The Guardian

Video oediV review – where and what is video art in 2016?

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Arts Centre, Sydney A new group show featuring only female stralia and beyond – offers a comprehensive look at the history and evolution of video art

Hissy Fit's 19.12.15 (2016) is a 95 minute work that can be viewed from a banana chair, at Campbelltown Arts Centre's Video oediV group show Photograph: Heidrun Lohr/Hissy Fit

Walk into any contemporary art gallery or museum these days and it's certain you'll see a few examples. Where just a decade or so ago video art was the 'new' thing, in 2016 its sheer ubiquity renders it largely unremarkable.

Back in the early 00s a downward shift in the price of consumer electronics and an upward shift in its quality gave even the most down-at-heel artists the ability to

make video art. Commercial galleries got behind the surge of interest, and since video art could be edition-ed as DVDs or later as media files, a market began to emerge. Despite the fact video art had been around in various forms since the late 1960s, it was considered a 'new thing' in the Australian art world, and various commercial exhibitions, museum survey shows and art prizes appeared in its wake.

Interestingly, 'video art' was never a single thing, but a term applied to a whole range of approaches to available technology. As a genre, 'video art' is about as precise as 'painting' or 'sculpture' - we know generally what we mean by it, but when you get down to specifics there's a much bigger range than the term implies. So where is 'video art' in 2016?

Until March 20 at Campbelltown Arts Centre is Video oediV, an exhibition that explores the history of video art across generations, and through various approaches to the use of the moving image. Curated by CAC's Megan Monte, the show draws together the work of eleven individual artists and three collaborative groups, from London, the USA, Germany, Australia, Thailand and Brazil - all female artists too, a fact not explicitly highlighted in either the publicity or the gallery wall texts, yet something fundamental to the show's overall curatorial concept.

Rosie Deacon's Big Fat in Da Back Kangaroo Rap (2016), commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre for Video oediV Photograph: Heidrun Lohr/Rosie Deacon

One of the most pervasive uses of video art is in a sculptural installation. Rosie Deacon's Big Fat Da Back Kangaroo (2016) is a delirious celebration of tourist shop kitsch: sequined tea towels and maps of Australia hung on a wall are interspersed with small video screens showing footage of the artist interacting with tourist shop employees and customers, while on a large projection screen Deacon dances in goofy decorated costumes, while rapping in a seemingly never-ending flow of Aussie cliches. Three mannequins in the gallery space display the costumes. It's mad, maximal and hard to watch.

In an adjacent gallery is UK artist Gillian Wearing's video Dancing in Peckham (1994), a work that plays out on a roof-mounted monitor - rather like a security CCTV - in an endless loop of the artist dancing wildly, as if cursed by an ancient god to never stop the body rock. The relationship between Deacon and Wearing's work is uncertain - we don't know for example if Deacon, a young Australian artist, was aware of Wearing's work, but the central theme of Video oediV is the idea of reflection and echo. Known to one another or not, the works form a continuum of practice.

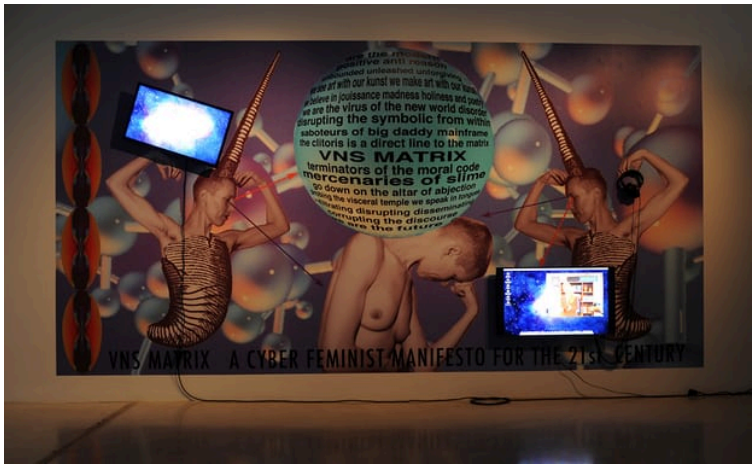
Performance art and video have shared a long relationship, first as a means to record a live event, then later as a way to create an event specifically for the camera. A contemporary

example of the first approach is Silvana Mangano and Gabriella Mangano's Lux (2014), a sumptuously shot two-screen video that records Australian landscapes and the artists' interactions with them. It's a stunning work that is also a sedate, almost classical kind of video art, but no less beautiful because of it.

Sue Dodd's Airhole Screentests (2013) offers a great example of performance for video - a series of video portraits that recreate Any Warhol's Screentests from the 1960s, matched in look and style to an accompanying video of Dodd, in costume, singing a variety of styles including surf, pop, country and rap. It's in part a parody of Warhol's queer gaze for his Factory superstars, but also Dodd's restitution of a female agency in those iconic images.

Alongside Dodd's work in the gallery is Undaddy Mainframe (2014), Direct Line (2015) and A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century (1991). Notionally a remix collaboration by the duo Soda_Jerk and the collaborative group VNS Matrix, it's actually hard to tell where one work ends and the next begins. While performance and installation sculpture have been a big part of video art culture, so too has a critical discourse on the nature of the video image itself.

VNS Matrix were a pioneering group of Australian female artists with a feminist agenda for the new media, repurposing the boy's own technologies of hard drives and software for the new flesh of radical cyberculture. Soda_Jerk are their descendants, and pay homage to that history by taking the manifesto and applying a remix of pirated fragments from VHS tapes. It's spooky and weird - and powerful.



Soda_Jerk remixed with VNS Matrix at the Video oediV group show at Campbelltown Arts Centre Photograph: Heidrun Lohr/Soda_Jerk with VNX Matrix

More works in the show include examples of video art as an online feminist therapy session with World Of Warcraft players, and high-end production values from international artists such as Brazilian Berna Reale and her ride on a scarlet horse. The show even manages to include two of the mainstays of any video art show - a marathon 1.35 hour work by the group Hissy Fit that requires you lie down on a banana chair to watch it, and a work with a busted pair of headphones.

In 2016 video art has evolved into something that is both conservative and radical, a media

that is sometimes successful, more often not, and virtually inescapable. Monte's Video oediV shows how a thoughtful and considered approach can reveal the depth and quality of a medium and a history. Video art is thus, in essence, that thing we call contemporary art.

Video oediV runs until 20 March at Campbelltown Arts Centre in Sydney