Video art is a type of art which relies on moving pictures and is comprised of video and/or audio data. (It should not however be confused with television or experimental cinema). Video art came into existence during the 1960s and 1970s, is still widely practiced and has given rise to the widespread use of video installations.

Video art is named after the video tape, which was most commonly used in the form’s early years, but before that artists had already been working on film, and with changes in technology Hard Disk, CD-ROM, DVD, and solid state are superseding the video tape as the carrier. Despite obvious parallels and relationships, video art is not film.

One of the key differences between video art and theatrical cinema is that video art does not necessarily rely on many of the conventions that define theatrical cinema. Video art may not employ the use of actors, may contain no dialogue, may have no discernible narrative or plot, or adhere to any of the other conventions that generally define motion pictures as entertainment. This distinction is important, because it delineates video art not only from cinema but also from the subcategories where those definitions may become muddy (as in the case of avant garde cinema or short films). Perhaps the simplest, most straightforward defining distinction in this respect would then be to say that (perhaps) cinema’s ultimate goal is to entertain, whereas video art’s intentions are more varied, be they to simply explore the boundaries of the medium itself (e.g., Peter Campus, Double Vision) or to rigorously attack the viewer’s expectations of video as shaped by conventional cinema (e.g., Joan Jonas, Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll).


Task: a) Look up JOAN JONAS and PETER CAMPUS on You Tube.
   b) Consider how their works may push the boundaries of what art IS or WAS in the 1970’s.
   c) Discuss the use of new technologies and the viewers ‘expectations’ when watching a video or film.
Cinema and Video Art

Cinema continued to develop both conceptually and technically and by the 1960s it would influence the Pop Art movement, in particular Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist and Richard Hamilton. Artists mimicked the conventions of cinema rather than cinema and fetishised its practice. The ordering of images and composition, as well as what Robert Hughes identifies as the ‘cult of the celebrity’, publicises Pop Art’s fascination with the film screen. Warhol in particular was transfixed by the power of film and explored how to break cinematic convention, as well as the expectation of the audience, in works such as *Sleep* (1964) and *The Chelsea Girls* (1966). Warhol established art-house cinema and broadened the expectations and practice of filmmakers. Through his practice, he synthesised mainstream and alternative cinema, providing a wider audience for experimental films.

The 1970s saw the technological development of video, which artists readily employed in their art-making practice. The immediacy and simplicity of video allowed artists to experiment with the media, as cinema had been very costly for many artistic ventures. Artists involved with the Fluxus group, such as Nam June Paik, quickly seized upon the freedom of this medium, and explored and widened the language of art through performance. This enabled video art to take on new conventions determined by time and space. Video art was born from the Fluxus movement, and the idea of the living picture (*tableau vivant*) was firmly established as a key practice from the Fluxus movement onwards.
Artists approached video-art practice in a variety of ways. Some artists chose to employ video as a documentary tool to record events and performance—as video allows the temporal existence of such events to be repeated in a gallery context. Other artists were more interested in the examination of the formal and plastic qualities of the medium, believing that video could democratise cinema. These artists positioned this process of artmaking in the hands of visual artists. Finally, some artists were interested in the physical properties of video to create installations and sculptures. By the 1980s, video art was recognised by galleries, and the Museum of Modern Art now holds an exhibition of such works. Independent artist-run groups such as Ant Farm, Videofreex, TVTV and Raindance developed a number of events and experiments using film and video. By the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, artists recognised the presence of film and video in society and attempted to tap into its ubiquitous power. New-media artists recognised the symbiotic relationship between technology and culture, identifying in film and video a dynamic form of expression as the next evolutionary step in the artworld. The paradigm shift in aesthetics started with the documentation of performances and installations and led to the development of video as part of the installation or sculpture. This is the case in Nam June Paik’s TV Garden (1974) in which Paik created a garden of televisions growing from the ground in the space of the gallery.

Film and video have become part of the aesthetic strategy that informed the critical postmodern art practice of the 1990s onwards. At the end of the twentieth century, museums such as the ZKM in Germany were opened to provide greater access to new media art. In 2002, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image was opened to showcase video, film and interactive works. This highlights an acceptance of this new medium within the artworld and demonstrates the highly engaging properties of video art for the audience. Galleries currently exhibit video artworks and installations, as the contemporary audience is fascinated with video works and the way in which this medium is completely different to all others.
Although it continues to be produced, it is represented by two varieties: single-channel and installation. Single-channel works are much closer to the conventional idea of television: a video is screened, projected or shown as a single image. Installation works involve either an environment, several distinct pieces of video presented separately, or any combination of video with traditional media such as sculpture. Installation video is the most common form of video art today. Sometimes it is combined with other media and is often subsumed by the greater whole of an installation or performance.

The digital video “revolution” of the 1990s has given wide access to sophisticated editing and control technology, allowing many artists to work with video and to create interactive installations based on video. Some examples of recent trends in video art include entirely digitally rendered environments created with no camera and video that responds to the movements of the viewer or other elements of the environment. The internet has also been used to allow control of video in installations from the world wide web or from remote locations.

Emerging in the 1970s, Bill Viola (USA) continues as one of the world’s most celebrated video artists. Matthew Barney, the creator of the Cremaster Cycle, is another well-known American video artist. Other contemporary video artists of note include Gary Hill, Tony Oursler, Mary Lucier, Paul Pfeiffer, Sadie Benning, Paul Chan, Eve Sussman and Miranda July and Pipilotti Rist.


**TASK:** Look up PIPILOTTI RIST and MATTHEW BARNEY on You Tube
Discuss how their work differs from a Tropfest short film

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Bill Viola: Still form *Dissolution*, 2005
Matthew Barney: Promotional Photo for Cremaster 3, 2005

Barney is a contemporary artist who works in several mediums including film, sculpture, photography, drawing and performance art. His compositions are often overly decadent, and even fantastical. The involve a mysterious symbolic system that alludes to associative dream states as described by Freud, offering a living and photographed quality, as opposed to a painted or surreal.

“Known for saturated colors, sensual images, and an unconventional use of space and scale, Pipilotti Rist’s video installations are at once tangible and boundless — witnessed in the here-and-now, but full of interpretive possibility.”

Pipilotti Rist: Still from Homo Sapiens Sapiens, 2005
A soundscape is a sound or combination of sounds that forms or arises from an immersive environment. The idea of soundscape refers to both the natural acoustic environment, consisting of natural sounds, including animal vocalizations and, for instance, the sounds of weather and other natural elements; and environmental sounds created by humans, through musical composition, sound design, and other ordinary human activities including conversation, work, and sounds of mechanical origin resulting from use of industrial technology.

The term “soundscape” can also refer to an audio recording or performance of sounds that create the sensation of experiencing a particular acoustic environment, or compositions created using the “found sounds” of an acoustic environment. It describes differing acoustic environments, which each of us is subjected to throughout our lives. These soundscapes play an important part in our lives, making us feel comfortable, productive and happy or uneasy and distracted. Soundscapes provide the contextual references that contribute to our feelings of belonging and place.

Adapted from Wikipedia

When creating video art, a short film or movie, sounds can be sequenced, shaped and overlayed to enhance action, mood or atmosphere.

TASK:
- Visit the following website and listen to various examples of Sound Art. http://www.ubu.com/sound/index.html
- Find examples of the work produced by composer John xCage. Discuss why he may be considered a pioneer in Sound Art and why his compositions challenge or push the boundaries of what is considered ‘Music’