

Press Release

Kukje Gallery

Bill Viola

(American, born in 1951)

2015. 3. 5 - 2015. 5. 3

Kukje Gallery K1, K2, K3

Press Conference: 11:00 a.m. March 5, 2015 (Auditorium, K3)

www.kukjegallery.com



“...after years of working with video, I experience time as a palpable substance. It's the most real material that I know.”¹

Kukje Gallery is delighted to present a major exhibition of new works by Bill Viola. This will be his third solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery. Comprised of seven video installations, the exhibition will provide an overview of his works created from 2005 to 2014.

Spanning more than four decades, Bill Viola's artistic practice has consistently redefined contemporary art, expanding the boundaries of video and challenging our understanding of time-based imagery. Viola's work has come to be synonymous with exploring the human experience. Jérôme Neutres writes, “there are three metaphysical questions Bill Viola has been wrestling with for forty years: Who am I? Where am I? Where am I going?”²

By asking these fundamental ontological questions, Viola frames the visceral quality of time, allowing his viewers to have a moment of awareness in the act of looking and listening. This is apparent when watching *Inverted Birth* (2014), installed in K3. The largest of the seven featured video projections in the exhibition, this piece shows a man deluged by liquids that change in color and consistency. Exploring the unknowable moment of human birth, the protagonist undergoes a series of shifts in consciousness

¹ From “Interview with the artist” by John G. Hanhardt in *Bill Viola: Going Forth By Day*. 2002 Berlin: Deutsche Bank; New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

² Quote taken from the essay “Bill Viola: Emotions in motion” by Jérôme Neutres to be published by Kukje Gallery in conjunction with the exhibition.

mirrored in the eyes of the viewer.

Viola's dramatic use of time in his videos powerfully reveals how the underlying architecture of perception affects human emotions. Presenting his subjects under extreme pressure in vignettes of profound catharsis, Viola frames the seminal moments of consciousness such as birth, death, and rebirth. His interest in the limits that define human experience is further explored in his other major work *Night Vigil* (2005/2009). Installed in K2, this work emerged out of an epic four-hour-long video piece Viola completed for Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century opera *Tristan und Isolde*, a new production directed by the acclaimed contemporary theater director Peter Sellars. A diptych, *Night Vigil* is projected on two adjacent screens portraying a woman and a man, separated by darkness, who are drawn to each other, and use fire to light the way. This potent allegory of longing depicts the merging of their individual selves in a world beyond death.

In addition to these two major works the exhibition will include *Ancestors* (2012), *Inner Passage* (2013), and *Delicate Thread* (2012) from his Mirage series. Through these works, the artist utilizes landscape as a metaphor for spiritual seeking, poignantly evoking the desire for untouchable things. Viola has eloquently described how he strives to make this tension visible, saying "I think what's never really been discussed is that what you're looking at is only made possible by the camera. I mean, you cannot perceive mirages that way. You are looking at your desire to enter the mirage..."³ Installed on the ground floor in K2, the works listed above as well as two additional pieces, *The Encounter* (2012) and *Water Martyr* (2014), combine in a tour de force, showcasing the unsurpassed vision of Bill Viola.

³ Quotes taken from "Going Forth From Day." An interview between Bill Viola and John G Hanhardt, Senior Curator of Film and Media Arts, Guggenheim Museum published as part of the artist's exhibition of the same name on view September, 2002 through January, 2003.



Portrait of Bill Viola

Photo by Kira Perov.

Image provided by Kukje Gallery.

Bill Viola was born in New York in 1951 and graduated from Syracuse University in 1973. He represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1995 with an exhibition titled *Buried Secrets*. Other key solo exhibitions include *Bill Viola: A 25-Year Survey* at The Whitney Museum of American Art (1997); *The Passions* at the J. Paul Getty Museum (2003); *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)* at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo in 2006; *Bill Viola: Visioni interiori* at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni (2008); and *Bill Viola*, Grand Palais, Paris (2014). He met Australian-born Kira Perov in 1977 who became Viola's partner and collaborator.

His background reveals a great deal about his values and emphasis on transformational themes. A student of technology, art, and philosophy, he emerged out of the Fluxus-inspired generation that produced avant-garde innovators including David Tudor and Nam June Paik. Working with both artists early in his career, Viola quickly found his own voice by using technology to create works and adopting the mechanics of the recording process to explore archetypal themes of spiritual and psychological passage. In evoking art historical themes through the modern medium of video, Viola discovered an entirely new genre that has made a momentous contribution to art history.

Assembled here at Kukje Gallery, the individual works of Bill Viola's distinct, forceful pieces come together to symbolize a journey through an emotional landscape. For additional information about the works in galleries K2 and K3 please refer to the detailed descriptions below. All texts were written by Bill Viola and Kira Perov.

K2 1st Floor 1st Room



Inner Passage, 2013

Inner Passage chronicles a brief moment in one man's solitary journey into the Mojave Desert of Southern California. In this landscape, the physical body confronts extremes of endurance in the form of scorching heat, numbing cold, blinding light, impenetrable darkness, infinite distance and forced confinement. It is also where the metaphysical extremes of loneliness, isolation, stress, anxiety and fear meet the forces of overwhelming beauty, mystery, wonder and ecstasy. The present moment lies between these two states with all its uncertainty and promise.

A man appears as a faint dot on the distant desert floor, and proceeds to move in a straight line toward us. As he gets closer he walks directly into the camera, blacking out the image. The screen goes dark, but it soon comes to life in an intense, jumbled cascade of images and fragmented sounds that builds in intensity and frequency. When these begin to fade, a solitary light illuminates the path and the man finally emerges from the darkness into the light. He walks away and out onto the desert floor once more, eventually disappearing into the far distance.

(Inner Passage is an homage to British artist Richard Long)

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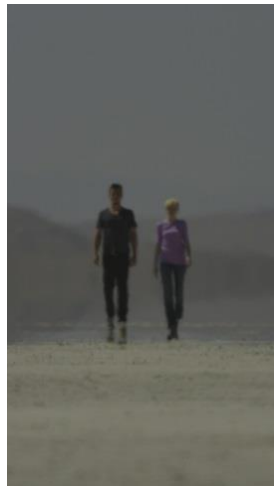
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K2 1st Floor 2nd Room



The Encounter, 2012

Two women are taking separate journeys at opposite ends of their lives. At the intersection of their meeting, during a brief encounter, life bonds are strengthened and the mystery containing the knowledge is quietly passed on from the elder to the younger.



Delicate Thread, 2012

A young man and a young woman are crossing the searing desert side by side, battered by the wind and dust storms in the parched and arid landscape. Emerging from the mirage world of illusion, they pass through into clarity that ultimately, at the end of their long journey, leads them to go their separate ways.

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Ancestors, 2012

Ancestors depicts a journey on foot across the desert made by a mother and her son in the heat of summer. In the course of traversing this vast and dangerous environment, a profound transformation occurs when the landscape swallows them in a dust storm and they emerge, finding companionship, strength, determination and clarity.

K2 1st Floor 3rd Room



Water Martyr, 2014

Water Martyr is one of four works that are derived from the permanent large-scale video installation *Martyrs* (Earth, Air, Fire, Water), unveiled at St Paul's Cathedral, London in May of 2014.

As the work opens, an individual is shown on the ground in stasis, a pause from his suffering. Gradually there is movement as an element of nature begins to disturb his

stillness. As he is raised by his ankles, water starts to cascade from above. The stronger the water rages, the more the martyr's resolve remains unchanged. In its most violent assault, the water represents the darkest hour of the martyr's passage through death into the light.

The Greek word for martyr originally meant "witness." In today's world, the mass media turns us all into witnesses to the suffering of others. The martyrs' past lives of action can help illuminate our modern lives of inaction. They also exemplify the human capacity to bear pain, hardship, and even death in order to remain faithful to their values, beliefs, and principles. This piece represents ideas of action, fortitude, perseverance, endurance, and sacrifice.

K2 2nd Floor



Night Vigil, 2005/2009

The images for *Night Vigil* are derived from a new production of Richard Wagner's nineteenth-century opera *Tristan und Isolde*, a collaboration with director Peter Sellars, conductor Esa Pekka Salonen, Bill Viola and executive producer Kira Perov. The original story of Tristan and Isolde is a mythic tale of a love so intense and profound that it cannot be contained in the material bodies of the lovers. In order to fulfill their desires, the two must ultimately transcend their lives to arrive at a realm beyond all polarities of light and darkness, male and female, life and death, time and eternity.

The installation of *Night Vigil* is a projected video diptych on two adjacent screens. In the video sequence a woman and a man, separated by darkness in the middle of the night, are drawn to each other and to the source of light that illuminates their longing. They undertake individual journeys to reach their goal: his, an outward journey of action—the long approach through the dark night into the light of a blazing fire—, and hers, an inward journey of contemplation—the methodical lighting of a bank of candles until

the darkness of her room is filled with light. The destinations of their individual journeys are the same – the merging of their individual selves in a world beyond death.

The video of *Tristan und Isolde* was produced by Bill Viola Studio in collaboration with the National Opera, Paris, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Haunch of Venison, London.

K3



Inverted Birth, 2014

Projected onto a five-meter high screen anchored to the floor, *Inverted Birth* depicts five stages of awakening through a series of violent transformations.

A man stands in the darkness, drenched in black fluid, the sound of drips punctuating the hollow sound of an empty space. Gradually the fluid begins to rise and as the movement escalates, the flow upward becomes a roaring deluge. The dark despair of black turns to fear as the liquid changes to red but the man remains strong. The flow of white liquid symbolizes relief and nurturing, followed by the purification of cleansing water. Finally, a soft mist brings acceptance, awakening, and birth. The fluids represent the essence of human life such as earth, blood, milk, water, and air, and the life cycle from birth to death, here inverted into a transformation from darkness to light.

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Ancestors, 2012

Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall
61 1/4 x 36 3/8 x 5 in (155.5 x 92.5 x 12.7 cm)

21:41 minutes

Performers: Kwesi Dei, Sharon Ferguson

Photo: Kira Perov



The Encounter, 2012

Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted on wall

36 3/8 x 61 1/4 x 5 in (92.5 x 155.5 x 12.7 cm)

19:19 minutes

Performers: Genevieve Anderson, Joan Chodorow

Photo: Kira Perov



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Water Martyr, 2014

Color High-Definition video on flat panel display mounted vertically on wall
42 3/8 x 24 1/2 x 2 5/8 in (107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm)

7:10 minutes

Executive producer: Kira Perov

Performer: John Hay

Photo: Kira Perov



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Night Vigil, 2005/2009

Color rear-projection video diptych, two large screens mounted on wall in dark room

Overall projected image size: 6 ft 7 in x 17 ft 4 in (2.01 x 5.28 m); room dimensions variable
18:06 minutes

Performers: Jeff Mills, Lisa Rhoden

Photo: Kira Perov



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Inverted Birth, 2014

Video/sound installation

Color High-Definition video projection on screen mounted vertically and anchored to floor in dark room

Projected image size: 16 ft 5 in x 9 ft 3 in (5 x 2.81 m); room dimensions variable

8:22 minutes

Performer: Norman Scott

Photo: Kira Perov



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