

Arts and Entertainment

Piecing together back to back jigsaw puzzles

AFTER puzzling your way through the Young Contemporaries show loaded with quotation and appropriation, you start to find the exceptionally inaccessible German video art a welcome relief.

Although none of the 10 young contemporaries, whose work is on show for the first time in Melbourne, would have had the 'Jimi Hendrix Experience', lived through the agony and ecstasy of Pete Townsend smashing his guitar, or experienced that genuine hallucinogenic

"Oh Wow" experience of discovering chaos, much of their works refer to that period.

Some of that disruption and chaos with its transcendental overtones can be experienced in the collection of 19 video tapes from the Federal German Republic on show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

According to the catalogue, German videos have a simplicity, roughness and timelessness. German video-art is less concerned with the absurd and the mundane than is British video-art, and is

more hostile to electronic technology than American video-art.

There are 36 hours of intense experience to get through before the show finishes next week, and some will be experiences you won't forget.

Video art has no history before 1970 and is not film, not TV, not theatre, and not really painting or sculpture. Video pioneers of the sixties were a mixed-up bunch coming from various backgrounds.

Nam June Paik, called "the daddy of the electronic dada" was a pianist and follower of

GERMAN VIDEO-ART
(until December 21).
YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES
(until January 17).
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art,
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South Yarra.
Review: JANINA GREEN

GALLERY

John Cage, who studied in Stockhausen in Germany in the 50's. Paik went on to make installations of organised chaos, that were more like sculptures than TV.

Other pioneer video artists came from film-making backgrounds,

bringing Dada and Surrealist traditions of chance, and celebrating accidental effects. Others came from the beatnik "stream of consciousness" tradition and espoused the "nothing is better than anything else" of western vedanta.

Because of these approaches, video came to be described as an irrational wordless experience that tried to imitate consciousness. There is nothing more excruciating than enduring Ulay and Marina Abramovic's 15 minute video called "AAA ... AAA", and nothing

more transporting than the Abramovic's recent video "City of Angels".

"City of Angels" is set at the temple complex at Ayutthaya in Thailand. It consists of five almost still images or scenes, and begins and ends with the camera panning across a group of people resting, like sculpture fragments, on some grass.

The soundtrack uses a melodic Thai voice, especially graceful to tourists. All the still images look like tourist shots; time and space is centred around the movements of

a tortoise crawling or a cloth in the breeze. The video is poetic and fluid, and has the rhythm of music, recalling the early avant garde tradition of transcending ordinary consciousness.

In contrast, the Young Contemporaries exhibition demonstrates how quickly high art strategies of quotation can destroy experience and promote academic reflection which does nothing to subvert hierarchical culture; something which any avant garde practice should do.