

No Earth/No Earth Station

a performance by John Sturgeon and Aysha Quinn

Presented by the Education Department in conjunction with the Museum's exhibition *Young Talent Awards: 1963-1983* (July 14-September 18, 1983).



Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Leo S. Bing Theater
Tuesday, July 26, 1983
8 p.m.

No Earth/No Earth Station represents a confluence of two major forms of expression in contemporary art—performance and video art. In the words of John Sturgeon and Aysha Quinn, "*No Earth/No Earth Station* is a performance within an electronic environment, utilizing three channels of prerecorded tape and live video,"¹ forming the matrix for the live performance.

Performance art evolved in the 1960s in part as a natural extension of developments in painting, which had begun to incorporate real objects into complex compositions that moved off the wall and into the gallery space. These led to environmental works that fully surrounded the viewer, and later to Happenings, which drew the viewer in as a participant; from this, performance art emerged. As a form it combines elements from painting and sculpture, as well as from music and theater, and may leave a residual work after it is over, or may persist as documentary photographs, or may linger only in the memory.

Video has come into increasingly wide use as a fine-arts medium in the past two decades. Rapid advances in communications technology (including the refinement of editing techniques, and the development of computer-generated graphics and computer-altered image capabilities) have provided artists with a rich variety of image-making possibilities. Areas previously explored only by scientists and engineers have been entered and investigated by creative individuals who in the past might have eschewed involvement with the arts. The result has been the flowering of an entirely new art form.

In their introduction to the book *Video Art: An Anthology*, Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot summarize the various uses of the medium:

"...three basic approaches to the video image have emerged: (1) where the artist/performer is subject; (2) where the environment is subject; and (3) where the abstract synthesized image is subject. Any of these approaches, however, may be combined within a single work. In addition, the way in which these approaches are manifested formally (whether single or multi-channel; performance or installation; real time, time delay, pretaped and edited) varies greatly."²

No Earth/No Earth Station, approximately one hour in length, combines live performance with a range of video effects. Sturgeon and Quinn act on a stage and in a theater densely cluttered with electronic equipment, including video recorders, projectors, monitors, cameras, and walkie-talkies. Prerecorded videotape and real-time sequences (actually filmed during tonight's live performance) are seen on monitors and projected onto large screens. Thus the performers are present in three simultaneous modes: in tape made earlier, in tape made during the performance, and as live performers.³

Sturgeon and Quinn in the fall 1982 version of
No Earth/No Earth Station

¹ In a 1982 letter to the author.

² New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976, p.3.

³ Tapes recorded during this performance may be incorporated into future videotapes or performances, continuing the sequence that began in pre-production.

For the Museum:

PROGRAM COORDINATORS:

Lori J. Starr, Associate Museum Educator
Anne Carnegie Edgerton, Assistant Curator,
Twentieth-Century Art

AUDIO-VISUAL AND OPERATIONS

PERSONNEL:

Glen Berkowitz
Dale Coffman
Bridget Kiley
Claudia Kunze
John Luker
Katherine Shirek

TECHNICAL STAFF:

Scott Eloffson
Paul Holman
Michael Lyon
Larry Scher

This complex composition is meant to function expressively as "a metaphor for a state of suspension, global/individual, and an attempt to balance and maintain the station [individual and relational existence] during extraordinary and trying times. Survival is the concern. Investigation, growth, healing, relationships and consciousness are the keys."⁴ The issues addressed here are among the fundamental ones of human life; the environment in which the action takes place represents the stressful, demanding, and often frustrating one in which we all live.

The performance first demonstrates how, by the intrusion of technological devices into our processes of communicating, our culture has lost contact with its collective history, and lost much of the richness of human experience. Alternatives to this state of affairs are offered. The performers, acting as shaman and alchemist, explore the unconscious, and the physical elements of earth, recovering primordial secrets. At the same time, they act as receivers of communications from the unseen future. The three-fold form considers present, past, and future, as well as the conscious, the unconscious, and the sensual, offering a metaphor for the restoration of harmony among individuals and between individuals and the environment.

Sturgeon and Quinn have for some time shared an interest in the investigation of human experience, both conscious and unconscious, and in the expression of their insights in a form that combines state-of-the-art communications technology with the stuff of primordial myth. Individually, their works have often referred in their titles and content to ancient mythologies and archetypal situations. Indeed, Sturgeon has commented that dream imagery has often been the inspiration for his videotapes and performances. He cites the writings of C. G. Jung, the cabalistic philosophers, and other mystical writers as important sources.⁵

No Earth/No Earth Station is the first fully collaborative work by Sturgeon and Quinn. Over the past seven years, however, each has assisted the other in creating individual performances and videotapes. A preliminary version of *No Earth/No Earth Station* was performed in the fall of 1982 at the Intermedia Arts Festival, University of Iowa. The version presented here has been revised in content and form specifically for this occasion.

⁴ N. 1, supra, ibid.

⁵ In conversation with the author, 1982.

Anne Carnegie Edgerton

Assistant Curator
Twentieth-Century Art

John Sturgeon

Born January 6, 1946, Springfield, Illinois
B.F.A., University of Illinois, 1968
M.F.A., Cornell University, 1970

Selected Fellowships and Awards

National Endowment for the Arts, Individual
Artists Grants, 1975, 1977, 1980
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial
Foundation Fellowship, 1981
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Modern and Contemporary Art Council
Young Talent Purchase Award, 1978

Selected Solo Exhibitions

Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1981
L. A. Louver Gallery, Venice, 1979
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1978
Long Beach Museum of Art, 1978

Selected Videotapes and Performances

2nd Intermedia Arts Festival, University of
Iowa, Iowa City, 1982: *No Earth/No
Earth Station*
Artists in Television Conference, Iowa City/
New York/Los Angeles, 1982
University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana,
1979: *Uroboros*
L. A. Louver Gallery, Venice, 1977: *Conjunc-
tion/Opposition II*

Aysha Quinn

Born January 5, 1945, New London,
Connecticut

Selected Solo Videotapes

Excerpts, 1983
The Meeting and *Bo Jangles*, 1982
Spearhead and *Fifth Chamber Information*,
1980
The Lamentations of Isis, 1978

**Selected Exhibitions, Performances, and
Videotapes**

School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Gallery, 1983
2nd Intermedia Arts Festival, University of
Iowa, Iowa City, 1982: *No Earth/No
Earth Station*
Artists in Television Conference, Iowa City/
New York/Los Angeles, 1982
University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana,
1979: *Uroboros*
L. A. Louver Gallery, Venice, 1977: *Conjunc-
tion/Opposition II*

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the Field," *Art Com*, no. 20, spring 1983.
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works*, vol. 3, fall 1980.



Sturgeon and Quinn

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The artists dedicate this piece to the life and work of Jamie Summers (1948-1983).

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