



Bill Viola

ELECTRONIC RENAISSANCE

10 MARCH
23 JULY
2017

FIRENZE
PALAZZO
STROZZI

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PRESS RELEASE

From 10 March to 23 July 2017 the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi will be introducing the Florentine public to **Bill Viola**, a significant exhibition celebrating this **unchallenged master of video art**, presenting works that span his long career, and which resonate with the architecture of Palazzo Strozzi. In order to create a unique experience, the exhibition will also include masterpieces of the Renaissance, such as, **Pontormo, Masolino da Panicale, Paolo Uccello** and **Lukas Cranach**. It will be on view.

The survey exhibition, curated by Arturo Galansino, director of the Palazzo Strozzi, and Kira Perov, executive director of Bill Viola Studio, reviews a career invariably marked by a **combination of technological research and aesthetic reflection**. It includes works beginning with his early experiments with video in the 1970s right up to the large installations of the 2010s that have drawn the public's attention with their strong impact on the senses. In a totally unprecedented layout, the exhibition will also use the Renaissance context of Palazzo Strozzi to fuel an extraordinary **dialogue between the classic and the contemporary** through the juxtaposition of Viola's work and masterpieces by great artists of the past that have served as sources of inspiration for this American artist and marked the development of his style.

Born in New York in 1951, Bill Viola is internationally recognised as one of the most important contemporary artists, producing video installations, sound environments and performances that offer the public **profound experiences of immersion in space, image and sound**. In exploring spirituality, experience and perception, Viola observes **mankind** itself; people, bodies and faces are the leading players in his works, with their poetic and strongly symbolic style in which man is called on to interact with such forces and opposing energies of nature as water and fire, light and dark, the cycle of life and the cycle of death and rebirth.

As the artist has stated: *“I am so happy to be returning to my Italian roots and to have this amazing opportunity to repay my debt to the great city of Florence with an offering of my work. Living and working in Florence in the 1970s, I never thought I would have the honour to show in such a distinguished institution as the Palazzo Strozzi.”*

Creating an exhibition of Bill Viola's art in Palazzo Strozzi, in an environment that includes both the Piano Nobile and the Strozzi, also means celebrating the special relationship that the artist has always had with the city of Florence. It was in this city that he continued to develop his career as a video artist when he was technical director of *art/tapes/22*, a centre for the production and documentation of video from 1974 to 1976, run by Maria Gloria Biccocchi. Palazzo Strozzi will be extending the exhibition experience to other locations in **Florence and Tuscany**, thanks to important partnerships with museums and other venues in the region, such as the Uffizi Gallery and the Santa Maria Novella Church Museum in Florence or the St. Andrea Church Museum in Empoli, where the artist's work will be on display, further illustrating his rapport with the history and art of Tuscany.

To tie in with the exhibition, Palazzo Strozzi has also created a special collaboration with the **Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence**. Visitors will be able to purchase a special combined ticket to visit the Bill Viola exhibition in Palazzo Strozzi together with the Baptistery of San Giovanni and the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, which will be hosting Bill Viola's *Observance* (2002) and *Acceptance* (2008) to tie in with the exhibition. These two works in which Bill Viola ponders on grief and suffering will be displayed to create a relationship with two of the museum's iconic masterpieces: Donatello's *Penitent Magdalen* and Michelangelo's *Bandini Pietà*.

The exhibition is promoted and organised by Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and Bill Viola Studio with the participation of the Comune di Firenze, Camera di Commercio di Firenze, Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi e Regione Toscana, with a contribution from Fondazione CR Firenze, with the support of Banca CR Firenze/Intesa Sanpaolo and the collaboration of Fondation Etrillard.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Bill Viola (b. 1951) is internationally recognized as one of the leading artists of our time. An acknowledged pioneer in the medium of video art, he has for 40 years created a wide range of media works that are displayed in major museums throughout the world. His ideas focus on universal human experiences—birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness—and have roots in both Eastern and Western art as well as spiritual traditions, including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism. Viola represented the US at the Venice Biennale in 1995. Other key solo exhibitions include; *Bill Viola: A 25-Year Survey* organized by 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. Two major installations, *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)* (2014), and *Mary* (2016) are permanently on view at St Paul's Cathedral, London, on loan from Tate.

Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi

Established in July 2006, the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi is an independent public-private foundation who delivers a consistent high-quality programme of modern and contemporary art exhibitions in its landmark Renaissance building, the Palazzo Strozzi. The Foundation has marked a significant break in the way cultural institutions have been run in Italy, establishing itself as a leading art venue in Italy and Europe.



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FACT SHEET

Title	<i>Bill Viola. Electronic Renaissance</i>
Venue	Palazzo Strozzi
Period	10 March-23 July 2017
Exhibition curated by	Arturo Galansino, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi Director General and Kira Perov, Executive Director Bill Viola Studio
Promoted and organised by	Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in collaboration with Bill Viola Studio
With the participation of	Comune di Firenze, Camera di Commercio di Firenze, Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi, Regione Toscana
With a contribution of	Fondazione CR Firenze
With the support of	Banca CR Firenze Intesa Sanpaolo
With the collaboration of	Fondation Etrillard
Thanks to	Blain Southern, London; James Cohan Gallery, New York; Kukje Gallery, Seoul Trenitalia Gruppo Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane, ATAF GESTIONI, BUSITALIA-Sita Nord, Ufficio Turismo della Città Metropolitana di Firenze, Toscana Aeroporti Spa, Unicoop Firenze, Firenze Parcheggi, Art e dossier, Rinascente, Mercato Centrale Firenze
Main Media Partner	Rai
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Catalogue	Giunti Editore, Firenze
Bookings	Sigma CSC T. +39 055 2469600 F. +39 055 244145 prenotazioni@palazzostrozzi.org
Times	Daily 10.00-20.00, Thursday 10.00-23.00. Dalle ore 9.00 solo su prenotazione. Accesso in mostra consentito fino a un'ora prima dell'orario di chiusura
Info	T. +39 055 2645155 www.palazzostrozzi.org
Admission	Full price € 12,00; Concessions € 9,50; Schools € 4,00

PHOTO SHEET

1.1	Bill Viola <i>The Crossing</i> 1996, 10'57". Video/Sound installation Two channels of color video projections from opposite sides of a large dark gallery onto two large back-to-back screens suspended from ceiling and mounted to floor; four channels of amplified stereo sound, four speakers. Performer: Phil Esposito 401 x 286 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
2.1	Bill Viola <i>The Greeting</i> 1995, 10'22". Video/Sound Installation Color video projection on large vertical screen mounted on wall in darkened space; amplified stereo sound. Performers: Angela Black, Suzanne Peters, Bonnie Snyder 280 x 240 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
2.2	Pontorno (Jacopo Carrucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557) <i>Visitation</i> c. 1528–9, oil on board, 207 x 159.4 cm. Carmignano, Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo	
4.1	Bill Viola <i>Surrender</i> 2001, 18'. Color video diptych on two plasma displays mounted vertically on wall. Performers: John Fleck, Weba Garretson 204.2 x 61 x 8.9 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
5.1	Bill Viola <i>Emergence</i> 2002, 11'40". Color High Definition video rear projection on screen mounted on wall in dark room. Performers: Weba Garretson, John Hay, Sarah Steben 213 x 213 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
5.2	Masolino da Panicale (Tommaso di Cristoforo di Fino; Panicale di Renacci? 1383/84–documented until 1435) <i>Pietà</i> 1424. Removed fresco 280 x 118 cm. Empoli, Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea, inv. n. 32	
6.1	Bill Viola <i>The Deluge (Going Forth By Day)</i> 2002, 36'. Panel 3 of 5 panels from <i>Going Forth By Day</i> (2002). Video/Sound installation. High-Definition color video projected onto wall in dark room; stereo sound and subwoofer 370 x 488 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
6.2	Paolo Uccello (Paolo di Dono; Florence c. 1397–1475) <i>The Flood and Receding of the Waters</i> c. 1439–40. Removed fresco 215 x 510 cm. Florence, Museo di Santa Maria Novella, the fourth bay of the east side of the Chiostro Verde	
7	Bill Viola <i>Inverted Birth</i> 2014, 8'22". Video/Sound installation Color high-definition video projection on screen mounted vertically and anchored to floor in dark room; stereo sound with subwoofer. Performer: Norman Scott 500 x 281 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	

8.1	Bill Viola <i>Man Searching for Immortality/Woman Searching for Eternity</i> 2013, 18'54". Video installation. Color High-Definition video diptych projected on large vertical slabs of black granite leaning on wall Performers: Luis Accinelli, Penelope Safranek 227 x 128 x 5 cm each. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio and Blain Southern, London	
8.2	Lukas Cranach (Kronach 1472–Weimar 1553) <i>Adam; Eve</i> 1528, mixed media on board 192 x 82 cm each. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gallerie delle Statute e delle Pitture, inv. 1890, nn. 1459, 1458 Lukas Cranach	
STROZZINA		
S1	Bill Viola <i>The Reflecting Pool</i> 1977–9, 7'. Videotape, color, mono sound. Produced at WNET/Thirteen Television Laboratory, New York, and WXXI-TV Workshop, Rochester, NY. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
S4.1	Bill Viola <i>Eclipse. The Moon Setting Through an Open Window</i> (Winter Solstice 1974) 1974, 20'3". Videotape, black-and-white, mono sound. Produced in association with Art/Tapes/22, Florence, Italy. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
S5.4	Bill Viola <i>Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)</i> 1979–81, 28'. Videotape, color, mono sound. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
S6	Bill Viola <i>Martyrs series</i> 2014. <i>Earth Martyr</i> , 7'10". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Executive producer: Kira Perov 107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm. Performer: Norman Scott. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
	Bill Viola <i>Martyrs series</i> 2014. <i>Air Martyr</i> , 7'10". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Executive producer: Kira Perov 107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm. Performer: Norman Scott. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
	<i>Fire Martyr</i> 7'10". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Executive producer: Kira Perov 107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm. Performer: Darrow Iguis. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
	<i>Water Martyr</i> 7'10". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Executive producer: Kira Perov 107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm. Performer: John Hay. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	

OFF SITE WORKS		
OffSite.1 Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	Bill Viola <i>Acceptance</i> 2008, 8'14". Black-and-white High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall; stereo sound e subwoofer. Performer: Weba Garretson 155.5 x 92.5 x 12.7 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florence 1386–1466) <i>Saint Mary Magdalene as penitent</i> c. 1455. Wood, h. 188 cm. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	
OffSite.2 Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	Bill Viola <i>Observance</i> 2002, 10'14". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Performers: Alan Abelew, Sheryl Arenson, Frank Bruynbroek, Carol Cetrone, Cathy Chang, Ernie Charles, Alan Clark, JD Cullum, Michael Irby, Tanya Little, Susan Matus, Kate Noonan, Paul O'Connor, Valerie Spencer, Louis Stark, Richard Stobie, Michael Eric Strickland, Ellis Williams 120.7 x 72.4 x 10.2 cm Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	Michelangelo Buonarroti (Caprese? 1475–Rome 1564) <i>Pietà Bandini</i> 1547-55. Marble h. 226 cm. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo	
OffSite.3 Museo di Santa Maria Novella	Bill Viola <i>Tempest (Study for The Raft)</i> 2005, 16'50". Color High-Definition video on LCD flat panel mounted on wall. Performers: Sheryl Arenson, Robin Bonaccorsi, Rocky Capella, Cathy Chang, Liisa Cohen, Tad Coughenour, Tom Ficke, James Ford, Michael Irby, Simon Karimian, John Kim, Tanya Little, Mike Martinez, Petro Martirosian, Jeff Mosley, Gladys Peters, Maria Victoria, Kaye Wade, Kim Weild, Ellis Williams 66 x 109 x 10.2 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
OffSite.4 Firenze, Gallerie degli Uffizi	Bill Viola <i>Self portrait, Submerged</i> 2013, 10'18". Color high-definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall; stereo sound. Performer: Bill Viola 121.2 x 72.4 x 9 cm. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture	
OffSite.5 Empoli, Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea	Bill Viola, <i>Sharon</i> 2013. Colour High-Definition video on LCD panel mounted vertically on wall; stereo sound. cm 92 x 53.6 x 3 Photo: Kira Perov. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio	
BILL VIOLA'S PORTRAITS		
1	Bill Viola in Yorkshire Sculpture Park, England, 2015. Photo: Kira Perov	

2	Bill Viola in front of Pontormo's Visitation, in Daniel Rossi restoration studio, Florence, 2013. Photo: Kira Perov	
3	Bill Viola in Daniele Rossi restoration studio during the Pontormo's Visitation restoration, Florence, 2014. Photo: James O'Mara/O'Mara & McBride	

*** More pictures of Bill Viola's years in Florence are available on request from the press office**



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Electronic Renaissance Arturo Galansino

The comprehensive survey Bill Viola. *Electronic Renaissance* covers over forty years of the career of one of video art's pioneers. Thanks to a selection of twenty-six works it manages to document all the creative phases, from the lesser-known productions from the Seventies up to the very latest works; it is thus one of the largest and most complete shows ever produced on this artist. The title—which incorporates the apt definition of ‘electronic painter’ coined by Maria Gloria Bicocchi—evokes at the same time the art from the past, especially that produced in Florence, which was inspiration and reference point for the artist, and the technological component, a central element in the artistic practice of moving images. Beyond purely aesthetic or expressive instances, navigating the forty years of Bill's career also means observing decades of technical development, from the primitive monitors of the Seventies to the plasma screens, in a crescendo of ever more ambitious productions, from the live recording of daily life to special effects and ‘Hollywoodlike’ set-ups. Kira Perov, co-curator of the exhibition and executive director of the Bill Viola Studio in Long Beach, California—who has worked and collaborated with Bill for almost forty years—illustrates this technological epos in the catalogue with her essay. The exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi was born and developed from an ongoing dialogue with Bill and Kira over the course of two years. Florence is Bill's adopted city, and he has been waiting to exhibit here for a long time. His career was greatly influenced by our city, with which the artist has had a long love-story. Materializing the wish of a protagonist of contemporary art is thus a great satisfaction for the institution I direct. Upon his arrival in Florence in 1974, Bill became ‘il tecnico americano’—as all would affectionately call him—at art/tapes/22, the gallery and production center run by Maria Gloria Bicocchi. He spent two years in the city, participating in what was then a contemporary art scene of international breadth. Alice L. Hutchison and Ludovica Sebregondi deal with that lively period in their essays in the catalogue; these help us perceive the sense of daily discovery and joyful exploration that characterized the train de vie in Florence of the twenty-three-year-old raised in Queens. From a work session with Chris Burden to a performance of ‘photobombing’ (antelitteram!) with the tourists in front of the Duomo, or the exhilarating discovery of the monotonous wardrobe by Gino De Dominicis, consisting of a dozen black suits, all identical... The early production by Bill, going back to the Seventies, is well represented in the exhibition with a dedicated section in the Strozzi, highlighted by *Il Vapore* (cat. 18), a seminal installation that was presented in Florence in 1975 at Zona contemporary art space. It was in Florence that Bill discovered, apart from Renaissance, the true ‘function’ of artwork within human and social life. “After a visit at the Uffizi I deeply felt that museums had been created for art, not the other way around as it happened in the contemporary scene I had left in New York. Moreover, many of the medieval and Renaissance works I had seen in those first months in Florence weren't even in museums. They were in the community, in public places—cathedrals, churches, chapels, courtyards, monuments, municipal offices, squares and palaces' façades—and, even more, many were still in the places they had been commissioned for some five hundred years earlier. The atmosphere was saturated with art and cultural ideas. I soon understood that here history was truly part of the present, and that the newest ideas circulated within a wider complex. I remember often seeing an old lady in the street, she would come in the morning to pour fresh water or place flowers under a Madonna painting nestled in a niche at the corner of her building. This provided a new context to my idea of art appreciation.” [Viola 2003] The comparison—or ‘dialogue’—of Bill's work with the Renaissance masterpieces that inspired it is striking in this exhibition's itinerary. The operation has been attempted in the past, but never before so ambitiously and philologically circumscribed to works, themes, artists and places that really mattered for the artist. We couldn't possibly avoid yet again placing *The Greeting* (cat. 2) next to the painting that inspired it: the *Visitation* by Pontormo (cat. 3). The comparison was made once before, in 2001 in Carmignano, and then repeated in the epochal 2014 exhibition *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. Diverging Paths of Mannerism* at Palazzo Strozzi; but in both cases in an indirect way, with the video displayed in a room separate from the painting. *The Greeting* was hailed with great acclaim at

the 1995 Venice Biennale, when it was presented in the US pavilion. The work has considerable importance in the artist's oeuvre, and corresponds to the beginning of a new experimentation linked to ancient art. Pontormo seems to be Bill's preferred old master; at the time of his Florentine stay he saw the *Deposition*, masterpiece of the master in Santa Felicita church; its extreme composition and hallucinating colors reminded Bill of the LSD paradises familiar to the beat generation. He thus recalls his visit: "The *Visitation* by Pontormo was the first classical work of art that inspired me. It was also the first set where we employed actors [...]. I had gone into the Santa Felicita church, just past Ponte Vecchio, to see the *Deposition*. The colors struck me. While going out I asked myself, honestly, what had the painter smoked to paint that pink, those incredible blues. It seemed like he had worked under the effect of LSD. But the *Visitation*, no, I hadn't seen it. After all it was kept away from Florence, in Carmignano. My encounter with that painting happened years later, in California. A funny story. [...] I had gone to a bookshop, I was looking for a book, I don't remember which. As I was going out from the corner of my eye I see a volume on the desk. A new text on Pontormo. On the cover was the *Visitation*, its colors impressed me. Of that painting I knew nothing, but I could not take my eyes off it. I bought the book and took it home. I waited months before picking it up though. In the end, I open the book, I read it, I am fascinated by the ideas, the colors of that painter." [*Il colore Viola del Manierismo* 2014] Thus Bill created his video installation without having seen the Carmignano painting in real life, which he finally saw in 2001. A close-up encounter with the young Pontormo took place in 2013, through Palazzo Strozzi, while the work was being restored in Daniele Rossi's studio in Florence, in view of the *Pontormo and Rosso* exhibition. On that occasion, as Bill takes leave of the masterpiece, he writes in the restoration workshop guest book: "For Master Pontormo, Thank you for your Inspiration and your Spirit. I am forever grateful for all that you had given me. You are a great master."

I wish I could show you my work with the Moving Image.
I look forward to seeing you in Heaven, in the section for Artists.
With gratitude and respect
Bill Viola."

The Greeting opened a new and vast creative territory, changing the spontaneous and direct nature of Bill's image capturing to true cinematographic productions. His themes, also, developed from daily life shot with a hand-held portable camera while traveling to distant locations with Kira, to interpreting biblical stories and making reference to the great western art tradition. In this work, a few seconds of a scene are dilated with an extreme slow motion obtained through the use of a special three-hundredframes per second camera, thus revealing a myriad of details which would go unnoticed with normal vision. What interested the artist was the representation of a precise moment, everyday and simple, an encounter between three women, within which the complex inner and social dynamic of such a mundane fact could be described. According to Bill this challenge he was facing, was even harder for the painters of the past, who could only choose one moment in time, around which 'a frame would be placed.' In several of his later works Bill was to move in this direction, drawing upon traditional imagery and merging it with the stretching of time. For the first time, the works of *Emergence* (cat. 9) and the *Pietà* by Masolino da Panicale (cat. 10) can be seen side by side in this exhibition; the video quotes the work literally, even though one can also see other illustrious quotes, from Roman sarcophagi to the *Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David, through the *Baglioni Altarpiece* by Raffaello. *Emergence*, together with three other pieces in the show, belongs to the Passions series (2000-2002), that Bill began working on in 1998 while a Fellow for a year at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, directed by Salvatore Settis. Together with a group of historians and scholars, they studied the representation of human passion and suffering. On a daily basis, he was also observing the works in the collection, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* by Andrea Mantegna and the *Annunciation* by Dieric Bouts. The Passions series is linked to traditional art in its themes and formats. For instance, *Catherine's Room* (cat. 6) is a true 'videopredella'—inspired by a work by the late-Gothic painter from Siena, Andrea di Bartolo:

Catherine of Siena with Four Blessed Dominicans (in the collection of the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice) (cat. 7)—in which the representation of everyday gestures and actions within the five scenes evokes the unending flow of a solitary woman's life. Bill's familiarity with the art from Siena goes back to the time he spent there in 1977 to film a documentary for PBS. On that occasion he had spent many hours at the Pinacoteca Nazionale, where he came to know masters from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Siena, about whom he states:

"Duccio, Lorenzetti, Giovanni di Paolo, Master of the Osservanza-artists all very different from the big art stars of Florence. Their work was part medieval, part Renaissance, eschewing the photo-realism of the optical method in favor of a subjective geometry based on feelings and a deep spirituality."

The initial inspiration for *Emergence* didn't stem directly from a reference to 'high' iconographic tradition. The original idea was simply to represent a woman holding a man. It would only be later, leafing through books on Masaccio and Masolino da Panicale, that Viola encountered a color plate of the detached fresco from Empoli. The artist made a sketch of it and replaced the book on its shelf: it wasn't nor it ever has been his intention to 'remake' classical works. One day a newspaper photograph of two women removing a man's corpse from a well made him remember Masolino's fresco: a large production derived from that, with actors and scenic machinery, where the shape of a Renaissance sepulchre blended with that of a well; the water presence thus brought a symbol of life in that image of death, with a Christian suggestion of resurrection. Bill chose one of his most experienced actresses and two younger performers, who were to work with him later in the monumental *Going Forth By Day* (2002). The role of the actor—an athletic aerial artist—was particularly challenging: he had to spend long periods of time under water, and use all his physical strength to re-emerge in a stiff and hieratic position from that inverse burial.

According to Bill, commenting on this scene:

“To our contemporary eye it looks like a drowning; to my inner eye, it's obstetrics. Similar images have their own life, as they are free and autonomous.”

[*Going Forth By Day*, 2002]

Our selection of works includes two from *Going Forth By Day*, created for Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, then traveled to the Guggenheim in New York where it became, a year on from the World Trade Center attack, a space for reflection and contemplation on the mystery of life. It is an 'architectural' installation of considerable dimensions; it consists of five large video projections onto four walls, creating a special experience that is fully immersive, one that Bill has compared to the large fresco cycles of the central Italian tradition, from Giotto to Luca Signorelli. *The Path* (cat. 4) alone is almost eleven meters long and completely fills a wall in the third room on the first floor of the Palazzo Strozzi. The work depicts various people walking in the same direction in a forest, each in their own way. Where are they going? Some look like refugees seeking a new existence, others simply like people on a stroll. The composition of the trees was inspired by the series of paintings of the Boccaccio novel *Nastagio degli Onesti*, made by Sandro Botticelli, in the collection of the Prado. The characters in the video, travellers on the path of life, are as if suspended between two dimensions, as in the infernal vision told in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The most spectacular scene of *Going Forth By Day* is *The Deluge* (cat. 11), where we witness a torrent of water pouring through the windows and doorway of a building of classical architecture, sweeping away whoever is left of a crowded urban scene and could not get away. There is a declared kinship with the tangled *Last Judgment* by Signorelli, in Orvieto, but also its visual repertory is rooted in the great 'catastrophic' scenes of the Italian pictorial tradition, those that Bill had discovered in his wanderings amidst the wealth of Florence's museums and churches. Among these, the fresco that Paolo Uccello painted for the Green Cloister in Santa Maria Novella, *The Flood and Receding of the Waters* (cat. 12), stands out as an absolute masterpiece; with its monochrome tones, the 'metaphysical' geometric architecture and the characters overwhelmed by the flood and yet still fighting, it positively appears to be the fifteenth century ancestor of *The Deluge*. We can try to find more artistic and historical references in this cycle of works, such as in *The Voyage*, where the small house in Giotto's style recalls a detail at the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua; or the rocky landscape in *First Light*, recalling that of the two *Agonies in the Garden* by the young brothers-in-law Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna, both at the National Gallery in London, while the sleeping figures evoke Piero della Francesca's *Resurrection*. *Going Forth By Day* is an epic 'video-fresco' in which Bill has crafted his composition down to the tiniest detail, aiming to capture historical and artistic ideals and creating, borrowing John Hanhardt's definition, a "humanism of our times." Even recent works, such as the four *Martyrs* (catt. 24-27), or the diptych projected onto large black granite slabs, *Man Searching for Immortality / Woman Searching for Eternity* (cat. 14) refer to this same concept. *The Martyrs* is the latest series of works created by Bill for the London Cathedral of St. Paul's; while not showing any obvious reference element, these belong to an imagery suspended between past and present. The diptych is instead inspired, albeit reversing it, to the sensual representation of the young naked bodies of Adam and Eve, typical of Dürer's iconography. During an enlightening visit to the Prado in 1984, made famous in his stories, Bill was particularly impressed by Albrecht Dürer's *Adam and Eve*. This impression simmered in Bill's mind for some thirty years, until resurfacing in the making of this work in which two elderly people investigate their bodies' decay under the beam of a small light, as in a contemporary *vanitas*. Two beautiful paintings by Lukas Cranach (cat. 15), inspired by Dürer, have been hung next to the video installation. The survey occupies the whole of our two exhibition floors, the first floor or 'Piano Nobile' and the Strozzi, embracing the opportunity of using the palace in its entirety. The show also extends throughout the city and its region, including two spaces that are important for our heritage as well as for the history of the Italian-American artist.

At the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo two pieces, *Acceptance* (cat. 28) and *Observance* (cat. 30) have been installed to create a connection with two of the treasures from the collection: the expressionist wooden statue of the *Saint Mary Magdalene as Penitent* (cat. 29), by Donatello, and the dramatic *Bandini Pietà* by Michelangelo (cat. 31). In Santa Maria Novella *Tempest* (cat. 32) shares the space with the detached frescoes of the Green Cloister; while the iconic *Self Portrait, Submerged* (cat. 33) can be viewed in the Uffizi galleries, reminding us of the special relationship Bill has with the realm of water; Bill and Kira donated it a few years ago, for the Self Portraits Collection of the Uffizi. The show also extends to other locations in Tuscany that have been meaningful for Bill, such as Empoli and Arezzo, widening the tribute to this great artist to a choral dimension. Just like other great artists, from Picasso to Stravinsky, once he reached maturity Bill felt the urge to confront tradition. Only a superficial reading of his references to Renaissance works could appear anecdotal or purely formal. Reproducing paintings as a moving image was not Bill's goal, but rather evoking primeval forms of human expression. After having long explored non-western theories and philosophy, Bill returns to Christian art, interpreting it as a means for growth, being more interested in the social and spiritual function of traditional art than its formal values. In his use of the past there is neither intellectualism nor irony. He refrains any form of quote or appropriation, at the same time shying away from the kind of conceptual universe of the twentieth century, that began with Marcel Duchamp. Bill does not perceive art as decoration, provocation or education, rather as 'transformation:' to help the individual navigating life's path, to understand it and oneself. Bill's works spark the most intimate reactions in the viewer's soul. His moving images talk to a general human dimension, universally shared. The artist believes art to have a healing and therapeutic function, in order to heal the soul. Hence Bill is not only a 'contemporary old master', but is, above all, a 'master of time:' that is, an artist using time—even before technology—in his work, not simply stretching its chronological references and bringing to the present images from the past, but working on the viewers' inner time. This induces in them a cathartic abstraction from their temporal dimension, bringing them in touch with the archetypal essence of their feelings, passions, and fears. For these reasons Bill's work resides beyond time. Hosting a large exhibition of Bill Viola at Palazzo Strozzi today means not only welcoming to Florence one of the most important contemporary artists, but at the same time shows the profound centrality of our tradition and past in the evolution and choices that have revolutionized the art of our time.



Bill Viola

ELECTRONIC RENAISSANCE

10 MARCH
23 JULY
2017

FIRENZE
PALAZZO
STROZZI

The Creative Process **MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE**

Kira Perov

At the end of 1978 I arrived from Australia to join Bill in New York, with no idea of the path that lay before me. After three years as cultural events coordinator at Melbourne's La Trobe University, I knew I wanted to continue with an involvement with the arts, so of course I immediately began assisting Bill with his projects. At that time I was experimenting with photography and found it natural and useful to record what we were doing. What we were doing turned out to be a thirty-seven-year-long fascinating and profound journey, supporting the creation and production of Bill's video works. Bill has always joked that he had a TV childhood. He was growing up with the new and revolutionary invention of television, and as he got older, video and media technology developed in parallel to his own development as a video artist. This enabled his palette to keep expanding, and the advent of each new device inspired new ideas for his work. Through the Seventies Bill made single channel videotapes as well installations that explored space and sound. The early videotapes were structured investigations of form with a new tool that could capture, and immediately replay, live action in the world around him. In these first experiments, it is evident that Bill was never far from his enquiry into human perception, which soon became a quest for the understanding of human consciousness, or simply, just being. He made most of his works from this time in Synapse, the student-run video studio at Syracuse University, New York State. Using their black-and-white equipment, and later color, his simple observations used the camera eye to reference a point of view such as is evident in the works *Level* and *Cycles* (both 1973, cat. 22, 21). It is clear that it was the *artist's* point of view, leaving in sounds from the audio recordings that make his presence felt – this is not an anonymous operator using a surveillance camera. And poetry was always part of the observation, for example *Eclipse* (cat. 19), subtitled *The Moon Setting Through an Open Window*, was recorded in Florence on the winter solstice, 1974. For twenty minutes we watch as the moon slowly intersects a candle flame placed in a window, shot with very basic black-and-white equipment from the studio art/tapes/22 where he worked. We watch as slowly in real time, two sources of light merge briefly into one. Viewing the piece today, we find it is still very compelling, perhaps because it was created with, and in, video's most simple form, but embodying a profound idea. During this early period, Bill made several works that are related to the sense of smell. One videotape is titled *Olfaction* (1974, cat. 20) and another, an installation, is called *Il Vapore* (1975, cat. 18). He understood that smell is a powerful tool in the brain that retrieves memory, and he used the technique of partial dissolves or overlays to suggest layers of memory of past actions. In *Olfaction*, his own figure appears five times in the same scene, often all at the same time, performing different actions that were recorded in the past. On a variation of this method, for *Il Vapore*, a work made for the exhibition *Per Conoscenza* at Zona in Florence, he used a technique that mixed a prerecorded action with a live camera, creating an interactive piece. To make the recording, he sat on a mat on the floor in front of a metal pot on a burner, and as he took water into his mouth, he poured it into the pot. The same objects in the scene are used in the gallery exhibition. The pot contains eucalyptus leaves and as the water heats up and comes to a boil the steam carries the vapor through the space. We hear the sound of the artist breathing, as well as water as it pours from his mouth. As we move around the piece, we see ourselves on a monitor, superimposed on the prerecorded action of the artist, a mix of the past and present. Bill also created groupings of videotapes, shorter related "poems" that would form a collection: *Red Tape*, *August '74*, *Four Songs*, *The Reflecting Pool – Collected Work 1977-80*. The *Reflecting Pool* (cat. 16) collection of five works encompasses a cycle from birth to death, starting with a naked man rising out of the pool in the title work, to *Vegetable Memory*, which depicts the slowing down and finally stopping of quickly recorded scenes in a fish market in Tokyo. Between 1977 and 1981, the five works of *The Reflecting Pool* collection were shot in quite a number of different locations: four of the works were recorded in: an overgrown pool in Upstate New York (*The Reflecting Pool*); a loft in New York City; Algonquin National Park, Ontario, Canada; near Tozeur, Tunisia (*Moonblood*); a Long Island hospital, NY,

New York (*Silent Life*); and Tsukiji Fish Market, Tokyo, Japan (*Vegetable Memory*). It seemed that we were always traveling. Even though the seven-minute title piece *The Reflecting Pool* was shot in 1977, it is still a relevant and popular piece today, and viewers continue to be baffled by how it was created. The scene of a pool in a forest was recorded in which the action of a man leaping up in a fetal position over the pool is frozen in time. Gradually and almost imperceptibly, his body that floats over the water fades out. Separately, Bill recorded a number of different takes of just the pool and then edited them before inserting the sequence into the rest of the scene. These pool scenes include various reflections of people and disturbances of the water, with no evidence of this occurring in the upper part of the frame. In the pool, time moves forward as well as in reverse. Today this kind of treatment is easily produced in the edit room, but in 1977 even the concept was far in advance of its time. Bill was always pushing the limits of the equipment. He continued his explorations of time in the third piece in the collection, *Ancient of Days*, named after the William Blake frontispiece for his book *Europe a Prophecy*, portraying Urizen, the embodiment of reason and law. Bill's work depicts in five different scenes the passage of time and his manipulation of it, moving it forward and backward, and using time lapse in unique ways. *Ancient of Days* was recorded in various locations in Upstate New York; Mount Rainier, Washington; Washington Monument, Washington, DC; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada; and an intersection in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan, while we were living there. Yasuo Shinohara, a Sony engineer interested in video art, agreed to develop a motorized lens system that would allow for the precise repetition of zooming in and out on a timer with programmable speeds. This achieved the result of being able to zoom into a shot and do time lapse at the same time. Today the technique is common, but in 1981 this was a breakthrough link that solved the end of this part of *Ancient of Days*, where each individual zoom into the intersection at Shibuya is slowed down in time and collapsed by time lapse, but the motion of the zoom is constant. Toward the end of the Seventies Bill was beginning to think more about landscape, and 'gathering' images rather than staging his works. He had recorded two documentary-style pieces, shot in the Solomon Islands, after he was sent by Nam June Paik to collect footage of Guadalcanal for his piece *Guadalcanal Requiem*. Bill decided to explore the culture and music of the Solomon Islanders, observing and collecting footage, and editing two works that are unlike normal documentaries, adding no anthropological commentary. So the next step was to embark on an expedition to study the landscape in this manner. In 1979, to record *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)* (cat. 23) we traveled to Tunisia for the mirages, and to Saskatoon in the winter for the contrasting cold. We brought with us our usual load of six cases of equipment including camera, tripod, audio recorder and microphones, ¾ inch videotapes, cables, batteries, and lighting gear. Bob Bielecki, a sound specialist who had worked frequently with Bill, was with us for the first part of the trip. We had to overcome the difficult physical environment of heat and the dust-filled wind, and lack of clean water and safe food along the way. But these harsh conditions provided the variables of the landscape we were recording. Every change in temperature and time of day brought different variations of color and intensity of light. More than thirty years later we were again in the desert shooting the Mirage series of 2012 (*Walking on the Edge, The Encounter, Ancestors*) but we stayed closer to home; we recorded on El Mirage Dry Lake two hours from Los Angeles in the California Mojave desert. We were planning a more formal interaction with the landscape and the mirages. We would choreograph human actions using actors, quite different to the images that we encountered by chance in Tunisia. We had a crew, more sophisticated equipment, and better protection from the elements. The concept for *The Greeting* (cat. 2), created for the United States Pavilion in the 46th Venice Biennale (1995), was born from an image that Bill saw in an art book, of Pontormo's *Visitation* in Carmignano, near Florence. Bill was fascinated by the kind of chance meetings he observed on street corners, and wanted to record this with the same intensity that Pontormo used when he selected that particular moment in the *Visitation* (cat. 3) to paint. Bill knew he had to 'stage' a work for the first time, to build a set and hire real actors to follow specified actions. His idea was to slow the meeting of three women down as much as possible, so that all the nuances of the emotions on their faces, their body language, and flowing dresses would create an emotional narrative, but to leave it to the imagination of the viewer to understand the motive. We hired a full technical crew, with producer (Peter Kirby), director of photography (Harry Dawson, who subsequently worked with us on all complex shoots until 2013), set designer (Dennis Kightley), wardrobe stylists, and the usual crew of grips, lighting specialists, set painters, and production assistants. A special high-speed 35 mm film camera was used that could record 300 frames per second (normal is 24 frames) in order to achieve a smooth and seamless slow motion that video was not capable of at that time. This meant that one thousand feet of film flew by in about sixty seconds, and that is all the time that the actors had to complete their actions. Each second would expand to ten seconds of viewing time, and had to be counted out while shooting. We called this method 'micro-directing' – when every second mattered. Even though the work was recorded on 35 mm film it was transferred to standard definition video for editing and presentation. We have now improved and restored this work by going back to the original 35 mm film to transfer it via telecine onto the best format of high definition possible today. A new edit has fulfilled Bill's original vision, to emulate the details of the painting of Pontormo. The

high-speed camera was also used for many of the Passions series pieces created between 2000 and 2002. These intimate studies were portraits of emotions that Bill was examining at that time. Recorded in our studio, these were smaller set-ups than on the set for *The Greeting*, but still required a full crew and lighting to handle the more complicated needs of the 35 mm camera. Each portrait was recorded in front of a background similar to what would be found in a commercial photographer's studio, and I worked with stylists to coordinate the needs of the wardrobe for a more intentional look. These portraits were made possible by the new video flat panels that revolutionized the moving image world. These plasma and LCD screens could be made to look like photographs by stripping the casing to add a custom metal frame, and mounting them vertically on the wall, or on a shelf or pedestal. They could also be used for diptychs and triptychs. The 35 mm film was transferred to high-definition video, also quite new, and thus we entered the digital world. This is how Bill was able to achieve the realism of the Renaissance, and the long drawn out emotions realized with the use of slow motion represented its humanism. In this series Bill made *Surrender* (2001, cat. 5), a vertical diptych that expresses separation, anguish, and the disintegration of the relationship. The performers submerged their faces in water, while the camera recorded their reflection, so when the water was disturbed, their reflections dissolved. *Catherine's Room* (2001, cat. 6) is a meditation on the life of a woman (Weba Garretson) in five panels that represent her solitary activities at different times of the day, as well as in different seasons. In our studio, a room was designed to look like the interior of a nun's cell, built on a stage that we dressed in different ways depending on the activity, and lit according to the hour. Since it was one unedited recording in each room, we used a highdefinition camera instead of high-speed 35 mm as the action was more prolonged than in the other works. Bill has a collection of various cameras in our studio that possess different qualities of color images, black and white images, and grain. To produce *Four Hands* (2001, cat. 8), a 'family portrait' of three generations, we used a small black-and-white infrared surveillance camera to create the intimate recordings of four pairs of hands performing *mudralike* actions. The infrared device gives the hands an unusual luminous quality. This camera was also used to make two self portraits in 1996, *Incrementation* and *Nine Attempts to Achieve Immortality*, that provide an other-worldly glow to the face. One of the last works to be created in the Passions series was *Emergence* (cat. 9), commissioned by the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2002 for the *Bill Viola: The Passions* exhibition the Getty organized, that traveled to three other venues. Six years after *The Greeting*, Bill again found inspiration from studying Christian art, this time in the beautiful *Cristo in Pietà (Imago Pietatis)* (cat. 10) fresco in Empoli, near Florence, painted by Masolino in 1424, during the early Renaissance. *Emergence* was different from Bill's other portraits of emotions that were more formal studies. With *Emergence*, he was creating a narrative based on the Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ, but by adding the element of water, he expanded the concept to include notions of transcendence and rebirth. Masolino's tomb is now a cistern that overflows with water as the young pale man emerges, seemingly neither in the world of the living nor in realm of the dead. In our studio, set designer Wendy Samuels worked with Bill to create a container close in design to the tomb in the Masolino fresco. Water was added that could be filled to the top that overflowed as required. The three performers (Weba Garretson, John Hay, Sarah Steben) in rehearsals became emotionally connected, and under Bill's direction, created the face and body language that is so expressive in the piece. The use of the 35 mm high-speed film camera was again a necessity to slow the work down so every detail and nuance of the action becomes visible. A year after *The Greeting* was produced we began work on *The Crossing* (cat. 1). It was co-commissioned by the 1996 Festival d'Automne in Paris, installed in the Chapelle Saint- Louis de la Salpêtrière, and the Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta, Georgia, shown in a former bank building. The concept for the piece, as represented in Bill's drawings, was very simple – on one screen a man is on fire, on the other, he is inundated with a torrent of water. Although we had already worked with a Hollywood film crew on other productions, it was clear that we now needed the help of a special effects team who could safely handle the elements we needed for the shoot. Robbie Knott was recommended who was experienced in the use of both fire and water for Hollywood movies. The actor (Phil Esposito) was willing to be doused with water, but of course we could not burn him. So for the fire, mannequins were made of his body, clothed

with the same clothes, fitted with gas pipes, and burned. We had four models made and ended up using them all. The fire had to be recorded slowly building in size until the mannequin was lost in the flames. For the dousing, the water was carefully timed to start with some small drops, gradually increasing in intensity/pressure, until a torrent poured over him so that he disappears before the water subsides. In both cases, plate shots were created where the fire and the water were recorded on their own with varied intensity so they could be layered into the final edit. The shoot took place in an airplane hangar since we needed the long approach of the performer walking up to the camera. Lights were set at intervals so the actor could walk in and out of shadows, with the floor reflecting a warm color for the side with the fire, and a cool color for the water side. After a successful production with *The Crossing*, we worked with Robbie and his team on other large and difficult projects: *Going Forth By Day* (2002), *The Raft* (May 2004), and *Tristan und Isolde* (2004–

5). *Going Forth By Day*, commissioned by the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin (curator John Hanhardt) was in every way an enormous production. Bill had visited some of the great frescoes in Italy, in particular those by Giotto in the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, and Luca Signorelli's *The Damned Cast into Hell* in Orvieto Cathedral. His idea then was to make a video fresco cycle, and to project the five very large panels directly onto the walls of the gallery. The panels vary in size from the smallest at the entrance, *Fire Birth*, 12 x 16 ft, to the longest, *The Path* (cat. 4), 7 ft 6 in x 36 ft wide. *The Deluge* (cat. 11) was the most complicated to produce, taking one month to build the enormous façade of a white building with huge pipes hidden behind so the water could be released. A large pool was installed in front of the stage just out of camera frame that was filled with water. From there the water, during a take, was pumped to the pipes and cycled back to the pool in order to have enough water to keep up the pressure of the deluge. The running time for all five panels is 34:30 minutes, and we had to shoot it in a continuous take, no editing, and calculating for the slow motion. So the action had to be precisely timed to create the slow build up of the people crossing the frame, to the crescendo of water pouring down the stairs and breaking through the windows of the building, with enough time to end with a few solitary drops at the end. We had a hundred and fifty extras who walked, stopped to talk, and then ran across the frame, fearful of the coming water. We had a team of props people, handing out various items to carry, and a team of wardrobe assistants who were helping create characters of all the extras. Most importantly, we added stunt people to our assembly of talent, who rode the rush of the water down the stairs and out onto the street. They landed in the pool in front of the building, just out of sight of the camera. Bill had seen Botticelli's series of paintings of *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti*, and was interested in the composition of the trees in the forest in part one of three. To create *The Path*, we established a camp in the Angeles National Forest, in the hills above Los Angeles, and brought in a full team of camera crew, grips and electricians. It took several days to create the necessary circumstances, with additional lighting on the trees, and to set three high-definition cameras in perfect alignment to make the thirty-six feet of screen possible. Again, we used a hundred and fifty extras and assembled many props and a variety of wardrobe, resulting in a very diverse group of people of various ages and ethnicity, endlessly walking through the forest. In the gallery it is shown with three projectors knitted together to create a continuous and seamless image.

Another group of works that were created by employing an innovative camera technique is the *Transfigurations* series that includes *Ocean Without a Shore*, 2007, and *Acceptance*, 2008 (cat. 28). *Ocean Without a Shore* was produced for the small, deconsecrated church of San Gallo, for the Venice Biennale. Three plasma screens, one on each of the ancient altars, displayed a solo figure approaching slowly from the darkness (recorded with the black and white 'Grainy Cam'), and into the light (recorded with color high-definition video). The threshold between these two worlds is a wall of water that is invisible until touched and illuminated by a spotlight. The water falls over a metal razor edge that becomes as clear as a glass window. The whole effect depended on the ability of the two cameras to record the same action at the same time, and from the same angle, since the transition had to be seamless in the edit room. Engineers from LucasFilm assisted in fitting a mirrored device between the two cameras that attached to the same tripod. *Acceptance* is one of the pieces in the series that Bill created using this set-up in order to portray one of his often-depicted themes of human life, the cycle of birth and rebirth. In 2012 we embarked on a new series of works, *Frustrated Actions and Futile Gestures*, some of which were recorded in our studio. After many large productions, we were happy to be back in a smaller space, creating intimate works. *Man Searching for Immortality/Woman Searching for Eternity* (2013, cat. 14) was made with two senior actors (Luis Accinelli and Penelope Safranek) and a small team of one cameraperson, one lighting person, and Bill and myself. The two people were recorded separately, and in a continuous take each to achieve the feeling of the passage of time. The last works we recorded that year were of the *Water Portraits* series that included *Self Portrait, Submerged*, 2013 (cat. 33). The plexiglas tank that we had custom built was clear on all sides so we could light it and shoot from all directions. We slid underneath a panel of background stones and sand that changed for each new performer. The water needed to be warm and also filtered to stay clear. Weights were placed on the back of the performer since the air in their lungs kept them too buoyant and their knees were held to keep them from moving out of our tight framing. Directed by me, Bill was the last one to be recorded. Bill Viola getting ready for a recording, *Self Portrait, Submerged*, Bill Viola Studio, Signal Hill, CA, 2012 pages 194-195 On the set of *Fire Martyr*, Red Studios, Los Angeles, CA, 2013 Using Red Studios in Hollywood was essential for a group of works produced in 2013. This is where the *Martyrs* series (completed in 2014, catts. 24-27) was created as well as *Inverted Birth* (2014, cat. 13). We needed the size and especially the height of the sound stage because of the verticality of the pieces. By this time the technology had changed considerably once again, and now we were working with high-end digital cameras, the RED and the EPIC, giving us 4K of resolution. For the *Martyrs* series, we engaged our aerial artists once again, John Hay and Sarah Steben, to take on the two difficult roles of *Water Martyr* and *Air Martyr*. For *Earth Martyr*, Norman Scott, new to our team, trained his body to perform his actions backwards flawlessly. He also performed in *Inverted Birth*, using the same

techniques. For *Fire Martyr*, we had to create the fire around Darrow Igus, just as we did for *The Crossing*, so Giuliano Fiumani, our special effects supervisor, modeled his seated body and dripped burning rubber cement to build a large conflagration of flames. Giuliano worked overtime to create the four elements that acted as ‘protagonists’ interacting with the four actors. He also provided us with the non-toxic fluids for *Inverted Birth* and worked with us to perfect the timing of them as they doused the actor. For some time we had been editing the works in professional editing facilities to achieve the best quality, and now we found that they had all been retooled for the new digital technology. Our long time editor, Brian Pete, already had learned the necessary new skills and proved himself very capable in making the changes. Our archive contains all formats of video, from black-and-white half-inch reel-to-reel tape, to 3/4-inch, to Hi8, to Beta SP, to laser disc, to DVD, to high-definition tape, to the latest digital hard drives. The works in the exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi are a remarkable representation of the many changes over the last forty years in video and media technology. The development of imagemaking technology has been one of the fastest growing of any industry, and Bill has spent a lifetime using these tools and creating new techniques to achieve his unique and profound vision.



Bill Viola

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A CLOSER LOOK

The Old Masters on display: the ancient works that inspired Bill Viola

PONTORMO

Pontormo Jacopo Carucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494– Florence 1557 *Visitation* c. 1528–9 Oil on panel 207 x 159.4 cm Carmignano, Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo

The profiled figures of Mary on the left and Saint Elizabeth on the right reveal their pregnancies; the staring women in the background are their alter egos, without the halos. The youngest repeats, inverted, the colors of the Virgin's dress, while the older seems to be the same Elizabeth, seen from the front, as a sort of double. Tall buildings rise at the back, to the sides, almost as metaphysical theatrical scenes: the two palaces on the left look distinctly Tuscan for their floor cornices, the ashlar in grey sandstone (pietra serena) and the traditional street bench, where two men are seated. The colors of clothes and headdresses, the abundant folds giving the figures ovoid shapes, Elizabeth's almost dancing pose on tiptoe, are close to those of the *Annunciation* and the figures in the *Deposition* of the Capponi Chapel, but the diamond composition by Pontormo could have been inspired by a secular 1497 engraving by Dürer, depicting four witches. The painting was meant to be viewed by peasant folk. It is possible that the work was commissioned to Pontormo by the rich anti-Medici family of Pinadori, also known as 'Pignadoro' (golden pine nut) because of the sign on their shop. They were spice merchants, sellers of medicines and candles, but also suppliers of colors and various materials to the painters. The link between the client and Pontormo might have been Ludovico Capponi, who knew the Pinadori and rented them a shop. The family owned a villa near Carmignano and, as indicated by the will and testament of Bartolomea del Pugliese, widow of Paolo Pinadori, the *Visitation* was intended from the beginning for the local church, dedicated to Saint Francis as well as the Archangel Saint Michael. The restoration of *Visitation*, carried out by Daniele Rossi on the occasion of the 2014 Pontormo and Rosso exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi, enabled some interesting discoveries. Infrared reflectography revealed the presence of a preliminary pencil drawing and a grid reproducing and enlarging that of the drawing 461 F in the Cabinet of Drawings and Prints at the Uffizi. The *Visitation* is painted on a board made of five poplar wood planks, glued and fixed by two larch wood crossbars. The restoration has revealed afterthoughts, but above all it has given back readability to the work, uncovering new colors and unexpected details: a donkey's head that appears from the alley behind the first building, a figure looking out of a window, hanging drapes, the banner ring holders on the first floor, stones scattered on the road and a clear sky between the buildings. Viola was inspired by the *Visitation* for his video *The Greeting* (cat. 2), presented at the Venice Biennale in 1995, reinterpreting it with the language of the moving image. A very slow movement, with dilated timing, extends the actual forty-five seconds of the three women meeting, resulting in a ten minute projection: a slowness that recalls the stillness of the Pontormo image, while adding a 'before and after' to the scene told, in a rarefied timeless dimension. *Ludovica Sebregondi*

MASOLINO DA PANCALE

Masolino da Panicale Tommaso di Cristoforo di Fino; Panicale di Renacci? 1383/84– documented until 1435 *Pietà* 1424 Detached fresco 280 x 118 cm Empoli, Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea, inv. no. 32

The fresco was removed from the small church of Saint John the Baptist, next to the Collegiata di Sant'Andrea in Empoli, in 1946; inside a cusped aedicule is a moving image of the suffering Christ, rising from an ornate classical sarcophagus with polychrome marble inlays, and assisted by mourners. The weeping Madonna is wrapped in a heavy mantle, *morello* in color; she embraces her son's pale body, holding his right hand, while on the other side a youthful Saint John, in a red coat, kisses Christ's inert left arm, holding it tenderly with both hands. Behind, against a background of light blue sky, stands the Cross with the Instruments of Passion reduced to their essential symbols: the crown of thorns in the middle, the two scourges hanging on the sides and the red scroll with the inscription INRI. The apex of the fresco is

surrounded by a frame with a dice pattern, shortened in perspective, and a horizontal strip decorated by a frieze with an acanthus motif. It encloses a central *clipeus* (shield) with the Shroud and the image of the Holy Face, and two side medallions below, with busts of two prophets. The one on the left is probably Isaiah prophesizing the coming of Christ in the Jesse Tree Description (*Isaiah* 11,1), represented with a scroll in his hand as he reaches out to watch the scene below. The one on the right, his face heavily abraded and holding the skull, symbol of Golgotha, was hypothetically identified with the prophet Ezekiel who, in the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, foretells the resurrection of the flesh (*Ezekiel* XXXVII, 1-11). The making of the fresco is credibly dated to 1424, when Masolino's presence in Empoli is documented since he was painting the Saint Helen Chapel and the right transept in the church of Saint Stephen of the Augustinians. The *Vir Dolorum* (Man of Sorrows) is an image based on an icon of Byzantine origin, reinterpreted here by Masolino in a more realistic style. It is quite rightly considered an emblematic work of the artist's composite figurative idiom, having completed the remarkable Cappella Brancacci. He blended elements of late-Gothic tradition, such as the cusp with three roundels of fourteenth-century ascendancy with the detailed description of the cross and the dice frieze, although rendered according to updated spatial canons in a cultured early-Renaissance language. The concept of the acanthus frieze is fully humanist for its obvious inspiration from classical models; the same applies to the sarcophagus with polychrome marble inlays, seen in perspective, and the body of Christ, where the skilled anatomical construction reveals Masaccio's influence as well as the awareness of coeval Florentine sculptors (especially Nanni di Banco and Michelozzo). The portrayal of the mourners' pain is also in tune with Renaissance sensitivity, devoid of the exaggerated Gothic style, applying gestures of dignified emotion, with uniform lighting providing the figures with delicate realism. *Cristina Gnoni Mavarelli*

PAOLO UCCELLO

Paolo Uccello Paolo di Dono; Florence c. 1397–1475 *The Flood and Receding of the Waters* c. 1439–40 Detached fresco 215 x 510 cm Florence, Musei Civici Fiorentini, Museo di Santa Maria Novella, the fourth bay of the east side of the Chiostro Verde (currently displayed in the Refectory)

The *Flood* is without a doubt one of the most impressive pictorial attestations of the early Renaissance; it is so particularly for the extraordinary expressive power that it still preserves, despite the damage suffered over time that has only left us with a small part of the original pictorial surface. It is one of the panels of the *Stories from Genesis* which decorated the four sides of the Chiostro Verde (Green Cloister) at Santa Maria Novella; according to sources of the time they were crafted with “herbs’ sauce and green earth,” a painting technique mainly dominated by this color, thus giving its name to the location. The episode of the flood narrated in the fresco is the direct consequence of God's punishment, sparing virtuous Noah and his family with the animal species destined to guarantee the rebirth of life after the cataclysm. The story is told proceeding from the left, starting from the most terrible moments of the flood: the ark's doors are sealed, the waters submerge lands and the leaden vortex unleashes its power; it uproots trees, carrying bodies away, while rain mercilessly batters those seeking safety hanging to the ark's sides, fighting among them, trying to remain afloat or seeking any possible shelter. Only an old man remains, at the front, next to the bodies torn by the elements' fury or by their fierce fighting for survival. The old man is wrapped in a large cloak, he looks hieratic and unperturbed by the hands gripping his ankles; he is perfectly ‘sculpted’ in painting, like saints and prophets could be in marble and bronze as crafted by Donatello, Paolo's friend and companion. Some scholars maintain that the old man's hollow and wrinkled features and his sparkling eyes conceal the portrait of Pope Eugenius IV, who at that time was presiding over the sessions of the Council of Western and Eastern Churches, sealed by the agreements of 1439. On the right, the moment after the catastrophe is depicted: the ark is stranded on the Ararat peaks, Noah emerges to receive the white dove carrying an olive branch, a sign of the waters receding and the beginning of a new life. The Chiostro Verde cycle is traditionally linked to the commission by merchant Turino di Baldese; the intervention of Paolo Uccello develops over two distinct phases. The first scenes are dated c. 1430, while the flood was painted c. 1439–40, a chronology some scholars prefer to postpone to 1445. Between the two phases a dramatic change occurs, reflecting the painter's participating in the radical artistic innovations taking place in Florence during the preceding decades which were destined to leave an indelible mark on the development of all European art. Paolo was influenced by the teachings of Ghiberti, with whom he had studied at the time of the decoration of the North Gate of the Battistero; the *Stories of Adam and Eve* in the first bay are inspired by the elegant rhythm of that master. However, a new and unstoppable urgency is present in the *Flood*: that of taking on the challenge of Brunelleschi's canon of perspective, with all the consequences that this implies for the human figure within a real and measurable space. In the *Flood* Paolo organizes a visionary stage set, in which the dizzying ark's fugue, right and left, is the reference by which the position, even the destiny, of each object and figure is defined. The painter's piercing sensitivity dominates over the whole; he leaves us with a gallery of memorable expressions, ranging from pain to rage, from fear to loss or even indifference. This did not escape Vasari, who penned a heartfelt tribute to this work: “tutta di tanta bontà et

eccellenza che gli acquistò grandissima fama” (the whole of such goodness and excellence that brought him great fame). *Anna Bisceglia*

ANDREA DI BARTOLO

Andrea di Bartolo; Siena, recorded 1389–1429 *Catherine of Siena with Four Blessed Dominicans (Joan of Florence, Vanna of Orvieto, Margaret of Città di Castello, Daniela of Orvieto) with Scenes from Their Lives* c. 1394–8 Panel 55.5 x 97 cm Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia

The reredos is one of the earliest and most significant examples of the iconography depicting Saint Catherine of Siena, who died in 1380; at the time of the painting she had not yet been canonized, which did not take place until 1461. She is thus represented with the nimbus identifying the blessed, in the same way as the surrounding sisters, all of them Mantellate of the tertiary Dominican order. These are identified as: “BEATA · GIOVANNA · DA · FIRENZE, BEATA · VANNA · DA · ORVIETO · BEATA · CATERINA DAS · SIENA, BEATA · MARGARITA · DALLA · CITTÀ · DI · CASTELLO, BEATA · DANIELLA · DA · ORVIETO” (Blessed Joan of Florence, Blessed Vanna of Orvieto, Blessed Catherine of Siena, Blessed Margaret of Città di Castello, Blessed Daniella of Orvieto). The panel depicts a real separation between the upper part with the standing figures and the lower one presenting the most significant life scene for each of the blessed nuns portrayed above. The aim was to imitate the conventional structure of altarpieces where the predella, often painted by a different artist, was separated. The image was intended to promote Saint Catherine’s cult in Venice, where she was less known than in Siena, and had a precise devotional and didactic function: the tertiary sisters wore the Dominican vest with a white tunic and black cape, a wimple covering the neck and a white veil. They hold a lily signifying purity and the cross with the extended vertical arm, which, when decorated with gems, expresses glory and triumph. Catherine is distinguished by the book and envelopes alluding to her famous *Letters*, while the dove symbolizes the Holy Ghost, indicating the spiritual source of her teachings. The predella, by duplicating similar scenes, illustrates the crucial moment of each of the lives of the corresponding women above. On the left, the blessed Joan is kneeling in front of her Florence home, spared by her prayers from the Arno flood of 1333. On the opposite side, angels carry Daniela of Orvieto to Heaven during a mystic ecstasy. The three central scenes put Vanna of Orvieto, Catherine of Siena and Margaret of Città di Castello together, at the moment of their highest spiritual exaltation, upon receiving the stigmata. The theme was of particular importance to the Dominican friar Tommaso Caffarini, a Siennese who moved to Venice, who commissioned the reredos; it was bestowed upon the sisters of the Corpus Domini convent, restored and entrusted to the Dominicans in 1394. Four of the scenes are set in cells, small ‘boxes’ with wood beams ceilings, where the women lived their all-encompassing mystic experience in solitude. Viola came across a photograph of the work at the Getty Research Institute. He was fascinated by the repetition of the same inner space, by the intimate life of a solitary woman, but also attracted by the format and the kind of daily life narration. Viola was also struck by the difference between the upper and lower part of the altarpieces from the fourteenth and fifteenth century: the upper part with a formal icon, while the predella below was more narrative and rich in references to daily life, leaving more space to the artists’ imagination, and also allowing the faithful to identify with the story being told. *Ludovica Sebregondi*



Bill Viola

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Florence of the Seventies Ludovica Sebregondi

Florence in the Seventies, in the turmoil of student protests, was—as always in its history—a conflicted, divided city; still mending, at the beginning of the decade, the wounds inflicted by the flood that had deeply marked it on the 4th of November 1966. However, that tragedy was turned into a rebirth opportunity, linked to innovative restoration techniques. The event was a game changer in social terms too, with a definite ‘before and after,’ forcing a large number of citizens to abandon the old city center, where homes were flooded by up to five meters of muddy water and oil, and where dampness would impregnate walls for years to come. This localized event somehow connected to a moment in history that was changing Europe: the 1968 movement. Dark times (the “lead years,” as they were called). Like in other parts of the country, in Florence too the Partito Armato (Armed Party) made its appearance; Rodolfo Boschi, Communist Party member, was assassinated in 1975, and in 1978 the Prima Linea faction killed a state police officer, Fausto Dionisi. Dramatic events characterized Italy: the armed actions of the Red Brigades, the killing of Aldo Moro (leader of the Christian Democratic Party); these events affected Florence too. It would be obviously arbitrary to deal with this decade without considering its many divergent ‘souls,’ yet it—no doubt—represented a watershed. It was a moment when a widespread desire for change pervaded society, a need to expand civil liberties and break down barriers. In 1970 the divorce law was passed, and four years later people overwhelmingly voted NO at the referendum to abolish it. Feminist groups were born, aiming to foster sexual liberation through birth control and abortion rights, and in 1978 finally the law making abortion legal was approved. These events may appear as separate from the lively creative experimentation of the time, but they constituted a decisive drive in a decade that was vital and bubbling in literature, cinema and design. The Christian Democrat Luciano Bausi was Mayor of Florence from 1967 to 1974. After a short transitional time under the prefectural Commissioner Antonio Lattarulo, and following the elections of 1975 first and then 1980, the administration returned to the left and produced again, after twenty-five years, a Communist Mayor, Elio Gabbuggiani, who remained at the helm of the city until 1983. During his first term the Culture alderman was Franco Camarlinghi. Although smaller than Florence, the neighboring city of Prato had always shown a greater interest and openness towards contemporaneity; its Metastasio Theater welcomed jazz music, with performances by stars of the caliber of Ella Fitzgerald, Miriam Makeba, Erroll Garner, Ornette Coleman, Stan Getz and Charlie Mingus. The theater director Luca Ronconi was in Prato from 1977 to 1979, with the Laboratorio di Progettazione Teatrale (Workshop of Theater Development) and a new space, Il Fabbricone, hosted in a large former industrial building. The relationship with Ronconi was also important for the Comunale Theater in Florence, where revolutionary Opera performances were staged under a young Riccardo Muti, who was its principal conductor over the whole decade. These performances caused controversy and debate, but were instrumental for the evolution of Opera direction, and included *Orpheus and Eurydice* by Gluck in 1976, the *Nabucco* in an ‘Italian Risorgimento’ version in 1978 and then *Trovatore* and *Norma*, to all of which Pier Luigi Pizzi contributed his skills as costume and set designer. Important art exhibitions¹ were organized, while the Antique show filled the galleries at the Palazzo Strozzi every two years from 1973 to 1979, attracting an international audience. The most memorable among modern and contemporary art exhibitions was the retrospective dedicated to Henry Moore, opening at Forte di Belvedere in May 1972. The mood of a certain Florence of the time, not yet invaded by tourists, is masterfully portrayed in *Amici miei (My Friends)*, a 1975 film with concept by Pietro Germi and directed by Mario Monicelli. In those days films were shown in major theaters first, and then in the more ‘authentic’ cinemas such as the Alfieri, later Alfieri Atelier, in Via dell’Ulivo, the Spazio Uno in Via del Sole, but above all the Universale in Via Pisana, emblem of the movie theaters used as ‘interactive’ spaces.



Bill Viola in front of the Florence Duomo performing *Free Global Distribution*, which involves inserting himself into the photos of unsuspecting and also rare tourists, 1975

Protests fired up in the streets and oftentimes the Florentine Students Movement gathered at 9am in San Marco Square to assemble student protest marches that would paralyze the whole city, not yet closed to private traffic back then. Students were demanding dramatic reforms to the education system, they used propaganda posters (modeled on those used in the Chinese Revolution) as a form of protest, distributed mimeographed flyers, organized public protests often centered around the Faculty of Architecture in Piazza Brunelleschi; the faculty was very lively and various influential groups formed there, such as Archizoom (including Andrea Branzi, Gilberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello and Massimo Morozzi), Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini, Piero Frassinelli, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia and the two Magris brothers), the Gruppo 9999 (by Calдини) and the Ufo (Lapo Binazzi, Riccardo Foresi, Carlo Bachi, Titti Maschietto, Patrizia Cammeo). The vertices of an ‘urban quadrangle’ of favorite sites for meetings, exchanges and synergies, were the Schema gallery, the Centro Di, the Spazio Zona and art/tapes/22. Schema was founded by the artist Alberto Moretti with Roberto Cesaroni Venanzi and Raul Dominguez, with headquarters on the first floor of Via della Vigna Nuova 17 from 1972 to 1976. Here the frescoed ceilings were equipped with a metal structure designed by Superstudio. The name of the gallery was suggested by Lara-Vinca Masini, and the art critic Achille Bonito Oliva collaborated with Schema since the beginning. Centro Di was a publishing house run by publishers Ferruccio Marchi and Alessandra Pandolfini, located at Palazzo Torrigiani in Piazza dei Mozzi. It published the catalogues of several contemporary art events, such as those at Spazio Zona, founded in December 1974 by Mario Mariotti, Paolo Masi and Maurizio Nannucci, and located on Via San Niccolò. It is at Zona that one of the first European exhibitions by Bill Viola took place, with the showing of his installation *Il Vapore* (cat. 18) on 9th June 1975, in the context of the *Per Conoscenza* cycle. The young Florentines met in “San Marco square, under the Logge of the Accademia di Belle Arti. At first it was the gathering point for the militant groups of the ‘extraparliamentary Left’ and later the territory for beatniks, intellectuals, musicians, artists, feminists, outsiders, drop-outs, counterculture collectives, writers, poets, directors, videomakers, pissed-off students, supplementary-years students, ‘on the barricade’ students, creative students, ‘off’ students, rock students, and for gays.”



art/tapes/22 logo, 1974

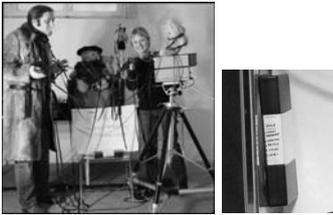
In 1973 Maria Gloria Bicocchi opened art/tapes/22, a video-art studio, at 22 Via Ricasoli, not far from the San Marco meeting site. Much has been written about it, and this propulsive center has often been remembered. It was founded by an extraordinary woman who, as she recalls with simplicity, was “utterly fascinated by the extreme adventure which back then appeared as totally insane. I thus bought the equipment and started producing videotapes, with enormous passion,” so much so that art/tapes/22 rapidly became the European focal point for video production. The following year Bill Viola arrived in Florence, in the studio he was known as the ‘tecnico americano,’ the American technician. “His first videos made at my place—writes Maria Gloria Bicocchi—are totally different from those that later identified his work as a refined ‘electronic painter:’ they were beautiful but experimental and even playful, he was a very young, great artist from the start.” Viola worked with several important international and Italian artists, taking their turn in the production studio. At the same time, he could experience classical art as still living, in the settings where it was originally conceived rather than frozen and de-contextualized in museums. His relationship with the other artists and young ‘technicians’ working at art/tapes/22 was paramount too, they shared the adventure and became friends. Among them are: Carmine Fornari, Andrea Giorgi, Gianni Melotti, Alberto Pirelli. Their relationship with Viola, and their memory of it, is varied. Carmine Fornari, later film director and lecturer, was at the time a technician, and “when Bill arrived in Florence—he recalls—he effectively replaced me, but we didn’t meet often as I moved to Rome to work at the Italian broadcasting organization RAI. I remember him tinkering with the new color equipment that had arrived to replace ours that was on black-and-white reels. He would bend over the video tape recorders, with his large spectacles recalling Coppola’s (the director that vaguely resembled

him physically) and was already experimenting with early visual effects; he hadn't yet created any video art [in Florence], but was experimenting a lot."



Bill Viola with Alberto Pirelli at Zona, 1975

About Alberto Pirelli, who later became a film producer, Bill Viola recalls, "My first day at work was an encapsulation of my life to come: we spent the morning reviewing all of the video technology at the studio, and then, in the afternoon, my new colleague Alberto Pirelli took me to the church of Santa Croce, with its frescoes by Giotto, perspective relief sculpture by Donatello, and the tombs of Michelangelo and Galileo. I was in one of the preeminent sacred monuments to art and science." Andrea Giorgi, who was then technician, remembers Viola: "the enthusiasm, his curiosity in creating new sound objects with a strong emotional charge, starting from common sounds such as the flies' buzzing, the rolling of a gas bottle on the floor, the buzz of a crowd in the cathedral... I remember his ability to put his technical knowledge at the service of language, and his great respect for Renaissance works." Gianni Melotti was the photographer who immortalized not just the works but also their making and makers with artistic, ironic and poetic images, ones that feed memories and become documentary sources.



Charlemagne Palestine and Maria Gloria Bicocchi at art/tapes/22, February 1975

It is thus that, observing the enlargement of a picture portraying Charlemagne Palestine and Maria Gloria Bicocchi from February 1975, on the spine of a U-matic tape casually placed on a chair to hold up a card, Melotti noted its content: some of the first video works by Bill Viola (1. *Instant Breakfast*, 2. *Olfaction*, 3. *Recycle*, 4. *Cycles*, 5. *Level*). These videos Bill Viola had created in Synapse, Syracuse, New York, and formed 'A Series', with which the artist participated in the travelling exhibition *Americans in Florence: Europeans in Florence*. Images from these works taken from the U-matic tape appearing in the enlargement were reproduced in the catalogue by Centro Di. The series was then organized as a collection, possibly in view of creating exhibition copies.



Bill Viola frames Gianni Melotti, 1974

Not all of Florence was paying attention to what was happening in Via Ricasoli, however, "so much so—recalls Maria Gloria Bicocchi—that I shared the stands at art fairs (Basel for instance) with Lucio Amelio or Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend. Never with another Florentine gallerist, and when art/tapes was open on Wednesday nights to show the video works to the public (students etc.) the space was filled by my children, their friends, the insiders, perhaps lecturer Pio Baldelli. Those were special years because culture was an ethic-political expression, not just aesthetic, and this is unrepeatable. Florence was a great little art family (Schema, Zona, art/tapes/22), but in reality the connections were truly international. The artists came from all over the world and in this 'whole world' art circulated and touched many big and small cities, Florence was one of these, not the only one." However, concludes Carmine Fornari, "the most beautiful thing was the spirit of 'cultural adventurers,' a bit pioneers, a bit up in the air, but with a great will to make, experiment, widen knowledge's limits."



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Technology and Revelation **BILL VIOLA IN FLORENCE**

Alice L. Hutchison

“All revolutions, if they are to last,
start from the heart, and in this way
Maria Gloria saw a new future for art.”
Bill Viola

Bill Viola's formative experience in Florence in the mid- Seventies has resonated throughout his groundbreaking work since, as one of the preeminent video artists and one of the most significant artists of the twenty-first century. How evocative then, that a survey at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, cradle of the Renaissance, would signify as a timeless testament to art and revelation. A survey of Viola's work at Palazzo Strozzi illuminates the artist's trajectory from early studies in video, through spectra of diverse cultures and beliefs encompassing humanity in all its anguish, to an ultimate transcendental state of grace.

In 1974, when Viola was a twenty-three-year-old fine art graduate from Syracuse University in New York State, he came to Florence, Italy, to work as technical director at art/tapes/22, one of the world's first studios dedicated to the emerging medium.

Viola participated in the *Projekt '74* exhibition at the Cologne Kunstverein and was then a young technician assisting artists Nam June Paik and Frank Gillette when he met Maria Gloria Bicocchi, founder of the new international video production studio for artists in Florence, the same year she and David Ross, video curator at the Long Beach Museum of Art, organized the exhibition *Americans in Florence: Europeans in Florence*, that opened in California in January, 1975. “From June to August 1974 in Cologne the international survey of video and video installations *Projekt '74* took place, and art/tapes/22 participated with some works, along with other international producers and artists. There I could see how much video work was being made throughout the world and view important video installations, never before displayed in Europe [...] art/tapes/22, as well as my life, was about to be incisively marked by meeting a new collaborator during this trip. In Cologne with David was a young friend of his, Bill Viola. He was already doing interesting works in video and was eager to further explore it. David asked me to bring Bill on as a production and technical director of art/tapes/22. We developed an easy, instinctive friendship and understanding, and during the collaboration we shared an unbreakable personal bond.” She offered Viola the role at their converted home-studio at 22 Via Ricasoli, near the Duomo in Florence. While in the Tuscan capital, Viola experienced an epiphany while visiting the early Renaissance masterworks in situ, such as Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* (c. 1427, Santa Maria Novella) and the vivid, emotive fresco cycles in the Brancacci Chapel, church of the Carmine. He saw in these frescoes and panels “a form of installation; a physical, spatial, consuming experience,” and identified with the young fourteenth- and fifteenth-century artists experimenting with new techniques, in their case, with the discovery of perspective.

Viola's reading of their synthesis of piety and humanist philosophy, illuminating the dialogue between the human soul and divine light, is continuously evident in his work. Many of his videos have taken a sacred format, such as the altarpiece. Themes of *The Deluge* as depicted by Paolo Uccello have repeated in numerous later works such as *The Crossing* (1996, cat. 1), *Going Forth By Day* (2002), and *The Raft* (2004). The tradition of the Pietà, particularly by Masolino da Panicale (1424, cat. 10) reflected in Viola's *Emergence* (2002, cat. 9), commissioned for his exhibition, *The Passions*, 2003, at the J. Paul Getty Museum in California, and specifically the most recent *Mary for St. Paul's Cathedral* in London (2016). Founded in 1972, Maria Gloria Bicocchi's art/tapes/22 operated from 1973 to 1976 producing, and distributing, more than a hundred and fifty seminal artists' videotapes. One of the earliest video production studios in the world inviting leading international artists of the time to work in this new medium, many of these seminal

videotapes were considered among the artists' quintessential works. Viola soon found himself in the midst of the most important international artists of this generation working in various mediums and disciplines converging in Florence to make what were often their first videotapes. Artists included Daniel Buren, Alighiero Boetti, Christian Boltanski, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Sandro Chia; Americans Allan Kaprow, Joan Jonas, John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and Eleanor Antin, to name but a few. Viola worked alongside Andrea Giorgi behind the camera on Buren's *Video-Souvenir (Recouvrant, Effaçant)*, 1974; on five videotapes with Chris Burden⁴, he worked on Douglas Davis' *The Florence tape: clothing, walking, lifting, leaving*, 1974; Gino De Dominicis' *Videotape*, 1974; Terry Fox's *Lunedì*, 1975, three tapes with Arnulf Rainer including *Confrontation with my video image*, and numerous other productions. Viola stayed at art/tapes/22 from September 1974 until February 1976. In addition to his prolific work with numerous artists, he made three early videotapes in Florence: *Gravitational Pull*, *Eclipse*, both 1974, and a black and white study on U-matic for *A Million Other Things* in 1975. He also made a series of sound pieces and provided art/tapes/22 with several tapes produced in the United States for distribution. Viola discussed his experience at art/tapes/22, a worklife confluence seamlessly melding the pleasures of Italian hospitality and its culinary delights with the company of visiting artists. Recalling the early days of video, with its attendant utopianism (not at all like the dystopian Beat Generation), Viola described pockets of activity happening throughout the world—Spain, Germany, the United States—like “mushrooms” growing in disparate places. Everyone involved “saw the future and jumped onto it,” with various groups picking up video for various purposes, social activists and fine artists alike⁵. Having studied and performed with composer David Tudor, Viola brought to art/tapes/22 a fresh new world view and perspective with an early progressive involvement in electronic music, considering audio as much as visual elements, central to his interests as an artist. Viola had taken an early interest in structuralist filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage, exploring the abstract, painterly and non-narrative possibilities of the moving image. Viola's visual and aural consciousness, involvement with cutting edge new developments in New York, and the vibrancy of the contemporary metropolis and exposure to the latest contemporary art and technological developments, were a welcome influence on the productions in art/tapes/22. In return, Florence provided lessons in art history, unparalleled in the world. Daughter of esteemed Italian avant-garde painter Primo Conti and English mother Munda Cripps, gallerist Maria Gloria Bicocchi had the foresight and sophistication to embrace new media not for the sake of the technology but for new artistic expression. Art/tapes/22 had presence at the major art fairs including Basel and Cologne, and she collaborated with legendary gallerists Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli. Bicocchi's passion, insight, and energy brought many great artists to Florence. Her friendship and work with Viola profoundly affected them both, and a strong bond of camaraderie, professional respect and collaboration was formed. The time the young artist spent observing and immersing himself in Florence—the streets, cathedrals, chapels, museums, and the Renaissance and classical art and architecture—has pervaded Viola's work since. Realizing that art and life were inseparable, the artist commented, “Art has to be part of one's daily life or it's not honest.” As part of a performance piece he titled *Free Global Distribution (Surrogate Broadcast TV System)* documented by Enzo Stella, he would often stand in as the anonymous ‘other’ in countless tourist photographs.

Viola lived and worked at the home of the Bicocchi family. Maria Gloria's husband Giancarlo was a leading Florentine architect whom she credits: “without him nothing would have happened in any sense, economic but especially intellectually and for the important fact that he did share his life and houses with this adventure.” Along with a constant stream of many of the best-known international artists who came to Florence specifically to create new work with art/tapes/22, it was a unique environment merging art and family life. Viola was able to visit the Uffizi and other museums and churches, particularly the Pontormo *Deposition* in Santa Felicita church. Bicocchi remembers him in a state of revelation and wonderment returning to the house “always luminous, incredulous, full of energy” embracing the profound realizations of the Renaissance breakthrough of perspective in painting which he was witnessing first-hand in situ. Masaccio and Giotto's figures in architectural settings created dimensional spaces for a viewer to exist on the same plane. Their visual narratives, like storyboards, were breakthroughs from the medieval twodimensional altarpieces. The earlier Gothic gilded icons were exquisite objects of beauty, yet they had been transcended by the need to communicate to a broad populace in representational form, with the development of chiaroscuro to provide the illusion of depth in visual narratives. A parallel was happening in Florence for Viola and other artists with the new medium of video art, albeit a very rudimentary black-and-white monochrome U-matic or open reel recorder at that time. Of his period in Italy, Viola wrote:

“... Much of the enthusiasm expressed [...] is due to the working ambience of art/tapes/22, where I feel a really open attitude toward the potentials of video as a healthy cross-cultural intersection of expression is being put into physical form daily. Built on the energies and desires of its director, Maria Gloria Bicocchi, it is, I feel, the only place of this kind in all of Europe and the United States, a place where artists from all countries

can find a common ground through the medium, and where a personalized, positive working situation opens channels for work.”

Exploring the potential of video as a cross-disciplinary medium during this period in Florence, Viola’s consciousness and observations were dilated, concerns and intuitions expanded, but also artisanal procedures refined, by observing those of the European masters. But while much has been made of Viola’s indebtedness to the European traditions of art history, of equal importance was his interaction with international artists of the Seventies; working in the studio, behind the camera, absorbing a myriad of different aesthetic perspectives and approaches, problem-solving and experimenting with other erudite minds, and being there at the ‘birth’ of some of the great early videos produced by art/ tapes/22. As an integral part of a very tightly knit production team, Viola spent much of his time sharing, developing, and then realizing new works with other artists, from a range of cultural backgrounds. This was a series of cerebral partnerships, improvising, refining and redefining, exploring video, the new portable recording device. Many of the artists there hadn’t used this medium before; Giuseppe Chiari made his first video work at art/ tapes/22, as did Kounellis and Gino De Dominicis. Viola reminisced about many delightful incidents, including his memory of De Dominicis wearing the same suit ensemble every day. One day, Viola peeked into the spare room (above a shop on Via Ricasoli) where De Dominicis was staying, and he witnessed the self-duplicating row of at least ten identical suits. In mid conversation, Viola got up and did a hilarious imitation of De Dominicis, with his ubiquitous black cigarette holder in hand, stalking around the video equipment, saying “Più basso!” or “Più alto!” (Lower! Higher!). De Dominicis was habitually performing, grappa in hand, with everyone his audience. Viola remembered that Giulio Paolini, perhaps disappointed with video art at the time and elder artists’ attempts simply to reproduce their previous work in the new medium, was one of the few artists who comprehended video conceptually. Viola thought and conceptualized through the medium, contemplating movement and change, rather than reproducing static images. He referred to video as the original soapbox, with a vastly different heritage than film in its early days. Paolini’s *Unisono* (1974), he felt, most adventurously explored the potential of the medium by gathering all of the slides of his previous work, shot frame by frame. Viola described *Unisono* as one of the first major instances of data compression.

The international influence of art/ tapes/22 has been neglectfully omitted from several video art anthologies and histories, but its impact was profound and not to be underestimated. The Getty Research Institute’s Glenn Phillips remarked in regard to California’s pioneering video program initiated at the Long Beach Museum of Art, “LBMA’s video program was vastly international in scope. This began with one of the museum’s first video programs, *Americans in Florence: Europeans in Florence*, which looked at the international roster of artists who had been traveling to Florence, Italy, to produce work at art/ tapes/22 [...] a program that was surely a model when the museum received funding to create a video post-production facility at LBMA in 1976.” Duration, time compression, expansion and real time were explored during this early period in Viola’s work, exemplified by *Eclipse* (1974, cat. 19), one long nocturnal take focused upon the burning flame of a single white candle on a white window sill with the moon directly behind it as it was gradually obscured by an eclipse. The candle flame acts as a natural measure of time, with the moon in the background comparable in size and on the same visual plane. The rarely exhibited, early minimal black and white videotapes made in Florence including *Il Vapore* (1975, cat. 18), an installation at Zona while Viola was still at art/ tapes/22 alongside videotapes distributed by art/ tapes/22, stand the test of time, augmenting personal experience, explorations of inner states of consciousness, confronting the physical world. Pre-dating art/ tapes/22 include *Level*, *Cycles* (both 1973, catt. 22, 21) and *Olfaction* (1974, cat. 20) produced at Synapse Studio in upstate New York; followed by *The Reflecting Pool* (1977–9, cat. 16), an important transitional work. Each humble visualization reveals a seminal foundation to Viola’s profoundly expansive evolution of work throughout the following decades—the breadth of which this major survey traces. Biondi’s legacy from her Modernist artist father, leading Futurist painter Primo Conti, embedded a futurist sensibility, an excitement for the new, for making new work with artists in a new medium. Hers was a natural sophistication of an urbane woman who had been associating with the great intellectuals and artists of her parents’ circle all her life, and furthermore which she was able to cultivate, with art/ tapes/22, with the great artists of her generation. But with the ever-increasing overheads of financing and running a busy production studio that was well ahead of its time, and not based around commerce but artistic experimentation, the venture was short-lived. It had to cease production after just three years. The entire collection was then transferred to the Venice Biennale. As Viola stated: “My life was forever changed by my experience in Florence.” The affinities between the old world and new, Florence and California, resonate to this day.

LIST OF THE WORKS

1.1

Bill Viola *The Crossing* 1996, 10'57". Video/Sound installation. Two channels of color video projections from opposite sides of a large dark gallery onto two large back-to-back screens suspended from ceiling and mounted to floor; four channels of amplified stereo sound, four speakers. Performer: Phil Esposito 401 x 286 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

2.1

Bill Viola *The Greeting* 1995, 10'22". Video/Sound Installation. Color video projection on large vertical screen mounted on wall in darkened space; amplified stereo sound. Performers: Angela Black, Suzanne Peters, Bonnie Snyder 280 x 240 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

2.2

Pontorno (Jacopo Carrucci; Pontorme, Empoli 1494–Florence 1557) *Visitation* c. 1528–9, oil on board 207 x 159.4 cm. Carmignano, Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo

3

Bill Viola *The Path (Going Forth By Day)* 2002, 36'. Panel 2 of 5 panels from *Going Forth By Day* (2002). Video/Sound installation. High-Definition color video projected onto wall in dark room; four channels of spatial quadrasonic sound 228 x 1097 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

4.1

Bill Viola *Surrender* 2001, 18'. Color video diptych on two plasma displays mounted vertically on wall. Performers: John Fleck, Weba Garretson 204.2 x 61 x 8.9 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

4.2

Bill Viola *Catherine's Room* 2001, 18'39". Color video polyptych on five LCD flat panels mounted on wall. Performer: WebaGarretson 38 x 246 x 5.7 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

4.3

Andrea di Bartolo (Siena, recorded 1389–1429) *Catherine of Siena with Another Four Blessed Dominicans of the Third Order: Joan of Florence, Vanna of Orvieto, Margaret of Castello and Daniella of Orvieto, with scenes from their lives* c. 1394–8. Wood, 55.5 x 97 cm. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia, storeroom

4.4

Bill Viola *Four Hands* 2001. Continuously running. Black-and-white video polyptych on four LCD flat panels mounted on shelf. Performers: Blake Viola, Kira Perov, Bill Viola, Lois Stark 22.9 x 129.5 x 20.3 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

5.1

Bill Viola *Emergence* 2002, 11'40". Color High Definition video rear projection on screen mounted on wall in dark room. Performers: Weba Garretson, John Hay, Sarah Steben 213 x 213 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

5.2

Masolino da Panicale (Tommaso di Cristoforo di Fino; Panicale di Renacci? 1383/84–documented until 1435) *Pietà* 1424. Removed fresco 280 x 118 cm. Empoli, Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea, inv. n. 32

6.1

Bill Viola *The Deluge (Going Forth By Day)* 2002, 36'. Panel 3 of 5 panels from *Going Forth By Day* (2002). Video/Sound installation. High-Definition color video projected onto wall in dark room; stereo sound and subwoofer 370 x 488 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

6.2

Paolo Uccello (Paolo di Dono; Florence c. 1397–1475) *The Flood and Receding of the Waters* c. 1439–40. Removed fresco 215 x 510 cm. Florence, Museo di Santa Maria Novella, the fourth bay of the east side of the Chiostrò Verde

7

Bill Viola *Inverted Birth* 2014, 8'22". Video/Sound installation. Color high-definition video projection on screen mounted vertically and anchored to floor in dark room; stereo sound with subwoofer. Performer: Norman Scott 500 x 281 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

8.1

Bill Viola *Man Searching for Immortality/Woman Searching for Eternity* 2013, 18'54". Video installation. Color High-Definition video diptych projected on large vertical slabs of black granite leaning on wall. Performers: Luis Accinelli, Penelope Safranek 227 x 128 x 5 cm each. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio and Blain Southern, London

8.2

Lukas Cranach (Kronach 1472–Weimar 1553) *Adam; Eve* 1528, mixed media on board 192 x 82 cm each Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gallerie delle Statute e delle Pitture, inv. 1890, nn. 1459, 1458 Lukas Cranach

STROZZINA

S1

Bill Viola *The Reflecting Pool* 1977–9, 7'. Videotape, color, mono sound. Produced at WNET/Thirteen Television Laboratory, New York, and WXXI-TV Workshop, Rochester, NY. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

S2-3

Bill Viola *Presence* 1995. Sound installation. Six channels of amplified audio, one of which is focused by a parabola, utilizing the architectural elements of the site. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

S4.1

Bill Viola *Eclipse. The Moon Setting Through an Open Window (Winter Solstice 1974)* 1974, 20'3". Videotape, black-and-white, mono sound. Produced in association with Art/Tapes/22, Florence, Italy. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

S4.2

Bill Viola *Il Vapore* 1975. Video/sound installation. Black-and-white videotape playback mixed with live camera on monitor in alcove; one channel of amplified sound; woven mat on platform; large metal pot of eucalyptus leaves boiling in water; live flame heating system. Room dimensions: 370 x 490 x 610 cm. Rome, MAXXI - Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo

S5.1

Bill Viola *Cycles* 1973, 7'4". Videotape, black and white, mono sound. Produced at Synapse, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

S5.2

Bill Viola *Level* 1973, 8'28". Videotape, black and white, mono sound. Produced at Synapse, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio S5.3 Bill Viola *Olfaction* 1974, 3'. Videotape, color, mono sound. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

S5.4

Bill Viola *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)* 1979–81, 28'. Videotape, color, mono sound. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio S6 Bill Viola *The Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)* 2014, 7'10". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Executive producer: Kira Perov 107.6 x 62.1 x 6.8 cm each. *Air Martyr* Performer: Sarah Steben; *Earth Martyr* Performer: Norman Scott; *Fire Martyr* Performer: Darrow Igus; *Water Martyr* Performer: John Hay. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

OFF SITE WORKS

OffSite.1

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Bill Viola *Acceptance* 2008, 8'14". Black-and-white High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall; stereo sound and subwoofer. Performer: Weba Garretson 155.5 x 92.5 x 12.7 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florence 1386–1466) *Saint Mary Magdalene as penitent* c. 1455. Wood h. 188 cm. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

OffSite.2

Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Bill Viola *Observance* 2002, 10'14". Color High-Definition video on plasma display mounted vertically on wall. Performers: Alan Abelew, Sheryl Arenson, Frank Bruynbroek, Carol Cetrone, Cathy Chang, Ernie Charles, Alan Clark, JD Cullum, Michael Irby, Tanya Little, Susan Matus, Kate Noonan, Paul O'Connor,

Valerie Spencer, Louis Stark, Richard Stobie, Michael Eric Strickland, Ellis Williams 120.7 x 72.4 x 10.2 cm.
Courtesy Bill Viola Studio
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo
Michelangelo Buonarroti (Caprese? 1475–Rome 1564) *Pietà Bandini* 1547-55. Marble, h. 226 cm. Florence,
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

OffSite.3

Museo di Santa Maria Novella
Bill Viola *Tempest (Study for The Raft)* 2005, 16'50". Color High-Definition video on LCD flat panel mounted
on wall. Performers: Sheryl Arenson, Robin Bonaccorsi, Rocky Capella, Cathy Chang, Liisa Cohen, Tad
Coughenour, Tom Ficke, James Ford, Michael Irby, Simon Karimian, John Kim, Tanya Little, Mike Martinez,
Petro Martirosian, Jeff Mosley, Gladys Peters, Maria Victoria, Kaye Wade, Kim Weild, Ellis Williams 66 x
109 x 10.2 cm. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

OffSite.4

Gallerie degli Uffizi, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture
Bill Viola *Self portrait, Submerged* 2013, 10'18". Color high-definition video on plasma display mounted
vertically on wall; stereo sound. Performer: Bill Viola 121.2 x 72.4 x 9 cm. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi,
Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture.

OffSite.5

Empoli, Museo della Collegiata di Sant'Andrea
Bill Viola, *Sharon* 2013. Colour High-Definition video on LCD panel mounted vertically on wall;
stereo sound. cm 92 x 53.6 x 3 Photo: Kira Perov. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio