a 1931 oddity that substitutes the show's original discovery.



WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

**HOPPER AND AMERICAN CINEMA:** Terrence Malick's 1978 film 'Days of Heaven' (L.) features a house that could double for the one in Edward Hopper's 1925 painting, 'House by the Railroad.' The mood and color of Hopper's works, including the 1939 'New York Movie' (above) have inspired countless films.

Some omissions are surprising. Kenneth Anger has called Hopper's "New York Movie" his favorite painting; the canvas is present, but not a single Anger film is to be seen. And where is Alfred Hitchcock's indelible "Psycho," with its spooky mansion influenced by Hopper's "House by the Railroad"?

The latter film does show up briefly in a multimedia presentation accompanying the exhibition's 21 movies and 50-odd canvases, as do clips and quotes from various other Hopper-related sources. Hopper may be an overstudied artist these days, but this show examines him from a perspective worth pursuing.

■ "Video Spaces" continues at the Museum of Modern Art through Sept. 12, accompanied by artists' talks and a catalog edited by Barbara London. "Edward Hopper and the American Cinema," curated by Robert Ray, goes through Aug. 13 at the Whitney, part of "Edward Hopper and the American Imagination," through Oct. 15.