

Deep Into The Medium: Paul Young's Video Frontiers

Artillery

By Anne Martens

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It's impossible to separate Paul Young from Young Projects - the gallery where he displays video art - or from the young medium he promotes so ardently. Just ask those who know him well, like Los Angeles gallerist Christopher Grimes, who met him more than a decade ago, or Nira Pereg, a Tel Aviv-based video artist whose work he has shown.

"I think that Paul's strength resides in his curiosity and persistence," says Grimes. "There is intelligence in the focus he has given to video through his writing and curatorial enterprises."

"Imagine a gallery full of rooms for viewing like they have at the Hammer Museum. That's what Paul is actually doing: says Pereg.

My own first impression was an indicator of this back-and-forth association. At the launch of the Pacific Design Center's "Design Loves Art" program two years ago, I wandered into an exhibition to discover more video installations than I ever recalled seeing in a gallery show. I remember warily wondering: "Who is this Paul Young"? Because it seemed the LA art world had suddenly been taken by storm.

At the two spaces Young runs singlehandedly at the PDC, there's now regular opportunity to see video shows by talented artists from all over the planet. At any given time, each gallery contains about a dozen to 15 works. From the political to the technological to the sensual, engaging themes and observed trends tie pieces together. All are presented with high-end equipment and inventive arrangement. Recent shows have incorporated what you might not even think of as video - 3D animation, computer games - yet created in video format by artists. Past shows have ranged from the conceptual to the painterly and covered sensibilities from '80s punk to feminist humor, all with equal potency.

Enter the first gallery that Young casually calls the "white box," and you immediately feel like you're in someone's living room or den, with wood paneling, carpeting, tables and comfy seating: Remote controls are everywhere, so no one has to urge you to start watching. A few doors down in the "black box," Young's other gallery, translucent projection screens are arranged along a meandering path - an entirely different, equally immersive experience. In both environments, the hum of equipment blends in with the works' resonances, an impressive integration. In the best possible scenario, experiencing video art involves heightened awareness as you lose yourself in time and space. And that's what is achieved "Paul is THE expert. in a field where there are very few players who can handle the curation and installation aspects technically of ambitious video-based work, says film producer and artistic director Stefan Simchowicz, who enlisted Young as a curator for PortugalArteIO, an international survey of contemporary art. "Video based-work is one of the hardest to deal with spatially. It requires a high degree of professional installation tactics, aesthetic and technological choices. There is no one like Paul in LA."

Given that this sentiment comes from a major Hollywood producer, it might be only a matter of time before LA's contemporary art scene and omnipresent film industry, both rife with potential collectors, are won over. Yet for many reasons, video art is a hard sell. Los Angeles has yet to be exposed to the vitality of an art medium that is shown and supported far more in Europe. Yet Young would argue for that being why he emphasizes video "To show that there's amazing work being done," His priority seems less about making money than about winning hearts and minds. He was won over early. Young made Super 8 movies at age 10. By junior college, an art-house cinema class had him hooked. While enrolled in the American Film Institute's graduate program in directing, he looked forward to a future in filmmaking. But halfway through his thesis project, his plans were derailed when he and the lead actor were involved in a car accident. His friend died, and he nearly did, too. "The whole experience was so insanely difficult and painful that I felt I needed to walk away from film," Young told me, quite emotionally. But he didn't really walk away. Since then, he has written and edited extensively about film and video for major newspapers and magazines, as well as about contemporary art and

music He produced Art Cinema, a thematic and historical overview of experimental film published by Taschen in 2009 Steve Anker, Dean of the School of FilmVideo al Cal Arts reviewed Art Cinema at several draft stages and has been a big supporter of Young's recent initiatives.

"He really knows the history of experimental film," Anker says about Young. I took the opportunity to ask Anker how acurator/writer might make the leap from film to video.

"Experimental or avant-garde film and video art as installation reaily have different histories and traditions." Anker says. "Yet if anybody. Paul is an example of a current generation of critics and curators who are aware of both and take both seriously the ways they can overlap and combine through the art and criticism. It's going to take people who have this kind of perspective right now." Young made that leap in 2008, as his book was about to be published. Charlotte Cotton, then LACMA's photography curator, encouraged him to travel to Barcelona to attend LOOP, considered the best art festival focused exclusively on video "I was really excited by what I saw," Young says. He decided to organize a best-of exhibition asa means to survey lthe field of contemporary video art "Remote Viewing : the first show I saw at the POC, opened in fall 2009. (It has since been fe-visioned for museums - last year in Barcelona and next year. in Stockholm.) Young Projects launched soon after. Meanwhile, in less than two years. Young has curated about 20 video-art exhibitions. "I have the same feeling as when I was making films myself: he told me. Eloquent in explaining what he does, he is also modest. "I still don-t know if I have a gallery. per se. For me it's more of an exhibition space and project space. I want to use it to learn. but also to let artists explore and try different things." Perhaps what's most remark able about Young is an outlook that turns challenging perceptions about the fledgling medium into positives, the best way to win over skeptics and neophytes. Video art is a confusing term , with blurred distinctions between it and "new media." Young simply calls it "video art ." while remaining open about the potential inclusion Of other genres. There's also the tact that video isn't "an object," a characteristic that makes It difficult for some to consider it art. To that Young musingly observes: "At some point I saw It as a thing on a walt. And once that happened, everything changed; It became this tangible, beautiful object." Although Young is following his passion, his approach is to encourage developing a collector base for video art in LA. Thinking in terms of how to overcome collectors concerns about an upstart medium that must conform to traditional art market rules, he sets the stage with an environment in which collectors envision living with this type of art, still think we're in the Model-T era: he adds. whilecontem plating video-s short histOfY and long potential. "What's exciting to me are works that sense space and are constantly changing by the traffic on the Internet or by the weather or by walking into a room. You can have a work in your house that's never, ever the same."