

2nd Hiroshima Art Competition

Like too many ceremonies in Japan, the prize-giving and opening of the Second Hiroshima Art Competition at the *Gendai Bijutsukan* on Saturday 15th February was rather a sombre affair, full of people either wearing suits or wielding cameras. None of your getting happily sozzled on the gallons of plonk laid on by the establishment or waving one's arms extravagantly in the air proclaiming how much one simply *adores* so-and-so's work. We did, however, all receive a catalogue and a coffee voucher.

In the event, once the speeches and prizes had been given, the exhibition itself was a pleasant surprise. The panel of four judges, made up of a representative from the museum, a Hirodai Professor of Art and two art critics from Tokyo, had selected 116 out of the 500 or so pieces submitted. Of these sixteen received prizes provided by the *Gendai Bijutsukan*, the *Chugoku Shimbun*, and local department stores. First prize went to Fumiko Akaiwa for her piece, "*Suii*". The exhibition runs until the end of March and is well worth a visit to see what artists in the prefecture are producing.

Among the sixteen prizewinners was an American, Clark Lunberry, whose contribution was an eighteen minute video (incidentally the only video in the exhibition). We asked him a few questions about his work and his feelings generally about video art.

Signpost: So how long have you been making videos?

Lunberry: Approximately three years—after I had been living in Japan for one year. However, I've been interested in contemporary video art for many years, having seen quite a lot while living and working in New York.

Signpost: What kind of video art were you seeing?

Lunberry: Experimental, generally non-narrative video; the kind of work that started in the sixties, through the seventies. I was particularly interested in Bill Viola's videos and James Benning's films, but until I came to Japan it had never occurred to me that I might try making something. The real turning point was when I bought a motorcycle and started driving around and getting lost on the narrow back roads of rural Hiroshima Prefecture. Loving the landscape and mentally collecting images of rural life, I realised very suddenly that I should buy a video camera and start recording some of what I was seeing. I immediately started subjecting friends to hours of unedited footage, having very little idea what I was ever going to end up doing with all the stuff. At that point it was very much like a compost heap... in fact, it still is.

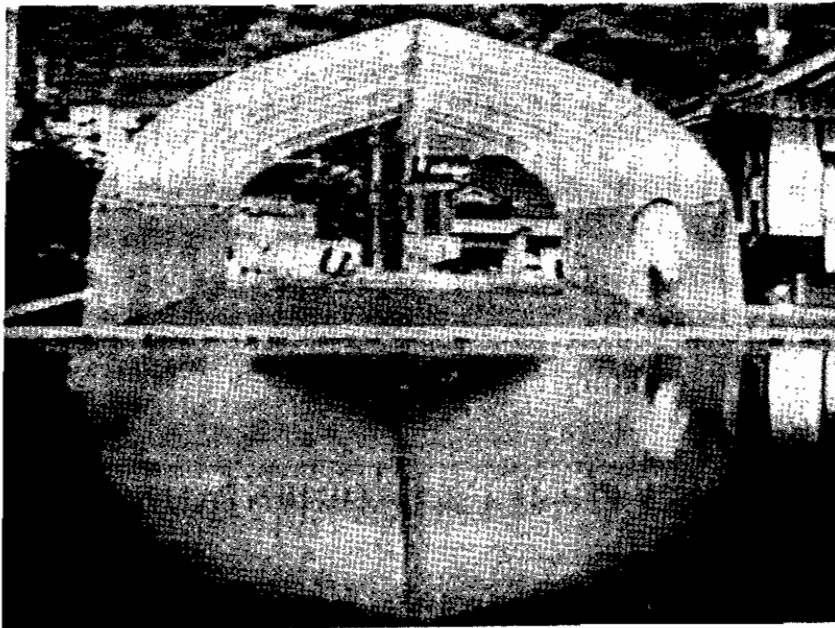
Signpost: One feature of your style is that you place your camera in a particular spot and leave it running, focussed on a single subject for protracted periods of time.



Lunberry: Yes, I put the camera on the tripod and leave it. The camera never moves. I often don't even stay with the camera, especially if it seems that my presence is going to interfere with what's happening. I'll just walk away. The camera does all the work. Later on, at home, I'll check and see what occurred, but chance is the crucial factor in what ends up being filmed. Of course, using this method, I end up with hours of *nothing*, painfully dull, but once in a while something remarkable happens.

Signpost: What is the appeal of this style of camera work?

Lunberry: In some ways, it shares something with the medium's early form, when so little was technically possible beyond the basic element of capturing an image. I enjoy the mid-19th century films by the Lumiere brothers. They were experimenting with this new medium, this amazing technological apparatus, this exciting new toy. In the beginning, the medium of film itself was so novel and dramatic that what was filmed was almost incidental. 19th century audiences sat enthralled, watching trains pulling into stations and pedestrians strolling on sidewalks. As audiences became habituated to the medium, they gradually demanded more from the images... the basic fact of filming having lost its glamour. However, I'm interested in that original reaction to the



medium, before habit intervened, as a kind of magical operation—capturing light reflected off of bodies, faces, objects and recording movement. My ideal audience would be mid-19th century Parisian.

Signpost: In an age where we've got used to *Die Hard*-type movies and flashy music videos, who do you think has the patience or the curiosity to sit and watch what you've done?

Lunberry: Aside from my mother, I'm not sure. Anyway, I'm glad that the judges liked what I did. A foreigner looking at rural Japan also must have intrigued them. But as for the snappy, high-tech gizmos available to video whiz kids today, I personally try to resist all the options. My goal is pretty straightforward: what can one person do with a video camera, a tripod and a motorcycle, with maybe a quick stop in an editing room to adjust things a bit and add titles. Like I said, I like those 19th century films of trains chugging into stations. The camera, for me, is first and foremost a frame for looking at things, it focuses me in its tidy square... an optical instrument for enhancing eyesight. Editing rooms are too seductive with all of their clever devices. All they want to do is mess up my picture with trendy technique.

Signpost: Could you briefly describe the video which was accepted for this competition?

Lunberry: The title is *Crossing Another Spring*. It's a companion piece to one that I made the year before called *The Narrow Road: A Slow Spring* which was in the first Hiroshima Art Competition in 1989. I compiled images that had been collected over a period of months, later arranging them into their present form. The trick was

linking the images over an 18-minute time span, finding some kind of alternative logic to a narrative development. In this video there is one central image of an old woman removing blankets from a line. I've divided this into four parts, spacing it across the video, forming the backbone for the entire structure. Between these intervals with the old woman are various other scenes of rural Hiroshima. I like to think that—even though they are unrelated—there is some kind of visually rhythmic continuity to the different sections.

Signpost: "Crossing Another Spring" is certainly full of dissecting lines, with a strong sense of geometry.

Lunberry: Well, I hope it's not *too* obvious. They're meant to form a kind of backdrop, stage-setting for the real theatrical event—in my case the theatre just happens to be an old woman taking down her laundry. But the grid is an old modernist device for organising space, one which I'm not above employing myself. In any case, I can't think of anything else to use.

Signpost: The most obvious criticism that is likely to be leveled against your videos is that they are dull; nothing happens. How would you respond?

Lunberry: They are dull, but it's not true to say that nothing happens—the old woman's blankets eventually get taken down. What more could one want? There's a famous Zen saying which goes something like: if you find something boring for two minutes, sit down and watch it for four. If it's still boring after four minutes, watch it for ten. If it's still boring after ten minutes, watch it for an hour and so on...

The medium for video is deceptive because you put the cassette in your VCR and watch it on a TV just like you would a Schwarzenegger movie. But *there* the similarity ends. If people carry over their viewing attitudes from *Terminator 2* to my movies then, yes, they'll be bored. I suppose a helpful parallel would be to think more in terms of looking at a painting or photograph. I like to think of my videos as activated photographs undergoing a gradual transformation... an image immersed in time.

Signpost: Well, congratulations and thank you. Let's hope that people find the time to go and watch *Crossing Another Spring*.