

Made in

HOLLYWOOD

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
and the Long Beach Museum of Art present

Made in **HOLLYWOOD**

by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto
(videotape, 58 minutes, 1990)

MOCA's Ahmanson Auditorium
October 20, 1990



Also presented by

1990 American Film Institute Video Festival
Los Angeles, California, November 2 & 3, 1990

Pacific Film Archive, University Art Museum
Berkeley, California, November 29, 1990

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Boston, Massachusetts, January 18 - March 3, 1991

Directed and Edited by
Norman Yonemoto

Produced by
Bruce Yonemoto

Screenplay by
Bruce and Norman Yonemoto

Director of Photography
Nikolai Ursin

Production Design
Gary Lloyd and Patti Podesta

Music by
Carl Stone

Co-producer
John Wentworth

Executive Producers
Carl Ludwig Rettinger and Tadayuki Kariyama

Principal Cast
Patricia Arquette, Michael Lerner, Ron Vawter
and Mary Woronov as "Mary"

Additional Cast
Rachel Rosenthal, Tim Miller, Raymond Cruz, Michael Smith,
Greg Mehrten and Mike Kelley

A ZDF Television and NEA Media Arts Production

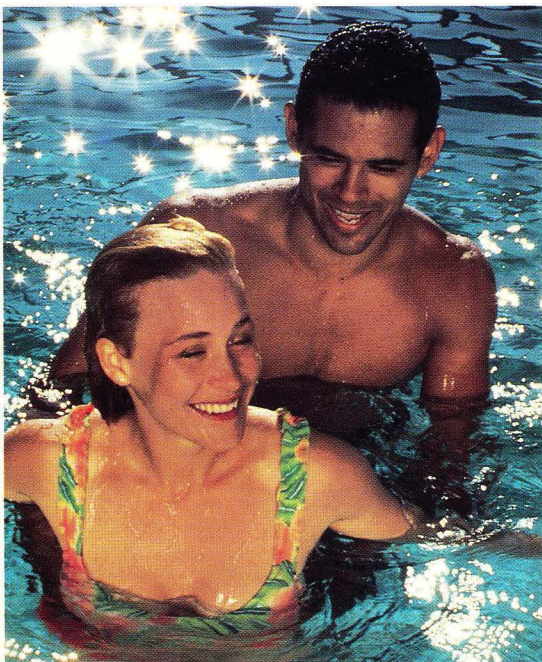
Introduction

Who can resist the dream, the desire, to travel somewhere over the rainbow? Television-generation media realists Bruce and Norman Yonemoto do not offer audiences a yellow brick road out of the image factory, or an alternative landscape to immigrate to. They simply pry open the studio doors. Viewers can choose to remain in their technicolor dreamscapes, or exit into the black, white and gray shades of their own reality. Throughout an increasingly sophisticated body of work, the artists have portrayed how the American Dream has been manipulated and degenerated, and how "the pursuit of happiness" has been reduced to no more than a grossly simplified, trivialized illusion. Their melodramatic, comic-strip videotapes crystallize how mores are transmogrified by the popular media and then redundantly thrust into the global sphere. By using the techniques of soap opera—the form we hate to love and love to hate—the Yonemotos subvert, and are nearly entrapped by, the kind of television and movies that lull audiences into being unconscious subscribers to an *US* magazine way of life.

The Yonemotos' process is a collaborative one. They conceive and create their art with a repertoire of writers, painters and performers all of whom are forging new cultural traditions. Diversity is the mainstay of their diet: gourmet as well as fast food meals are digested, and fuel their work. But mass media's processed perfection makes them sick. The Yonemotos seek conscious recognition that we need not be massaged into the marketplace of monoculturalism and deception. They are wary of Richard Serra's proclamation in his 1973 videotape: "television delivers people."

The Long Beach Museum of Art has collected, exhibited and assisted in the development and realization of video art, in all its forms, since 1974. For this visionary and "pioneering" work, LBMA has earned the respect and recognition of artists, scholars and audiences around the world. The Museum of Contemporary Art has fully integrated the media arts into its ongoing activities since its first year of public programs in 1983. Both museums recognize the significant need today for a multifarious and complex cultural dialogue, one that many artists in our community are already championing. It is with this kind of discourse between art makers and art perceivers in mind that the curators present Bruce and Norman Yonemoto's most recently completed work, *Made in Hollywood*.

Julie Lazar, Curator
The Museum of Contemporary Art



Bruce and Norman Yonemoto

Bruce and Norman Yonemoto are brothers and life-long California residents who currently reside in West Los Angeles and Santa Monica, respectively. They have collaboratively produced works in video since 1976, works that have been exhibited and broadcast by many important arts institutions and experimental television venues in North America, Europe and Japan.

Works by the Artists

- Based on Romance*, videotape, 1979, 24:15.
- An Impotent Metaphor*, videotape, 1979, 43:00.
- Lovelines*, videotape, 1979, 1:00.
- Green Card: An American Romance*, videotape, 1982, 79:15.
- Spalding Gray's Map of L.A.*, videotape, 1984, 27:40.
- Vault*, videotape, 1984, 11:45.
- Kappa*, videotape, 1986, 26:00. In collaboration with Mike Kelley.
- Blinky*, videotape, 1988, 15:30. In collaboration with Jeffrey Vallance.
- Framed*, video installation, 1989.
- The Shroud Revealed*, video installation, 1989.
- Made in Hollywood*, videotape, 1990, 58:00.

MADE IN HOLLYWOOD

Soap Operas, Media Presidents and Trojan Horses

Television has exceeded itself. The social fact of television is now by far the most important thing about television. Another way of saying this is that television programs have been replaced by television "programming." This is pretty obvious if you've watched MTV lately, but turn on your TV set and consider what you really see on every channel. Television as desire, television as identity, television as television—this is the programming of television.

Many believe that this meta-metamorphosis was set in motion by the first broadcast murder, JFK's assassination in 1963, and the first global television event, the moon landing of 1969. Clearly, these events helped transform television from a form of information about the world into a world of information about form. Television was no longer merely *how* we knew about things. Catalyzed by these immensely powerful collective media experiences, television became *what* we knew about things.

But I would argue that an equally important manifestation of TV's elevation from furniture to world view was the Presidency of Ronald Reagan, the first President made in Hollywood. Before Reagan, television's continuum of equivalencies placed pitchmen and Presidents no further apart than a channel change. Reagan erased even this distance. A merely marginal actor in various movies, television shows and commercials, he finally found his ultimate role mastering the art of acting presidential rather than being President. And he was, from the standpoint of (approval) ratings, one of the most "successful" Presidents ever because he played this part as though he was always on TV through a kind of reverse method acting technique. The strategy worked perfectly, of course, because television minimizes the distinction between reality and television. More than any event that preceded it, the reign of Ronald Reagan as TV superstar institutionalized the hegemony of television, his lasting legacy to American politics and culture.

Throughout the Reagan decade, artists working with video technology have attempted to explore and critique the ways in which television, in exceeding itself, has recast contemporary life. It can be argued that none have succeeded more than Los Angeles-based media artists Bruce and Norman Yonemoto.

Ignoring increasingly meaningless formal distinctions in order to address film and television together as highly related forms of popular culture, the Yonemotos make meta-melodramas with theatrical trap doors, using commercial media production to critique

commercial media, in effect playing both ends against the middle. The particular success of their video art relies upon its ability to imbed analysis within the terms of television so completely, that the two often cannot be separated. In a wonderfully convoluted irony, their strategy of "out-televisioning" television is fairly similar to Reagan's strategy of performing the Presidency.

Enabling mass media to become its own worst enemy, the Yonemotos have refined a perpetually self-critical form of soap opera perfectly poised between the art world and media culture. As such, the Yonemotos' work offers the promise of being able to advance video art's as yet unsuccessful efforts to infiltrate and subvert the enemy territory of television. Their most recent and most ambitious production, *Made in Hollywood*, is, in this respect, one of the most strategically crafted and positioned Trojan horses to be delivered by alternative television to date.

The Yonemotos' collaborative critique of media and television has been in development since 1976. Norman's training in film production, including instruction at the American Film Institute, provided the basis for their ability to simulate popular media structures and conventions. Bruce's interest in appropriation and deconstruction, encouraged in part by his studies at the Otis Art Institute, pointed them in the direction of media critique.

The basis for the orientation and approach that comes to fruition in *Made in Hollywood* can be seen in *Green Card: An American Romance* (1980). This feature-length soap opera previews the kind of textual ruptures for which the Yonemotos would become known, while telling the story of a Japanese woman who faces a range of legal, social and sexual entanglements in mixing immigration and romance through a marriage of convenience.

In *Vault* (1984), an amplified soap-opera narrative is driven by hilariously exaggerated Freudian devices. It is, in a sense, *Made in Hollywood's* prologue. The meeting of two lovers is overshadowed by a series of ominous flashbacks—our heroine's father leaves her alone in the hospital as a little girl, our hero's mother dies and his father later punishes him for stealing by tying him up. She is a cellist and pole-vaulter, he a cowboy and abstract expressionist painter. They have sex, they eat, a cow is branded, oil is pumped, she looks "distant." Playing off an inventory of manipulative techniques derived from film and television, the Yonemotos use a shifting montage of love, sex, fear and death to create a "mediated"

reality where Freud, seen by the Yonemotos as the architect of consumer culture, becomes a cause of perversity rather than a cure.

Overlaying a different cultural landscape onto *Vault's* territory, *Kappa* (1986) intercuts an Oedipal soap opera—featuring Mary Woronov and Eddie Ruscha—with the legend of the lascivious Shinto god of fresh water, the Kappa, a role performed and written by Mike Kelley. A poolside woman-meets-boy seduction scene begs for an analyst, and the Yonemotos provide a highly unlikely candidate in the form of the Kappa. “So much pleasure, can pain be far behind?” the Kappa counsels the Oedipal couple. Of his own experience, he reflects, “The weight of water, the pressure of sex, you lose your bearings too soon.” The Kappa knows all about lust, but his carnal knowledge keeps him on the edge of society; he is a subhuman cretin who yearns for acceptance. By crossing the conflicts of the couple with the Kappa’s mortal longings, the Yonemotos reframe the Oedipus myth as a primal conflict between sexual desire and cultural identity, and *Kappa* becomes a mutant cousin of television family dramas like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.

In *Made in Hollywood*, Bruce and Norman Yonemoto’s ambivalence toward their own proximity to commercial media surfaces in a crucial scene between Mary Woronov and Ron Vawter. “But what kind of success, Mary?” Matt (Vawter) asks, challenging her desire to make a feature film. “Making copies of copies of copies. And what were the originals? Desperate wet dreams of uneducated immigrants yearning to be chic.”

“Don’t tell me what I want isn’t art,” Mary (Woronov) fires back. “What’s your inspiration? We’re surrounded by copies. We all breathe, eat, sleep copies. That’s the real world.”

Simulating, critiquing and becoming a copy of a copy—often all three simultaneously—*Made in Hollywood* has to be regarded as a crossover *tour de force*. Formally, the videotape’s mix of film and television modes reads like a definitive textbook on media quotation. Flirting with conventional forms also requires strong acting, and in this respect the videotape succeeds where many independent productions have failed. Among its intriguingly diverse cast are Hollywood talents Mary Woronov and Michael Lerner, as well as Los Angeles performance artists Rachel Rosenthal and Tim Miller, with Patricia Arquette in the starring role as Tammy.

The principal storyline elements revolve around a movie mogul’s familial intrigues, the conflicts of two artists selling out to make movies and a simple country girl’s angelic rise above it all. The Yonemotos stretch this narrative with faux documentary sequences on the making of *Made in Hollywood* and an actual supermarket ad campaign, and they throw in Granny on the farm and a lot of media theory disguised as dialogue for good measure.

The conjunction of the storyline, the theoretical inquiry and the tape’s own ambition—establishing what kind of art content can be put into entertainment formulas—is brilliantly problematized by our heroine’s epiphany. Rather than accepting Matt’s offer to star in the big picture, when she sees her reflection in Granny’s special little boxed mirror, she realizes that her calling is to star on the little screen in TV commercials, the domain where her B-movie self-image belongs, where dreams don’t *come* true, they *are* true. “There’s only one place where I can find the world I’m looking for,” Tammy concludes. “It was right in front of me all the time....A place where there ain’t no doubt or want, where no one goes hungry, where no one hurts or is hurt.” Tammy has discovered the real source of television’s programming.

Most of the dialogue sustains this scintillating tension between narrative exposition and self-irony. By integrating television techniques and critique completely into one another, *Made in Hollywood* becomes a hall of mirrors where, for a moment, television disappears into its own infinity, the only relief we may ever get from it.

Tammy’s translation of “commercial” television into a kind of ontological argument for the American Dream can also be seen as an embodiment of Reagan’s America in its most essential form. Washed up on the silver screen and unable to advance his political career on rhetoric and right-wing platforms alone, Reagan’s breakthrough came when he cast himself completely into political spots and sound bites, where his reductionist mission to restore “traditional” values finally made sense. Acting as though television is the only operational reality, it becomes possible to think that “evil empires” exist, that homilies suffice, that “star wars” technology will protect us. The Stater Brothers supermarket’s “Heartland” ad campaign, incorporated into *Made in Hollywood* as a paradigm for Tammy’s dream, is Reagan’s America in a nutshell, “where life is simple,” “where the girl next door can become your wife” and “every friend you make is a friend for life.”

Made in Hollywood’s crossover appeal for television audiences is inextricably linked to Arquette’s seamless embodiment of Reagan’s world view. That’s the bait and then comes the switch. The Yonemotos have amalgamated into the videotape’s machinery enough computer “viruses”—hidden “programs” that turn upon their host—to kill a small media corporation. Can the idea of television disable the social fact of television? *Made in Hollywood* surely stands as one of the most provocative and promising tests of such a crossover strategy to be produced within the field in recent years.

Michael Nash, Media Arts Curator
Long Beach Museum of Art

Editor

Michael Nash

Design

Rebekah Behrendt

Photography

All production stills by Laura London, except still of
Patricia Arquette and Raymond Cruz by Rue Mattheissen.

Printing

Queen Beach Printers, Inc., Long Beach

The Museum of Contemporary Art
250 South Grand Avenue at California Plaza
Los Angeles, California 90012
(213) 621-2766

Long Beach Museum of Art
2300 East Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, California 90803
(213) 439-2119