

Has TV Finally Become An Art?

By Floyd Fessler

■ As your eyes become accustomed to the dark, you notice a large gray ball suspended in the center of the room. Long strips of reflective surfaces extend outward. You feel you are looking through a chamber, with the ball at the far end.

Suddenly, the ball lights up. Images are instantaneously reflected, mirrored and reflected again within what appears to be a three - dimensional circle. Multi - images flash, flicker and flutter in an intense bombardment of color that becomes one big zigging, zagging image turning itself inside-out as though it were alive.

You are watching a Videola.

The room and Videola belong to the National Center for Experiments in Television, a collection of artists with backgrounds in painting, television and film who are dedicated to the principle that there's more to TV than *McHale's Navy*.

These San Francisco artists see television as an end in itself, capable of producing an image worth watching just for the art of it. They use electronics as paint, and the TV screen as canvas.

Created by Don Hallock, the Videola is only one of the devices used at NCET. An alternative to the conventional rectangular TV screen, its spherical surface multiplies a single TV picture until all the separate pictures are blended into a new image, a creation in and of itself.

As you carefully step over the cables and try to keep from bumping into electronic control panels that would make a *Trekkie* jealous, you get a crash course in experimental television from Ann Turner, NCET reports editor.

There are two ways of getting a picture to the Videola, she says. In one, the picture travels from a camera to a processor to a video tape recorder. In the other, it goes from a synthesizer to the video tape recorder. In both cases the tape recorder then sends the picture to the TV screen in the center of the Videola. The images can also be transmitted directly to the Videola without using the tape recorder.

But the NCET artists are most interested in where they're going. So while their methods are, of course, topics for long after-hours discussions in the NCET viewing room, the end result is what they want to convey to the public.

And to that end, NCET is currently presenting a show at the San Francisco Museum of Art. In addition to showing tapes which illustrate the use of various video effects, the artists are giving live performances on the Videola.

But NCET, which receives grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Rockefeller Foundation, does not see the realization of a new art form as its final goal. The artists are aware they are only beginning to scratch the surface of a new movement, a new era.

An era in which, perhaps, television can be used in psychotherapy . . .

An era in which, perhaps, the public could buy video cassettes of experimental television compositions . . .

And an era in which, perhaps, a tired businessman could come home at night and unwind with flowing lightforms caressing his mind as a viable alternative to the martini . . .

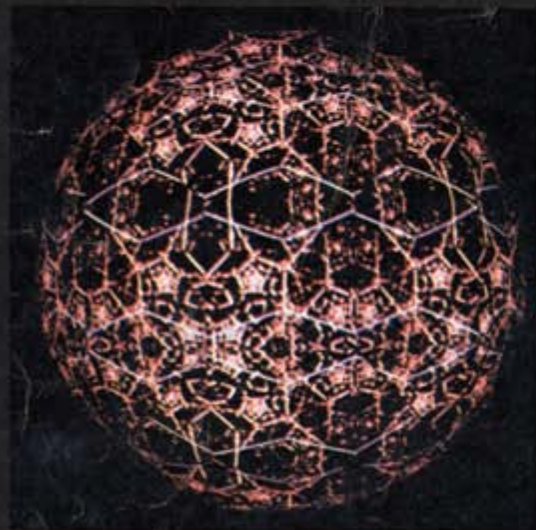
Here, and on the following pages, is a preview. □

*"Multi-images flash, flicker and flutter
in an intense bombardment of color
that becomes one zigging, zagging image."*

Photography by M. d'Hamer

Movements continued

*"They use electronics as their paint
and the TV screen as their canvas."*

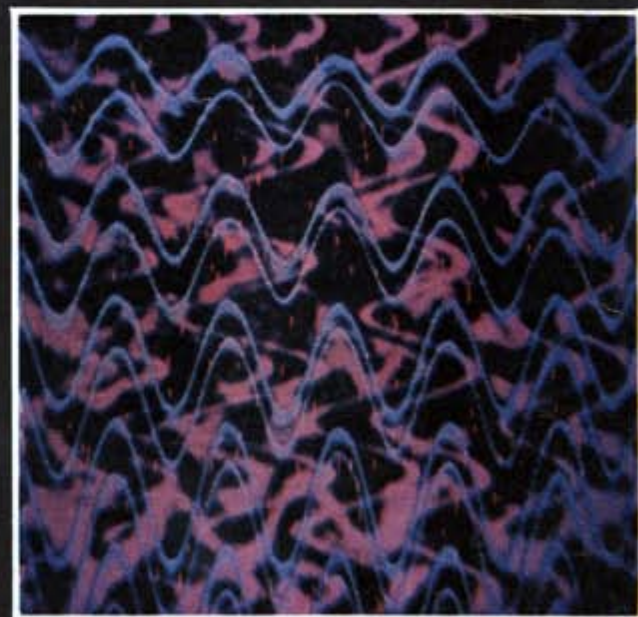


Images made on a Beck Direct Video Synthesizer created by Stephen Beck.

Above circles are Videola images by Stephen Beck. A synthesizer is used to produce a picture and feed it to a TV screen in the center of the Videola. The Videola then reproduces the picture numerous times to give a three-dimensional effect.



A processor can do many things to a seascape. The same seascape was used in "Untitled."



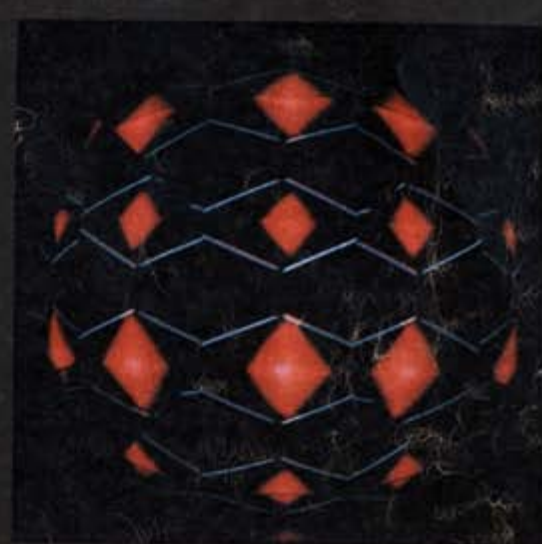
Synthesizer images by Stephen Beck.



Lightforms by Willard Rosenquist.



Images from "Untitled," a work by William Roarty and Don Hallock.



Circles at left and above are created by the Videola, using direct video images produced and fed to it by a synthesizer. The Videola was invented by National Center for Experiments in Television artist Don Hallock.