

Marina Polosa Interview FIFA 2017

Why do you make videos?

Well, I've always been around people who made videos. When I was primarily a musician, I composed and performed with an interdisciplinary company called VideoCabaret. They used video in a live context it was not just a prop but it was rarely autonomous from the live performance. But I was exposed to and became friends with video artists, who made tapes intended to be shown as objects in their own right....Susan Britton, Rodney Werden, Colin Campbell. So, out of curiosity, I made a couple of video tapes. This would be in the early eighties, after I had severed from VideoCabaret. I was also a member of the band The Government and this was when music videos were a brave new world. So we made one, we did it all wrong, we had a narrative. Back then I was more into narrative than I am now.

But I've never been that prolific.....there were phases when I did not make videos. I did work that I can't watch now....it's too film-referential. ..in the mid eighties. My work in the later eighties was performance-based, although my language fetish certainly surfaces in *Who Killed Professor Wordsworth?* (1989-90). Then I made *Controlled Environments* (finished in 1994), which consisted of seven split-screen arguments between myself as arts bureaucrats A and B (referencing Warhol, if you like... but also see *True or False* by Colin Campbell and the roles of AA and Felix in the *General Idea* videos). But this is of course referent to the choice I made to become a cog in an art machine.

After *Controlled Environments*, I wasn't sure where to go. I wasn't interested in making big works or joining the film or television industries. Steve Reinke's *100 Videos* suggested alternatives... Steve used to call his initial videos little poems. Or they could be sculptures or paintings or novellas. I was primarily writing novels, which didn't pan out. With me, there's a tension between fiction and documentary. On invitation from Splice This Super 8 festival, I made *The Walking Philosopher* in 1999. This super8 film proved popular enough I transferred it to video and entered it into circulation. There are a couple of other Super 8s on video...*Headmaster's Ritual* (2003) and *DOA/Remake/Remodel* (2005). Also *Trophy Life* (2010)

I made *Eating Regular* (2004) in a residency about food. That video is a transition between live action elements and non-camera work involving my manipulated drawings, which I make in Photoshop. I've always paid as much attention to painting and sculpture as I have to movies and videos. Also, the writer never goes away. Text as pictures is an element throughout my 21st century work. (see *12 x 26* - 2008). *The Enigma of SAP* (2008) is non-camera, and it retains the art world locales. Since then, I've made videos with my drawings (and also my text and music) as well as some works that could be called materialist, as they are composed and edited entirely within editing systems.

Examples are Roman Spring Leakage (2011), More or Less (2014), and Narrative (2016) Are these even videos? I mean, they are outputted to video and distributed as videos, but are they videos? Are they not a linked series of drawings or paintings or whatever?

Can you tell me more about text as image, about the drawings or paintings. You've been making "drawings or paintings or whatever" on a computer for many years now. What has that process been?

Well, I think of texts as language that's in circulation. Such language, whether used for various communication-related purposes or simply to fill space, becomes landscape and thus deserving to be skewed.

I did find myself drawing on a computer... I don't really draw very well on paper or canvas...at least a couple of decades ago. It became something I did for the hell of it.....my graphics never entered my video work until Snowjob (2000-2001)... where I'd been thrown a challenge about media art in the 21st century. I thought of the Y2K hysteria, but also about language and its omnipresence and also frequent redundancy. I remember watching a Video Biennale thing in 1999.. I was sitting with Colin Campbell, bless him. The works shown were aggressively modernist with quick rapid-fire editing and some quasi-industrial music. Colin leaned over and remarked that it didn't look like there would be dialogue in the 21st century.

I did find myself thinking about how language has been largely co-opted by image industries, but never completely co-opted. I'm frustrated but fascinated with the limitations of language....is it really about communication.. .is it about killing time....is it about expressing emotions or repressing emotions? Or is it about killing time, with flair and elegance, rather than being confessional or rhetorical or persuasive or whatever? Is it not really about communication?

The drawings and paintings....well, I'm a frustrated visual artist. Snowjob was a shift in my work...Eating Regular (2004) took this shift further. Performative live action is mixed with sections composed only of drawings... with voice-over. In Eating Regular and especially Rectangular World (2006), there is some correlation between abstract painting and modernist architecture, or architectural uniformity in hostile urban environments et cetera.

I think a further shift happened with The Enigma of S.A.P. (2008), in which two voices can be heard at the opening of a new gallery. The visuals are entirely composed of the 'paintings' on the wall at this SAP gallery. The two pundits of course drink and ingest substances that are being offered, so the 'paintings' become quite wildly distorted....I get quite carried away with the Effects but not with the AfterEffects. And the two gentlemen become so stoned that they stop talking, so enter music and single-frame editing. Think Paul Sharits and also a brief rave. A Temporary Autonomous Zone, until alarms go off.

Oddly enough, I have begin making actual paintings, out of curiosity and also because I had a show in a gallery (gallerywest). I showed the SAP tape with stills from the tape but also these paintings I made on found canvases in the basement of the building I live in. I bought four colours of acrylic paint and wheeee...well, some are better than others. Now I make the occasional birch-wood painting, with a pattern in the wood predetermining the pattern of the painting... like a puzzle. Fill this section with this colour and fill that section with that colour. So...in a sense, they are ready-mades.

I remember showing The Enigma of SAP to a class at V/tape and somebody asked me if I was making fun of abstract painting. Not at all.

Can I pick up on this sentence?

"The drawings and paintings....well, I'm a frustrated visual artist."

It's interesting to me that you should say this as very few artists will actually come out and say this. It's a very hard life, in most ways, to have chosen to be a visual artist, especially for those who don't include teaching in their "portfolio" of this and that they do to survive.

Would you say anything about this? You don't have to if you don't want to, it's personal.

Well, I simply mean that I sometimes wish that I was a painter or a sculptor. For some time now, my videos have involved images that resemble paintings. And also sometime sculptures,. ,lines and structures against a specific coloured backdrop. But then, visual artist is sort of a misnomer.

Except for audio art and a lot of writing and then some music, art is visual. There must be something to look at or imagine the look of. And so much of the writing I enjoy is about words as images, or how they play on initially blank pages.. .pages are canvases, right?. Concrete poetry to me is [sculptural..](#) it's about concrete shapes and forms. And music to me is visual... it's about shapes and patterns and colours.

There are many people who make art, whether visual or textural or sonic, who don't make their livings from their practices. Do these people call themselves artists, in fact? Not with regards to their taxes. I mean, a couple of decades ago I had years where I thought claiming any sort of art practice would open up too many cans of worms, because art was not my primary source of income.

In terms of you and your work, I want to come back to other folks who might or might not be interested in. I'll throw out some names: Gertrude Stein, Agnes Martin, Ed Ruscha, Peter Kubelka, Robert Ashley, Daniel Spoerri, Blue Gene Tyranny, Kathy Acker? Any

interest in any of these? Any others you'd care to mention.

If you have any images of your paintings that you could send, I would love to see.

Gertrude Stein is a quintessential modernist... I am fascinated with her sense of play and yet repelled by her (at best) apoliticality. I have a taste for language outside of communicative functions....Stein goes there as do others. Beckett I am of course quite keen on.

Agnes Martin...yes....Sol Lewitt, Rothko, Josef Albers.... I think there is always a grid, even when the world or the environment is supposedly grid-free or free-fall. I am paranoid.....I smell grids even when there may not be any.

Ashley and Blue Gene Tyranny I might wish to revisit. I saw some presentation by them at the AGO in 1980 and was cynical, although I was sitting with two friends who were cynical about the presentation. I am into Steve Reich and Terry Riley.

Spoerri.. .hmmm....in terms of redefining art objects or object art.....sure. Except I am such an un-food person, actually.

Yes, Kubelka...and Tony Conrad and Sharits. I have an interest in materialism....some of my videos could be described as 'materialist' as they are composed of materials within editing systems.

Ed Ruscha...okay. I like e.e cummings. I've been told some of my writing is like R.D. Laing's Knots but I came to that independently although I can see why. I think there's a parallel with my interest in repetitive writing and Albers and grids.

Kathy Acker....in terms of writing as collage and in many cases theft..and breakdown between divisions of literature and painting and drawing et cetera.

It's weird....Acker did not like Beckett, or Robbe-Grillet. Too spartan and puritanical, I think. Becket once dismissed Burroughs as "that's not writing, that's editing".

Duchamp and Warhol, again in the context of defining or redefining art objects. From Warhol into General Idea, of course.

I used to be obsessed with Godard and Fassbinder..not now as much as I used to be. Peter Gidal I wish to further explore.

I'll attach a painting for you later.

Painting: I am kind of fascinated by you being a "frustrated" painter. And you have exhibited paintings in the years since I left TO. I guess it seemed like a lot of "multi-disciplinary" artists who started making work decades ago often strenuously rejected painting (not suggesting that you did) and it is interesting to me that you are an out-of-the-closet closet painter. I am being glib in a way and I apologize. But it makes sense in terms of you you hold on to a work with the medium, be it language, video, perhaps music as well.

You mentioned being a materialist. Would you say that you are a structuralist?

Well, my comment about being a closeted painter is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. But I do see screen as canvas. I've only shown paintings in public on a couple of occasions. Paul Petro and I have a running gag for his Christmas Spice shows.

I think my attitude to many mediums is sculptural.. .certainly my attitude to music is. I think, if I make any further videos, they will be about music and composed images... as many of the recent videos have been (Roman Spring Leakage, More or Less). I think language provides pictures with regards to my videos. In More or Less, language is introduced and then literally abstracted. But then there are exceptions... Passing, Seven Segments.

I think some of my videos could be considered structuralist, they certainly draw attention to their own structure which is their point. But I might be too prone to accidents or sudden impulses to be a very good structuralist. Editing is performative, and performance is where unpredictable elements might take over or creep in.

Language provides pictures.

What do pictures provide?

I am thinking about Aids Has Not Left The Building, where you borrowed an image (you seemed surprised that I had selected that video, but I have to say that I really love it). It is minimal, political, succinct, lyrical, visual, musical.

Do you want to say anything?

Language becomes pictures. If a word is familiar, then how is the word presented... visually.

Pictures are images....images are or become familiars...

AIDS HAS NOT LEFT....well, it samples Snowjob in a few spots.. is Snowjob is the programme at FIFA?..... it uses Polaroids I took at Pride March many years earlier... it used photos of the AIDS memorial columns in Cawthra Park. That tape was made for Pride 2007..it was meant as a comment on how AIDS is on the back burner in relation to Pride celebrations... and assimilation and gay marriage et cetera. Oh yes, there are still people with AIDS...even though the cocktail combinations certainly are prolonging lives. AIDS Action Now was reconvening in 2007..I was briefly involved. The tape was originally 39 seconds...to be screened like a billboard projection at Pride 2007. I added twenty-one seconds so it could be exactly one minute for Toronto Underground Festival (TUFF), which is shown in the subway or the underground during TIFF. So the tape is this (I hope) kinetic montage of location photographs and original graphics. Every ten seconds.. .every ten frames. There is a silent version and a musical version. I hope the silent version is musical even though it is silent.

I would like to also think about sound and music, rhythm and drone in your videos. Can you tell me about that?

I will expand soon.

Well, the first video I made that is in distribution was for The Government. This is How Many Fingers, which was produced at Trinity Square Video and technically directed by a friend of mine who worked there... Alan Fox. It was an anti-music video... it ignored the language of promotional videos and was blocked to the music of the eponymous song. The song was written, by me, for a theatrical production of Orwell's 1984 that The Government was scoring, but which we withdrew from while taking out our songs. This was in 1979.

I think since 2011 most of my videos have involved a musical grid... Roman Spring Leakage, More or Less, Floating. Or music is implied in the editing. In The Enigma of SAP, there's no music until the two punters become too stoned to talk. Then it becomes a rave. Words and music here are incompatible. In 12 x 26, the soundtrack rises from A to G# ... twelve semi-tones. Typical Morning For Green and Blue also uses drones (I was thinking of the refrigerator with pitch.). In More or Less, music suddenly enters... it's soundtrack pseudo-soul that has become ubiquitous as soundtrack cliches. Our mutual friend Nelson Henricks was asking me about synaesthesia...with regards to Roman Spring Leakage. In the top half of that tape...the colour of the frame changes when the musical pitch changes. But this is not so much a cause and effect as a formal device.

The music in Walking Philosopher was not composed specifically for that film, which was transferred to video. It is music I wrote for Trudeau and the FLQ in 1996 that is my music and thus I own the rights to it. The music does make the thing move... give it motion that I hope is already in the editing.

Narrative is all edited in the same rhythm...therefore music is redundant, I think. I kept music out of Passing because the text is already melodramatic. Melodrama means music plus drama.

I'm thinking of doing a work involving just graphics and music... no verbal language. It seems the next thing to do after Narrative, which did not need music or else it would have been locked into the time-frames of the specific music.

Melodrama, that is good to hold onto.

What about that grid, is there more to say about that: how you work with it, how you establish it?

Well, I'd say I have a love and hate relationship with grids.

Maybe I'm paranoid, but I think they're always there even when living in or dealing with alleged free-fall zones.... I always suspect there are structures even when there are ostensibly none. So I prefer to fetishize the grids and the structures.

Plus I was never much of an editor until Eating Regular. I used to work with outside editors... if I ever did something involving split audio and video I would work with an editor. So I learned how to edit to audio cues....this picture comes in here with this audio....there is a picture edit with an audio change, etc. So, for many of my videos the audio is entered into the system first... The Enigma of SAP was edited accordingly.

Can you maybe prepare to talk a bit about your relationship to and involvement with artist-run culture and what that has meant for the work that you make? Can you think of all of the artist-run centres you have been involved with and what you have done with them? I find this important because I think of you as an artist who has given a tremendous amount to the art community (ugh, that c-word) through your writing, coordinating, organizing, and your presence (at seemingly EVERY opening in Toronto while I lived there) and support.

For better or worse, I have ARC history. But it all varies. I mean, just look at different centres in their different phases. I was on the board of Trinity Video between 1989 to 1993, A Space between 1991 and 1993, and YYZ between 1997 to 2000. I stayed active with YYZ and the publishing committee..I co-edited Money Value Art with Sally McKay and I was the editor for the Gary Kibbins book Grammar & - Grammar. I have thoughts about artist-run structures.. .many of which are well-intentioned but ineffective.

Can you also prepare to talk about Collection/Correction and expand on how it came about, the interest expressed in your work by a younger generation, and what that has meant to you and your work. Jacob clearly gets how you are working with language. How did he learn about your work and how did this project unfold?

Jacob Korczynski and I became friends in 2005... he has curated my work into a few programmes. In 2012 we met and began talking about a possible publication for various aspects of my writing....we stuck to the plan.....a selection of earlier writings published in IMPULSE between 1979 and 1989, four specific video scripts, and then my ongoing 'concrete poems', which I began experimenting with in the late nineties. Jacob is a curator and researcher.....he comes into contact with an artist.. .researches he/she/them. Many of the younger artists I'm friendly with also subscribe to a curator/researcher model. It means a lot to me that younger artists and academics find my work worthwhile....I'm all too aware about how senior artists are routinely dismissed of being strictly 'of their time', with only the early work being acknowledged.

Also, Kunstverein Toronto came on board in 2015. They are curators based on research..mixing the contemporary and the historical. They have exhibited Carolee Schneemann, Glenn Lewis, Maryse Lariviere....they are doing something with Anna Banana. Illustrious company, no?