



**MICHAEL J. MASUCCI**

**HISTORY IS  
THE ART OF  
FORGETTING**

*And knowledge is always contingent*

# HISTORY IS THE ART OF FORGETTING (AND KNOWLEDGE IS ALWAYS CONTINGENT)

by michael j. masucci

"History is the Art of Forgetting" is a very long essay, or a very short book, written by Michael J. Masucci. It recounts the detail of his 30-year long journey with EZTV.

*NOTE: I have often thought that "On the Road" should be read in the way it was typed; as one continuous roll. I fully understand that it is not stylistically fashionable to design web pages as one continuous scroll. But, in recognition of Jack Kerouac (subject of the Lerner and Macadams' film which was EZTV's first bona fide exhibition hit), whose "On the Road" was written on continuous teletype paper, I submit this text as one extremely long-scrolling page.*

*But for the 'scroll intolerant' among you, I also offer links to the parts of the essay. See menu below.*

I - DEGAUSSED

II - UNLIKELY AUTHOR

III - A TALE OF TWO (or more) AESTHETICS

IV - ia KAMANDALU

V - THE COMMUNITY AND THE REALITIES

VI - AN EVENING AT EZTV

VII - CURATORIAL COLLABORATIONS

VIII - THE TIME OF CRISIS

IX - MOVIN' TO MELROSE

X - THE LEGACY

## I. DEGAUSSED

The recently discovered archaeological site at Gobeke Tepe, Turkey, was never assumed to exist. For centuries, scholars around the world had pompously strutted around their classrooms and academic conferences, declaring their canon for the history of civilization, based on this ignorance. It's now newly discovered recognition is transforming the timeline of history, adding over 7,000 years to the 'official' existence of civilization. The fact that it had not been previously recognized, of course, never negated its existence; it's just that history had been forgotten.

Based on this ignorance, history became less of a science and more of a form of literary art, crafting a tightly woven, yet altogether false, narrative. This literary art is based more on what has been forgotten, than what has been preserved.

The City of Ubar, although discussed in the Koran (but physically undiscovered until a collaboration between an amateur archaeologist and NASA), is an example of something actually described, but, based on its source, never believed. It did not become 'true' until the academic high-priests, who declare for us, what is and isn't real, accepted what our ancestors had already told us, 1,400 years before.

And over a century ago, another amateur archaeologist challenged the expertise of professional scholars, and discovered the location of Troy, which had previously been declared myth, not history.

History, once written, is easy to erase, especially if it challenges the agenda of the dominant theory. Theories become industries, the interests of which become protected against all competitors. People have erased the evidence of entire cultures, who they declared their enemies, and marginalized, or misrepresented cultures which they neither understood, nor even attempted to understand.

We may, erroneously presume, that modern 'checks and balances' of academia would prevent such historical erasure today. However, while the ancients marked their existences in long-lasting materials such as stone, today, we now declare our presence in the fragile world of electrical impressions, made on materials which can hardly be expected to stand the test of time. The history of today is already being erased, lost, as if, such as Gobeke Tepe, they were never presumed to have existed. Such an erasure, threatens to subvert the very nature of what our human journey has been.

Early analog video is very easy to erase, and much, no doubt has been. Degaussed is the technical term that was once commonplace to describe such erasure.

What else has been forgotten? Possibly so much has been lost, even recently, that any interpretation of history, postulated on such incomplete information, is invalidated by its incompleteness.

### **OPINIONISM.**

There is a common adage that history, is written by the ‘winners’, in other words, by those politically powerful or else at least financed adequately to preserve, promote and publicize their points of view. As true as this old adage may be, I think that a more nuanced and therefore likely to be accurate description is that, as I have stated at talks around the country, that History is the Art of Forgetting. By that I mean that what is forgotten is just as important as what is decided to be remembered by cartel, or cabal, and how such remembrance furthers the pecuniary interests of the living, far more than it arbitrarily honors the dead.

The importance of remembering a wider picture of our past, including our recent past, is the rightful and justified inclusion of the wide variety of cultural differences, who all clamor, correctly so, for their recognition. Recently, Hip-Hop fought successfully to be seen as a true cultural artform, whose music and visuals constitute a description of the joy and pathos of contemporary urban life. Opponents to such an understanding may have used residual racism as the roots of their condescension.

We now live in a world of inter-connected multi-histories, of ripples of time and story that often collide, influence and modify each other, while modern civilization evolves with each colliding wave. The preservation of these ripples of time are then sometimes aggregated into art collections, which seemingly convey attributes corresponding to similarities in genre, period or affiliation.

### **COLLECTING THE UNCOLLECTABLE.**

I am much more concerned as to why something is considered art, and therefore becomes collected, than whether it is really art or not. Of what that even means anymore. Cultural anthropologists seem to suggest that such a notion as to what is or isn't art is culturally relativistic. It possibly borders on racial, sexist, homophobic or cultural prejudice.

It is not my purpose here to ascertain whether a dead shark in formaldehyde or three basketballs in a fish tank, or having yourself shot or crucified, are major cultural achievements of the late 20th Century. Or even for that matter, if disco should be discussed in an art context. That is for each free-thinker to determine for them self. Each of us, free of the constraints of gatekeepers, be they critic, curator, or collector, must contemplate what constitutes the signposts of our generations. Therefore concluding for oneself which collections of art, and/or ephemera are exemplary of a people or a time.

By definition, such collections are the intentional result of collectors, either private or institutional. Many collectors are driven solely by their arbitrary 'tastes', or worse, by the tastes of the cadre of art consultants, and/or critics, who advise on art investment. This overt conflict of interest is hiding in plain sight, and pollutes the credibility and efficacy of curated exhibitions worldwide.

However, there is that rare collector, or preservationist, whose mission is more altruistic, in that no measurable personal gains (other than perhaps emotional satisfaction) can be seen. This is the collector whose vision recognizes the factionary nature of cultural relativity, where the efforts of some communities are deemed more 'worthy' (or fashionable) of preservation, than those of other, more traditionally disenfranchised, discarded or underrepresented communities.

#### **USING THE WORD HISTORY WHEN IT'S ONLY FASHION.**

Science has learned that evidence once relied on in the past, may be faulty, and therefore must constantly be retested. Art History, in order to continue to have any relevance in scholarly thought, uses this process as well. It often adapts its perspective to reevaluate the roles that individuals, movements or cultures have played on society, or the societies in which it interacts.

So, if we are to attempt, not matter how futilely, to improve on the process of historication, then just as in science, constant re-visitation to conventionally held, and conclusionary ideas are mandatory. Otherwise, what we have is more akin to fashion, than history. Fashion, which in and of itself is considered an art form by many, asserts the notion that some designs are superior to others, and should be adopted. While such belief is clearly true in engineering, where some bridges stand while others fall, in the arts, such notions as 'superiority' must be questioned, as to the underlying motives which generate them.

Additionally, fashion constantly changes. What is in vogue one decade may be out the next. Likewise, art, just like fashion shifts, often with the previously declared outsiders taking center stage.

Art History must adopt a procedure closer to Cultural Anthropology, and not just discuss what types of art they find 'worthy' of collection and preservation, but must collect examples of all cultures which are in evidence at any given time. Otherwise, culture becomes degaussed. Only in the very recent past has LGBTQ culture, digital art or pop culture been seen as 'worthy' of serious investigation and preservation.

Physical Anthropology records the anecdotal tale of how the fossilized skull cap of what became known as Piltdown Man was first discovered by road workers in England, who mistaking it for an old coconut, smashed it into several pieces. When a local scientist asked the workers if they ever found anything unusual, they gave him one of the smashed pieces. Only because he immediately could identify the fragment as something of scientific value, was the discovery actually made. The old adage 'one man's junk is another man's treasure' comes to mind. And what is considered treasure becomes, by both private and institutional hands, 'collectable'.

It seems as if almost everything is ultimately, collectable. In recent years we have seen enormous prices at auction for all types of not just art, but various other kinds of cultural memorabilia. Baseballs from historic ball games, love letters by rock stars, early personal computers, postage stamps from extinct nations, musical instruments used to record hit records, props from movies, all are as valuable as many art objects. Even toys, lunchboxes, trading cards, antique guns, and other mass-produced items, now made rare through their popular abandonment, are valued, and may secure high prices at auction. Once these items are deemed 'important' enough to be collected, then they are studied by culturists as well.

Is the EZTV 'collection' something that should be studied by art historians, sociologists, and cultural practitioners in the LGBTQ, feminist, punk, transhumanist, and other so-called alternative communities? I think so. But of course I'm admittedly biased. If the Long Beach Museum Video Annex's collection constitutes an important body of work, as evidence of a unique or alternative aesthetic direction to the long-shadow of Hollywood, then clearly EZTV's alternative stance does equally as well.

## **PRESUMPTION STANDS AS THE CENTERPIECE OF PROPAGANDA.**

What I will call OPINIONISM, like narcissism, is unrelated to any basis in objective evidence. Rather, opinionism derives its authoritative stance, gleaned from factoids, presumption presented as preponderant evidence, not needing a burden of proof that is clear and convincing, and certainly well below the standard of 'beyond a reasonable doubt'. Simply put, we routinely accept as truth, information that would not be admissible evidence in a criminal courtroom.

This is a bold, perhaps contentious statement, I realize, yet one I have said many times. I have not said this to provoke, or alienate, although that has sometimes happened, but as way of explanation. In terms of EZTV's context, this statement currently best demonstrates an informed, deconstructed reality. This reality is not just for EZTV, but for other degaussed artistic movements, whose contributions are ignored, co-opted, misrepresented or misconstrued. For as the first, highly inaccurate drafts of media art history have now been presented, the exclusion of EZTV through either oversight or choice, negligent or intentional, is as much a part of any discourse on the subject, as are the artists arbitrarily included, so far, in the official media arts canon.

Has this initial exclusion been due to class-ism – the elitism of the academy to reward its own graduates, or its pecuniary allies? Is it due to the complexity of EZTV's culturally pluralistic programming, which purposely rejected the narrow band-width of genre-specific curatorship, therefore, confusing its 'brand'? Or, most distastefully, it is due to residual homophobia, steaming from the many LGBTQ founding members of EZTV, long gone, many due to AIDS?

It may be one, none, or all of these reasons, but more likely it is simply due to an academic myopia, currently systemic in the educational/industrial complex. A self-centered belief that one's own knowledge base is larger than it actually is. Such so-called 'scholarship' must whole-heartedly be rejected by any researcher who presumes to foster accuracy or objectivity. Whether through incompetency or malicious intent, EZTV's exclusion from recognition of its contributions, by 'experts' within the art/industrial complex, raises the question as to who is being served by such exclusion.

A decade ago, in 2003, I was asked by SIGGRAPH art chair (and Otis College Professor) Michael Wright, to contribute an essay to the conference catalog. My article was titled "Is the Age of Expertise Over?". Although I left the question I raised unanswered, today, a decade since, that question is more critical than ever. For if the 'experts' fail to produce accurate histories, than what value, if any, do these histories have?

It should actually be more of interest to any true historian which artworks, artists and artistic movements have not so far been included in the official media arts canon. Or have not received Macarthur 'genius awards', or major museum retrospectives. For historification is a volitional process with overt commercial implications, overseen by well-connected, powerful and affluent collectors and their institutional advocates. Or, unwittingly mitigated, by the lazy researcher, pretending expertise, yet merely scratching the surface, doing the expected, promoting the previously promoted, and missing the subject entirely.

Historification adds value to a portfolio, collection, or catalog of work, and enhances the financial benefit to investor-collectors, looking to take advantage of a largely unregulated art market. Whether seeking resale at an enormous profit, or else taking a loss, for its equally advantageous tax benefits, historification has become a clear business strategy, involving a cartel of collectors, gallerists, art administrators, critics and museums, all enhanced through acceptance of the path to historification of certain artists.

In an age when some Los Angeles area museum directors have been reported to being paid twice the salary of the President of the United States, there can be no delusion that art's regional management is very much, a mainstream professional career, equal in stature and compensation to the corporate executive class. Such an institutional system can hardly be seen as alternative to anything in mainstream culture, certainly not to the Hollywood film industry, the sports industry, or any other aspect of big-ticket consumer society.

The notion of an alternative to this self-serving, and self-perpetuating system, has been in evidence throughout the advent and proliferation of the art/industrial complex. These alternative art movements, and the spaces which spawn and nurture them, are as much a part of any true, multicultural history of art, as are the stories of the 'hard-drinking, hard-loving son of a guns', who populate the mythologies of abstract expressionism.

A cultural eco-system, in which various species of art-practice compete, co-exist, or interbreed, is clearly the more accurate environment for cultural discourse. Premised more on the best theories and practices of cultural anthropology, than on the fashion-based subjectivism of art history, including the significance of truly alternative art spaces is a fertile ground for exploration. The current brand and fashion of mainstream contemporary art history must be seen as merely the history, or accounting, of collector-based art.

In such an environment, the life-cycles of alternative artists' spaces, which by their nature mandate radically different approaches to their existences than the industry of art collection and historification, must be critically preserved, taught, studied and written about.



## II. UNLIKELY AUTHOR

Of course, I fully recognize that it should have been John Dorr, and not I, writing this 'self-portrait' of EZTV. Dorr did, in fact, leave behind the beginnings of such a history, uncompleted at the time of his death. His draft extensively covers the years before my involvement with EZTV (1979-82), so I will leave that as the definitive telling of those three years.

Once EZTV Video Gallery was actually formed, in 1983, Dorr's draft, only in very brief sketch form, outlines the time from then forward. Although he speaks in the plural, in terms of the creators of EZTV, he fails to mention some of these various people by name. Some, integral to any reasonably accurate telling of this complex story, are never mentioned at all. Without their integral inclusion, the story is not just incomplete, but misleading. Hopefully, had he completed his history, all those whose contributions should have been properly credited, would have been included. Or perhaps he realized, facing his battle with AIDS, that the task of telling the rest of the story would ultimately fall to others.

I also fully recognize that the accuracy of anyone's self-portrait, memoir, or autobiography, is suspect. And well it should be. It is likely to assume that such a self-history has been idealized, focusing on strong points and perhaps downplaying or excluding altogether, the weak points. Critical thinking must take over, in any reading of anything which can rightly be perceived as self-serving. I believe strongly that those who write their own histories are really writing a type of infomercial, no matter how well-meaning the intent may be. I cannot promise that this essay will be any different. But I can promise that I can either prove everything I state as fact, or else reasonably elaborate on any philosophical or opinionated assertion.

I have supported myself, throughout my time in LA, as a video/filmmaker. So, it would seem logical for me to tell my take on EZTV's story, through the medium of film. But after careful consideration, and noticing the intrinsic limitations of a traditional linear documentary film on this complicated subject, I decided to make my 'documentary film' about EZTV as a website instead. I feel the need to explain this decision, in order to make the website have more substantive value to anyone who wishes to explore it.

Commercially released documentary films are often now expected to adopt storytelling theories, from narrative fiction films, and/or novels, and create 'good stories', sometimes, I fear, at the expense of 'good information'. The simple truth is that compelling information is often not linear enough, simple enough to convey, or 'plot-driven' enough, to be best served

by time-based experiences. Non-linear, interactive models, such as are available online are vastly superior ways to convey complex, intrinsically multi-linear narratives.

So, with these admissions I finally publish, instead of a traditional linear book, or documentary film, this non-linear online museum, as my 'official' history of EZTV and its sister organization CyberSpace Gallery. It is designed to be explored in any order of interest, and to cross-reference as much as possible, whatever cross-over elements apply.

### **INTENDED AUDIENCE.**

Obviously, I do not expect this website to be of general interest to any 'wide audience'. I leave that ambition to date-movies, pulp novels, reality television, episodic cop dramas, and slice-of-life sitcoms. Rather this reference source is conceived as an artifact to be used by anyone interested in the socio-anthropology of late 20th century media arts culture. Authored by someone who if not a witness to history (because scholars have not deemed it historical), then at least a witness to a type of socio-political petri dish, with specimens which ranged from the AIDS pandemic to the proliferation of the digital revolution and onto the recognition that physical difference does not warrant unnecessary limitation.

I have taken every effort, to include all those who had a major impact on the EZTV/ CyberSpace story. I intend to update, and include, any who may have slipped through the cracks. As I said at the outset, history is the art of forgetting and I, no doubt, have been a practitioner of this art-form, as well.

John Dorr's death, in 1993, of AIDS related complications, thrust upon me, and the few that persevered with me, the unwanted responsibility of running EZTV. And therefore, preserving its history. Not just John Dorr's history, not just my own history, and the history of my collaborators, but the history of a community that in many cases I hardly knew. Or in several cases, never knew at all. At that time of assuming this responsibility, I felt neither financially nor emotionally qualified to take this on. But it was clear to some, at least those that truly cared about EZTV, that I should try. Over 20 years have passed since that time, and EZTV, although greatly changed, survived. Much of that credit belongs to Kate Johnson, of which you will hear more later.

Therefore this non-linear book/online museum is the culmination of an admittedly subjective story, told from the perspectives of two very different directions, one that started in 1979 by John Dorr, and the one that shifted when others became involved, on a daily basis, since 1983. (end of introduction)

### III. A TALE OF TWO (OR MORE) AESTHETICS

EZTV's over 30 year timeline is really best understood as the friendly bombarding against each other of two, seemingly incompatible aesthetics, that of founder John Dorr and that of my own. They really had very little in common. It is ironic that it was mine that survived, now allowing for Dorr's rediscovery and reevaluation, over 20 years after his death.

In both technology as well as aesthetics, we had different visions of the future.

For John Dorr a revolution had occurred, where low cost home video equipment could be used to create films which would be seen by millions. Having made films on his own home equipment, he saw that people would take media into their own hands and create work that many would see. The term "DIY" was not yet coined, but its philosophical roots, well-articulated in Dorr's early interviews, are clear.

But for me, having recently finished my tenure at what was at the time, the most advanced photo-technical laboratory on earth, knew that high-tech would, and should, always have an integral place in art making. And the continuously revelatory advancements of state-of-the-art productions, some admittedly costly hundreds of millions of dollars, would draw audiences, and critical attention, for some time.

We were both right.

Aesthetically, Dorr's love of cinema, or "movies" as he preferred to call them, vastly contrasted with my own interest in contemporary art. He loved the long-form of theatrical features. I was drawn to experimental ways of creating imagery, and storytelling.

In so many ways, taste-wise, Dorr and I differed far more than we agreed. Yet, precisely because of our explorations in decidedly differing genres, and through the critical input of many others, the breath of EZTV's curatorial posture became unlike anything being seen in Los Angeles in the 1980's. Today, when the limits of curatorial exploration is much debated in the mainstream contemporary art museum culture, these EZTV ideas from the 1980's are still, curiously, radical.

Yet, as in any economic system, resources, some substantial, were needed to launch EZTV from an idea mulling in the brain of John Dorr, in his tiny garage-apartment in West Hollywood, to an ongoing physical space, with expensive equipment which needed to be purchased and maintained. Despite Dorr's initial belief that credible work could be made and

widely distributed using only home equipment, he soon learned that more professional level equipment, such as what was being provided at the Long Beach Museum Video Annex, would be needed.

### **AVI & LEAH BAHR.**

No account of the EZTV story can be made without recognition of the several 'angels', who, in the early days, contributed and set-up the hardware necessary for such a story to be even possible. It is all too common for chronicles to 'short-hand' history, or to compress the actions of several into one person. When John Dorr started EZTV Video Gallery, it was very poorly equipped. Dorr had a simple Betamax camera and recorder, several TV sets and purchased a rudimentary Betamax to ¾" off-line editing system. Robert Hernandez loaned the money to purchase a second, pro level ¾" editing system. I had pro level multitrack audio recording gear and a primitive home computer, and Pat Evan & Earl Miller had a few lights. That was it.

But Avi & Leah Bahr, two more different persons from EZTV than anyone could possible imagine, came forward and loaned us, for the next five years, and at absolutely no cost, the professional tools which brought us into a serious operation. They did so, and with no strings attached, except for the hope, that some good work would be created from their contribution.

The Bahrs were, politically speaking so different from us, that I have often wondered how they even found out about us. Avi was in the military when he first came into the space and offered to lend us his stuff. He was politically extremely conservative, and he joked that his politics were 'far to the right of Attila the Hun". He and his wife proudly practiced their religion (they were very conservative Jews), and knew that we were largely a group of mainly atheists, sexually active, politically liberal and that many here were openly gay.

Avi would say that he couldn't stand much of the work that was being made or shown at EZTV, but he would 'fight, or die, for our right to make or show them'. In some ways, Avi was the truest example of the belief of the American spirit of freedom of expression I have ever known.

### **COMING TOGETHER.**

Despite our differing tastes, John Dorr and I did absolutely agree on one thing, the importance of true independence in art making, and exhibition. Artmaking had become an

industrial enterprise, with the same distribution and publicity requirements, of supposedly more ‘commercial’ endeavors, such as the music business, or even the automobile industry. Also, a growing tendency to integrate corporate and governmental support into the standard practice of widely promoted artists was troubling to both of us.

The rise of Reganomics had engulfed both the contemporary art scene as well as movie-making, leaving anyone outside of this ‘trickle-down’ funding system as unrepresented.

### **THE CORE GROUP.**

In addition to Avi & Leah Bahr, there were others who brought equipment into the space, usually for low-cost rental fees. These included John Hays, Pat Barr and Suzanne Taylor.

During the first several years of EZTV, a number of promising producers, in a variety of such unrepresented genres, from LGBTQ, to quirky comedy, and from dramatic narrative features, to experimental short works, made and screened credible projects at EZTV. Dorr’s initial focus was to program feature-length work, inspired by traditional narrative cinema. It was really what he thought EZTV would be known for. The press, especially the local press, paid serious attention. But audience attendance was mixed, with some works drawing very large crowds, and others, no matter how critically acclaimed, unable to ever find their audience.

In the short-hand, sound bite, bumper sticker world of historicization, if EZTV actually does ever become historicized, then it is possible that only John Dorr and possibly Kate Johnson, ia Kamandalu and myself will be in the short version. But EZTV was really a much larger collective of in-house artist/producers, whom I hope to effectively argue, must be included in any EZTV history. Among the most prolific of EZTV’s in-house producers were the industrious partnership of Shepard and Miller.

### **NIGHTFALL PRODUCTIONS.**

Mark Shepard and Patricia Miller (aka Nightfall Productions), with their team of Dan Silva, Geoff Watkins, Rod Matsui, Sam Oldham and others, produced a prodigious number of works, initially focusing on documentaries about science-fiction writers. During the first few years of EZTV, they produced a weekly half-hour series in collaboration with KPDK’s sci-fi radio program “Hour 25”. No other EZTV producers created so much programming.

Nighfall then entered into the so-called “B-Movie” genre, often starring legendary “Scream Queen” Brinke Stevens. Stevens, was a living example of what a female James Bond character

might be- brilliant, beautiful and mysterious. A marine biologist by training, she always conveyed a professional, yet unpretentious attitude, delightfully stating that her claim to fame was having done “more nude shower scenes than any other actress in Hollywood” (a claim that was apparently accurate). She would tool around town, driving her fabulous, mint-condition, jet black '57 T-Bird (with “Brinke” license plates) and was one of the few EZTV performers, with true celebrity status.

Nightfall tried to satisfy a need for product in the seemingly insatiable ‘direct-to-video’ marketplace of the 1980’s, with Stevens as their muse. But their projects, often portraying the over-the-top gratuitous female nudity and gory violence which was emblematic of the B-Movie genre, did not reflect the mainstay of EZTV.

By 1989, Nightfall was no longer associated with EZTV. Their leaving opened the way for a greater focus, by artists such as Annieliese Viraldiev, ia Kamandalu, Mark Gash, myself and others, for a more contemporary art-centric focus. This focus ultimately won out, above all others, including long-form narrative fiction, and became the focus EZTV was known for by the mid-1990’s.

But prior to Nightfall’s departure, it was primarily Mark Shepard’s tireless obsession for making videos, which created the ambiance often associated with an evening at early EZTV. Shepard’s seemingly endless output of trailers, short interstitial videos (mostly comedic in nature), bogus public service announcements, ads or other entertaining distractions, brought both a light-heartedness to the screenings, as well as a more produced and programmatic tone to the evening. EZTV became a total experience.

This, more programmatic approach to video exhibition, greatly differentiated EZTV from other media art exhibitors at that time, such as the Long Beach Museum, or LACE.

More than anyone else, it was Shepard that created an exhibition screening style that was dramatically different than the style used in other art spaces, as he edited the evening’s programs together. He put a signature on these events, and therefore EZTV, that often went uncredited.

## **T. JANKOWSKI.**

T. Jankowski addressed Queer culture with a daring and unapologetic perspective that challenged the ambiguous boundaries between straight and gay.

An integral artistic voice in the early years of EZTV, Jankowski's body of work, a mix of narrative and non-narrative experimental film vocabularies, was among the most provocative of the early EZTV videos. I really thought he was on to something and wished he had continued to experiment. The work had a completely different exploratory direction than anything I had seen at LAICA, LACE or Long Beach. As I recall, he created four EZTV videos in total, all dealing with an obsessive, deeply psychological world of jealousy, sexuality and murder.

Jankowski moved on around 1985, if I recall correctly, when he and his friends bought a home in Ireland. He ultimately returned to the East Coast of the U.S.

### **JAMES WILLIAMS.**

Often overlooked in terms of his indispensable contributions to early EZTV, James Williams is a videomaker, photographer, graphic and sculptural artist, clothes designer and curator.

Williams was EZTV's first Art Director, as well as curator of wall art. He also decorated portions of the original EZTV Video Gallery with his own original art works. These inventive and elegant designs were often created using recycled (and otherwise disposed of) materials such as Styrofoam packing materials (reclaimed from video equipment boxes) and used photographic seamless paper.

As an openly gay African-American man, Williams was rightfully proud of both his ancestry as well as his identity. Although since its earliest inceptions, EZTV had always exhibited various aspects of the Queer aesthetic, usually either serious dramatic works, such as the collaborations of James Carol Picket and Michael Kearns, or the camp comedy of Mark Addy, or Jaime Walters, Williams introduced true gay erotica to the space. He championed an understanding of a 'sex positive' stance on adult-themed cinema. Mainstream contemporary art operatives, often misunderstood this then-radical theory, often confusing sexually frank material, for mere pornography.

A clear double-standard can be argued to have existed in the early 1980's. Throughout LA's then art eco-system, the rightfully celebrated rise of frank and self-empowered sexual content in the work of feminist and other performance art, was being elevated to high-brow art discourse. However, equally frank LGBTQ work was marginalized. Ultimately, EZTV would both adopt and then adapt this "sex-positive" philosophy, well before the term was coined. Both LGBTQ as well as straight sexual lifestyles became just another creative subject for

investigation, among the myriad of others being explored, in the course of the culturally pluralistic journey that EZTV was taking.

James Williams created the visual motifs for which the EZTV Video gallery became associated. He created the EZTV logo, which became a registered trademark for EZTV, He made numerous visual treatments for the gallery, and his short experimental videos were among EZTV first's experiments in video art. His Polaroids taken at EZTV parties captured the mood and tone of what the space was all about.

Williams' most lasting contribution to EZTV, other than the EZTV logo, was the creation of the gallery's controversial wall art tradition. He curated monthly wall art shows, both Queer and straight, and from the very beginning, pushed the boundaries, with exhibitions of controversial artists Tom of Finland ( before LACE or other art spaces embraced him), X-rated comic book artist R. Crumb and 'low-brow' master painter Robert Williams. Such exhibitions set a tone for EZTV's role as an outsider to conventional contemporary art theory. And a challenger to the dogma of an official canon to contemporary art.

#### **SLEAZYTV.**

In addition to the gay themes from many of EZTV's core artists, the space welcomed the efforts of LGBTQ work from around the country. Within EZTV's first year, John Dorr programmed selected highlights from the SF Gay & Lesbian Film Festival. Some art cognoscenti, never having seen any of these films, unfortunately assumed incorrectly, that they were 'gay porn' and branded the space 'SleazyTV'. In some circles, the name stuck.

EZTV's diverse community dared to inform and humanize the straight-world's perception of LGBTQ culture, by presenting a variety of projects that celebrated, explored, or critiqued the experience, as well as understanding, of Queer art. Like the Woman's Building, Visual Communications, KAOS TV, and other identity-focused alternative art spaces, EZTV filled a much-needed gap in the cultural infrastructure. But unlike the Woman's Building, John Dorr did not choose to define EZTV in any unilateral identity-context. By any stretch of the imagination, Dorr could have easily named the space "the Gay Building". Maybe he would have done better if he had. But he understood that human rights empowered any of the so-called outcasts. In one sense we were all outcasts at EZTV, and in that regard, we were all welcome. Separatism was never the goal. Independent video was.

An unspoken philosophy permeated the space. I like to simply see it as Humanism. Most of the co-founders of EZTV, certainly the ones who stayed on, seemed uncomfortable in the



more formalistic notions of either traditional art aesthetics, or else the traditional notions of mainstream Hollywood. Here was to be a place where all open-minded, non-judgmental persons, gay, straight, black, white, male, female, transhumanist, etc., were welcome. Welcome to create, to discuss, or to view. Although I never discussed this with John, I'm sure he would agree that was very much his intention. I hope so, because it was certainly a tradition I became committed to continue.

But the open door policy apparently created a misconception to the mainstream art establishment, who saw cultural pluralism, as some sort of unschooled lack of focus, and therefore, a lack of curatorial excellence. Ironically, John Dorr was a Yale graduate, with art history as his major. He knew exactly what he was doing, and we all agreed, this was to be at least one direction for the future of art. But the misconception of SleazyTV stuck, and marginalized us.

In some stances, it took years to unravel this misconception, and I believe that this opinion still remains pervasive in some few instances. It was sad to see that even artists, and their administrators, curators and educators, could be so bigoted and closed-minded about other artists' explorations.

Some however, were open-minded enough, and daring enough to venture forward and make their mark on EZTV.

#### **STRAWN BOVEE.**

Actor/producer Strawn Bovee, one of several actors who can rightly claim to be EZTV founding members, appeared in many of the earliest of the EZTV projects. These included two of Dorr's early features, as well as subsequent works by T. Jankowski, Nightfall Productions and several other independent directors, including the first feature by Dan Sallit. She would later go on to continue to collaborate with Sallit again, after he left the EZTV family.

Bovee's striking presence and dramaturgical skill elevated the level of Dorr's productions. She was arguably, the first actor to really 'get' EZTV. Like many others in the EZTV community, she was affiliated with other notable artists outside of EZTV, including post-modern dance pioneer Rudy Perez, and alternative theater producer Scott Kelman.

Some of the criticism that Dorr's early Betamax movies received was unevenness in the acting. He would use a combination of a few trained actors, such as Bovee, and then fill out

the cast with number of his non-actor friends. This adversely impacted the work. Bovee stood out as the exception.

Bovee's own productions at EZTV include, most notably, the live multimedia art/science performance event: "An Astral Tea Party". She was among the few artists that, although never having an on-going daily involvement with EZTV, can be seen as a core member.

She has continued to understand the significance that EZTV played in California's media art history, has worked from time to time with its current team, and has been an outspoken advocate for its acceptance into mainstream contemporary art history.

### **M'LISSA MAYO.**

Writer/performer/musician M'Lissa Mayo introduced performance art to EZTV, as well as connecting it to LA's burgeoning underground art scene. Although formally trained as an actor and classical clarinetist, she was compelled to interface more with visual artists than the more typical actor-types. She experimented with the boundaries between sexuality, spirituality, fetish and politics, as well as creating works combining live and pre-recorded performance, in ways still rare in those days, in Los Angeles.

Her live multi-media performances included her series "Heal the City", which attempted to grasp the illusionary disparity between saving the planet, and saving our civilization.

Active in the LA 'performance poet' scene, long before the fashionable 'slam poetry' movement took off, she saw the impact that spoken word would have. She moved out of LA and lost touch with EZTV, but during her EZTV tenure also served as a vital cultural diplomat in bringing to the space, two of its most seminal visual artists, Victor Acevedo and Mark Gash.

### **VICTOR ACEVEDO.**

Digital artist Victor Acevedo, in addition to his own body of work, has contributed to the discourse concerning computer based, or 'cyberart', as well as being an important ambassador between the digital and non-digital art communities.

He has participated in many of the seminal EZTV and ultimately CyberSpace Gallery collaborations, involving SIGGRAPH as well as major multi-organizational events such as On The Threshold (1985), produced by Joan Collins and Robert Gelman, the CyberArts

International Conferences (1990-92), produced by Robert Gelman and Dominic Milano, as well as LA Art, and the various activities of the LA Digilantes, a movement he co-founded with Otis College professor, Michael Wright.

Acevedo introduced Michael J. Masucci to art historian/curator Patric Prince (one of the first historians studying computer art). This meeting resulted not just in EZTV Gallery's seminal computer art show ART 1990, but subsequently in the formation of CyberSpace Gallery, by Masucci & Prince. Acevedo also played a key role in the formation and operation of the gallery, clearly among the world's first dedicated to digital art.

### **MARK GASH.**

There is no way to fully describe the complex soul that was Mark Gash. Paraplegic, dwarfed in size, and wheel-chair bound his whole life; he was a constant example of someone who could do the impossible. He remains one of the bravest people I have had the privilege to know, and was one of a handful of people who knew no obstruction that he wouldn't try to overcome.

He never made excuses for his condition, and was able to live independently, lived in exotic locations such as Barcelona and the Polynesian Island of Palau ( where he was initiated as a shaman)and was a raconteur and provocateur. He was a fixture in art circles in LA, New York and Dallas.

Gash was the first person with third-degree osteogenesis imperfecta to graduate college. He then beat his own record and got an MFA from CalArts, studying under John Baldersari.

Gash was primarily a painter, of large, complex surrealist psychosexual narratives, often including the personas of his friends and other inhabitants of LA's hip underground art culture. Over the years, I found myself, and other EZTVers, in a number of these paintings, sometimes doing bizarre things. Gash was also a writer, and performer, and was a member of the Screen Actors Guild. He loved music and various West Coast rock stars were among his friends and patrons.

Gash took on many creative endeavors, curated shows at EZTV, and created its first website.

### **ANNELIESE VIRALDIEV.**

John Dorr had known actor/visual artist Anneliese Viraldiev, from when they both worked for the venerable film festival Filmex. Viraldiev was one of a group of so-called 'film-nerds' that included Lloyd Cohen, Dan Sallit and Bill Krohn, that had become interested in Dorr and EZTV's activities.

"The Voice of Filmex", Viraldiev made her living as a professional voice-over artist, in major motion pictures, TV, radio, and in live events. She also had been an artists' model since a teenager, and had a true understanding, and love, of the greatness that could be the art of film. She introduced me to a variety of artists ranging from the work of Andre Tarkovsky, and onto Japanese Butoh.

She used her background as an artist's model to conceive a conceptual art show at EZTV called "Video is the Medium of Narcissism". The show had one of the most interesting premises of any exhibition I was part of. Viraldiev made the persuasive assertion that an artist model is at least as responsible for the authorship of a piece, as was the so-called 'artist'. She asked about a dozen artists, in many different media and styles, to render her nude torso. She even asked her doctor, to create an X-ray of her. But she was to be seen as the artist, not just the model, and the artists, were to be seen in a more diminished capacity, more typical of what is generally the position of the model. I thought it was brilliant.

In addition to her own notable work, her bringing of work such as Jean Luc-Goddard to EZTV, as well as introducing the Cinematheque Francaise and Cannes Film Festival to EZTV. Viraldiev, now associated with the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art, was among the first artists to not just bring international recognition to EZTV, but to expand its programming to include recognized filmmakers ( such as Chantal Akerman) as well.

### **OTHER CORE ARTISTS.**

It would be counter-factual to assert that only these core artists were the DNA that combined to form the early EZTV. These were among those, however, whose impact affected me enough to inform my direction of the space, after John Dorr died.

Besides the aforementioned, the contributions of other key EZTV producers, most notably James "Dillinger" Baker, Mark Addy, Ken Camp, Nick Frangakis, Pat Evan & Earl Miller, Phoebe Wray and Kit Van Zandt, Rob Sullivan, Jaime Walters. Sondra Lowell, Malignant Buffont, and Michael Kearns were also among the artists who produced work regularly in the initial days of EZTV's first video gallery.

Of them, only Sondra Lowell continued to be involved with EZTV, on a daily basis. In her case, she, in addition to being “The Tap Dancing Newscaster” on KABC radio, worked as a staff editor at EZTV, until the mid-1990’s.

#### **THE TAP DANCING NEWSCASTER.**

Sondra Lowell brought a type of comedic performance art to EZTV that broke boundaries in every direction. Her tongue-in-cheek deadpan manner, in portraying a series of ‘how to’ video parodies, such as “How to Make a Salad Bar Salad”, “How to Avoid Relationships” and “How to Walk on Hot Mashed Potatoes” made for the most bizarre video series at EZTV.

But her on-going role on KABC drive-time morning radio show “The Ken and Bob Show” as “The Tap Dancing Newscaster” was what she was best known for. In this, she would sing actual news stories, to the tune of “Tea For Two”, while tapping dancing.

Lowell sought permission from Andy Warhol, to produce a stage version of his 8 hour film “Sleep”, which he granted. She mounted the stage production, as a one-night only event, in which the audience, who were encouraged to bring their own sleeping bags, for the overnight experience, which ended with breakfast.

#### **THE TRANSITION.**

By the mid-80’s others, various artists would come and go, some for extended periods and other only briefly, as well as influential guest producer/curators such as Dr. Timothy Leary, Patric Prince, Barbara Trent, Lewis Macadams and Mike Kaplan, developed a scope and diversity of understanding of the medium, that allowed for rapid change, and evolution.

Of all of these aforementioned artists, throughout the mid 1980’s- late 1990’s, without question, ia Kamandalu had the most lasting impact.

## IV. ia Kamandalu

Artist/performer/producer ia Kamandalu (aka Kim McKillip) brought on a tenure of works which elevated EZTV's reputation simultaneously in both art circles as well as the emerging digital art scene. Her visual music collaborations (often with me, collectively known as "Vertical Blanking"), became some of the most iconic of the EZTV videos. And some of the work for which I am most proud.

Kamandalu had already produced her own videos when she walked into EZTV to attend a screening. When we met, she agreed to work with me on a project which I had attempted several times previously to produce, called "Lemuria".

Her creative instincts and raw talent made for a new chapter, and with her striking beauty, and stunning performances, which combined bravado with vulnerability, sensuality with an open-frailty and honesty, she quickly became the female face and personae of the new EZTV. She was creative as well as daring and the combination set the bar higher than before.

Lemuria became the best-selling EZTV home VHS, found its way to galleries and other art venues, and was screened numerous times on West Hollywood Cable TV, where it earned cult status. Our stature in art circles was enhanced through this piece, and we continued to make a number of videos and stage several live multimedia projects until the death of John Dorr in 1993.

The two most notable of these videos were "Theater of Dreams (I thought this is what you wanted)" and "Deposition", which became well known in the cyberarts circles and emerging digital art scene. Both became milestones in EZTV's catalog and still among the most favorite of all of EZTV's productions.

Kamandalu's career in the arts was greatly affected by the death of John Dorr. This is another impact of the AIDS pandemic, for the lives of those who survive, who are friends, colleagues or employees of those who died of AIDS complications, are also changed forever. Door's death prevented Kamandalu from continuing her video and multimedia work at a time when public and critical interest was never greater. Instead, she buckled down with the remaining staff, and worked to continue EZTV through its bleakest hour.

Her arrival at EZTV, diversified the tone and look of the EZTV works, and allowed me to experiment with daring and provocative subjects. EZTV never was the same after she arrived. She moved on in the late 1990's and has continued to make her art in her own way.

## V. THE COMMUNITY AND THE REALITIES

### THE COMMUNITY

There were also guest, community-oriented organizations and their leaders. There are many among these groups that could be named here, but mostly notably Zina Bethune of Dance Outreach, Joan Collins of LA-SIGGRAPH, Michelle Hershorn of LACPS, Nick Frangakis of the Hays Foundation, Barbara Trent of the Empowerment Project and Robert Gelman of BGA Media stand out. The International Documentary Association also held monthly screenings, and several screenings organized by the American Film Institute, the Los Angeles Festival, the Gay & Lesbian Media Coalition (forerunner of Outfest) and Anne Bray's LA FreeWaves took place as well.

### VIDEO THEATER 'HITS'

This diversity, beginning in EZTV's earliest days, also guaranteed a level of excellence that expanded well beyond the self-produced works, many of which lacked the level needed for serious attention. And attracted inspiring work from outside the EZTV family.

Actually, the largest "hits", in terms of audience size, were by productions not made by the core of EZTV artists.

In 1985, it was to be a documentary about a beat poet, "What Happened to Kerouac" by Richard Lerner and Lewis Maccadams, which became what the LA Times called the world's "first video theater hit". Its success allowed EZTV to expand from a cramped 700 square foot space, to one over ten times that size. Lewis Maccadmas would go on to collaborate with John Dorr and crew, in making 26 one-hour documentaries of leading literary figures. The Lannon Literary Series, as it was called, became John Dorr's largest body of work.

'Kerouac' was one of a handful of EZTV presentations, mostly documentaries, which found audiences equal in size to a traditional film theater. Besides the documentaries, some digital art events and projects such as Dave Markey's underground Rock'n'Roll narrative features ("Desperate Teenage Lovedolls" and "Lovedolls Superstar"), drew exceptionally large crowds. But the success of some work may have frustrated those making less popular projects.

## **THE CORE GROUP SHIFTS**

After EZTV's first two years as a gallery (1983-5), many of the initial EZTV members, primarily those who Dorr had worked with prior to EZTV, had moved on, or altogether stopped making work.

Some moved on because of better career opportunities, and pursued 'industry' careers, but some became frustrated by their lack of instant acclaim, and gave up. A few who left cited issues with what they felt was too much power being given just to Dorr, and the ignoring of the various other less publicized members who were making major contributions.

Others were simply scared off by the mounting economic responsibilities needed to guarantee continuance of the space. Many wanted to enjoy the numerous perks of having access to such a space, and come and go when they pleased, knowing the space would somehow, miraculously, be there when they arrived. But few wanted to contribute to paying for it.

This left only a handful of highly dedicated, if not deranged persons, who took on full-time, the burdensome financial obligations of operating the space. EZTV was not seeking support from grants, and wanted to prove that independent video could survive without the trickle-down of Reganomics.

## **MAKING THE RENT, NOT MOPPING THE FLOOR**

In addition to Dorr, it would be primarily Mark Shepard, Patricia Miller and myself that initially assumed the daily management and financial burdens needed to guarantee the weekly screenings and generous daily equipment access, which so many enjoyed (and often took for granted). A handful of others, most notably James Williams, routinely contributed as well. When ia Kamandalu joined the staff in the late 1980's she also became a major contributor to the workload.

Alternative art spaces suffer from a small productive labor pool, but a very large group of others, who participate in the activities of those spaces.

The large extended family of EZTV, who used the equipment, and staged or attended screenings or art shows at EZTV, rarely inquired about the economic model on which the space survived. Or offered to assist in any way, in its upkeep. Not even in non-financial ways.



EZTV could be often chaotic, and very often, the place, understandably, became a mess. In addition to the editing systems churning out projects, and the camera teams setting up lights, all the ancillary operations needed to make video were taking place. Sets being built, flats being painted, art show being hung, food being cooked, costumes being made, in any corner where something could happen, something likely was.

Neither John, nor the rest of us, could usually keep it under control for very long. No matter the countless hours we all spent keeping the place afloat, we would often be reminded about the mess, as if we should stop and do something about it. We'd all quip 'We're working, if you don't like the mess, pick up a broom'. Dorr greatly resented these people, as the rest of us often would ourselves. I jokingly referred to them as 'waltzers', as they would waltz in, and waltz out, as they pleased. They saw themselves as integral partners, but the working core thought of them as unwelcome outsiders, or dilatants.

A few, open-minded and daring cultural explorers investigated all that EZTV had to offer, but most stayed inside the comfort of their own 'genre-bubble' and never saw the extent to what the space was involved in.

## VI. AN EVENING AT EZTV

The experience an audience member would have at an evening at EZTV evolved quickly. And varied dramatically from night to night. At first, many feature-length works would be screened, often with some shorts preceding them. With a few notable exceptions such as two Queer-centric projects: "Blonde Death" by James 'Dillinger Baker, and "Highway Hypnosis" by Ken Camp, feature-length work had a tough time maintaining audience interest. Both Baker and Camp, although neither having any long-term relationship with EZTV, left their marks in the first year of EZTV, and their two features remain among the most interesting, and controversial of the early long-form works.

The other offerings, including documentaries and experimental works seemed to do better with the public, looking for an alternative to movie theater-style storytelling. Soon wall art, curated by James Williams was also shown. These art openings attracted yet another audience which greatly expanded public awareness for the space. And opened the way for the next chapter of the EZTV experience.

### **MY ROLE AS CURATOR/GALLERY DIRECTOR**

James Williams moved on and I assumed the role of wall art gallery director by 1986 and began to integrate live performance as much as possible. That was also the time I created my piece of sculptural graffiti, (and unlikely international hit) "the West Hollywood Sign". And more significantly, began to collaborate with ia Kamandalu.

The unexpected success of the West Hollywood Sign, so delighted John Dorr, that he gave me a "title promotion" (your title increases but your salary doesn't). I went from being EZTV's 'Artistic Coordinator' to 'Co-Artistic Director' with Dorr, a title I held until his death.

Like John Dorr and James Williams, I was also an artist first and programmer/curator second, who used my knowledge to find interesting, and truly alternative art experiences for EZTV. Also, like them, I was interested in programming work that was neither safe, fashionable, nor conventional. I was looking for the outliers, and soon found them.

I soon became known as a curator who would take risks. I liked that. In addition to more typical contemporary art (East Coast style abstract expressionism, to East LA style magic realism), I included more pop culture-style shows, such as "A Tribute to Florence Ballard" (yes, of the singing group "The Supremes"). That wild and border-line camp

exhibition had original costumes that she wore, as well as various artifacts, artworks and memorabilia. Naturally, West Hollywood loved it.

I also presented highly challenging work, such as an early art exhibition by provocative body artists Bob Flanagan & Sheri Rose, as well as controversial events by performance artist Frank Moore, and even more controversial work by Kembra Phaler (including her collaboration with Richard Kern "Sewing Circle"). These daring artists were creating work that attacked the very notions of what art was. Or what was socially acceptable. But I also investigated the other side of 'cutting-edge" (pun intended), and gave soon-to-be internationally acclaimed media artist Jennifer Steincamp, her first one-person show.

I knew I had found my place; I could create my own work, and offer exhibitions to people doing work that challenged our sensibilities. Unlike when I first started at EZTV, I was broke, and basically homeless, but extremely happy. John Dorr's system of inclusion, had not only allowed for me, a straight man in an originally largely gay organization, to not only find a home for my own work, but by extension, building upon James Williams' exhibitions, a home for work that was not yet 'acceptable' for even the other alternative art spaces.

Some of my more controversial offerings, especially "Needles and Pins" by Flanagan & Rose, created an angry rift at EZTV, with some of the more conservative members, as well as clients, threatening to leave EZTV. We did, in fact, lose a few clients. The show, which included extreme genital piercing and what some would call mutilation, was outside the boundaries of even what EZTV had presented before. But John Dorr, in his usual fashion, supported me, and the show did not come down, get censored, or get marginalized. But ultimately it did teach me that I had an eye, and taste-level that competed with mainstream contemporary art curators. EZTV was staging shows as good as the mainstream art circles, just a year or more ahead of them. Within a few years after this, Flanagan & Rose went on to international artistic recognition.

It is ironic that recently, ONE curator David Franz mentioned that show to Sheri Rose. He said she hardly remembered it. But history is the art of forgetting, and although this show arguably helped Flanagan & Rose get to the next level, it apparently made little impact on Sherri Rose. But it could have easily destroyed EZTV. It is strange to think that I, and my supporters took such risks, and the artists for whom this was for, may have never been aware of it. Or even cared.

The computer art shows, however, brought us our most loyal audience, including the community centered on the computer arts conference SIGGRAPH. The international

conference, which was part scientific and engineering papers on the latest technical developments, and part art show and animation festival, was the definitive voice of the computer art, graphics and interactive technology revolution. The group was very large, and major cities around the world had their own local chapters. Needless to say, due to the shadow of Hollywood, LA-SIGGRAPH was the largest chapter, and highly active and influential. Even though they were routinely playing with supercomputers and large R&D budgets, and we had hot-rodded semi-pro equipment, they loved EZTV and were very supportive of what I and others there were doing. Were it not for their emotional support, I might not have had the strength to get through EZTV's later, difficult times.

This group of extremely talented individuals, truly worthy of the name 'visionary', helped migrate EZTV from low-tech community space to an international player in the advocacy of the greatest innovation since the printing press. Digital artists, involved in developing some of Hollywood's most elaborate special-effects laden productions, would come over to EZTV after work, and would burn the night hours trickling-down to us, cheap and no-cost ways to integrate their developments into our own work and exhibitions.

I could have easily focused on just presenting digital art. It seems to strange now, but art created using computers was as much an outlier in the 1980's LA art scene, as was genital mutilation (although of course, not quite as polarizing). Even the most recognized computer artists had trouble getting shown in 'legitimate' galleries or museums. When such venues did exhibit computer art, it was often made by traditional artists, who were merely dabbling with computers. Rarely, in my opinion was such work even remotely on par with work by artists who had seriously and committedly focused on creating a truly unique digital vocabulary.

I have argued that there is a similarity of the outsider nature of both LGBTQ culture and early computer art, although of course, for very different reasons. But both were initially excluded, or else denied to exist, in the 'serious' art circles evolving out of the New York based abstract expressionist industry. Neither gays nor geeks fit into the testosterone drenched notions promoted by Peggy Guggenheim and her intellectual progeny.

But I didn't want the wall shows, and multi-media performances to just reflect geekdom. So, in order to diversify the exhibitions, I also asked artist/writer Mark Gash to sporadically curate a series of art shows as well. Mark was very plugged into the LA downtown art scene as well as the underground clubs and hipster hangouts in Silverlake and Echo Park. Mark guest curated a number of good shows for us, which included an early one-person show for now internationally recognized artist, Jim Shaw.

Gash also represented another ignored community in these days, the physically challenged. He, along with Tim Taylor and Zina Bethune, demonstrated yet another way that EZTV's vision of what an art space should be. For me, although straight, I have always identified more comfortably with the outside status of LGBTQ, and believe that such a designation should ultimately include all who do not demonstrate the 'dominant' culture pedigree of straight, vanilla, preppy or jock. This would include people like Gash, as well as people like the SIGGRAPH crowd. In this panorama of diversity, is where I believe EZTV's philosophical as well as aesthetic contributions most lie.

## VII. CURATORIAL COLLABORATIONS

I began to realize the unique situation I was in, as a curator. As a professional video producer, with access to equipment, and to a community more diverse than other art spaces, I could expand the relationship between exhibiting artist and curator.

I began a program I called Curatorial Collaboration, in which an artist, which I had selected for a show at EZTV, could if she/he wished; create video material as part of their show. In many cases, such an offer was not necessary, but in many cases, accompanying video projections, installations, or standalone short films expanded the scope of the exhibition well beyond what any other gallery could offer the artist.

By the late 1980's, gaining a spot in EZTV's gallery schedule was a coveted achievement, and artists, once selected, waited two years for their show. This gave ample time, to plan and produce the video components which became more routinely a part of the EZTV experience.

Within a few years, a mixture of art show, live performance art, and video screenings at EZTV were common. Ultimately, by the early 1990's, the evening-length screenings, focusing on long-form narrative fiction, were largely replaced with these live multi-media projects, often utilizing the emerging digital technologies available through home computing. We scheduled far fewer shows, but each show required much more production.

Additionally, participating in a number of region-wide cultural events, most notably the Los Angeles Festival, Fringe Festival/Los Angeles, and LA Freewaves brought a recognition by other art spaces, previously not in evidence. This expanded the press recognition of EZTV, from its initial focus on narrative features, to more of its gallery and performance art offerings.

EZTV's long-standing critical acceptance, and often praise by the press, was further catapulted by its advocacy of the computer-based works. EZTV's public recognition continued to grow at a time when video art was still often being marginalized in alternative art spaces. EZTV's public recognition gave the core EZTV artists, near rock-star status, provided numerous opportunities and fueled the optimism which John Dorr had first initiated and his cohorts portrayed.

The press paid serious attention to us. We began to be invited to serve as judges on major grants. We participated as guest speakers at universities, and in a number of leading

international conferences, focusing on new technology, independent production, and the emerging world that was to become the world wide web.

## VIII. THE TIME OF CRISIS

It seemed that EZTV could not fail, and for the most part, at least creatively, it did not. Then John Dorr, now no longer routinely participating in the exhibition side of EZTV, was diagnosed with HIV. He was understandably, sometimes depressed and a bit bitter. But he usually tried to keep up his normally optimistic world-view. For two painful years we all stood by, helplessly, and watched Dorr's stoic nature face his struggle, first denying his probable fate, and then finally succumbing to it.

Throughout these two years the attention being given my collaborations had continued to expand. After nearly a decade of supporting computer based art, I founded, along with curator/historian Patric Prince and with the indispensable help of artists Victor Acevedo, ia Kamandalu, Michael Wright and intern Lisa Tripp, CyberSpace Gallery.

Two months before John Dorr died, ia Kamandalu and myself, along with long-time collaborator Zina Bethune staged an ambitious and technologically innovative live multimedia performance as part of the final CyberArts International Conferences. It was without question, the first time artists had experimented with night vision cameras.

The project received technical and financial support from SONY and other companies and included a large team of actors, dancers along with projected video 'cameos' by Dr. Timothy Leary, Vincent Prince and art critic Peter Frank. It was a success and there seemed many more creative opportunities ahead. But that was to be the last creative project that ia and I would do, for some time. We both, eventually, went back to our art practices, but unknown to us, our creative collaborations together were over. At least we ended Vertical Blanking at the height of its achievements.

When John Dorr died, an enormous crisis ensued. Our lives changed forever. John's partner and heir, George Lafluer received ownership of EZTV.

George soon gave me one-half of his ownership, perhaps as an incentive for me to not leave EZTV at its moment of crisis. At that point, well more than half of all EZTV's income was derived from clients that were either ia's or mine. It was clear to everyone that if I and/or ia had left, that our clients would come with us. But I actually never had any intention of leaving, and had even (during Dorr's memorial service), already turned down a promising, and much more lucrative job offer by the Empowerment Project (who in three months would win an Oscar). But instead of taking the fast track with them, I accepted the worst possible



business arrangement, a 50-50 ownership split with George, where whoever didn't want something to happen, wins. Even I wasn't stupid enough to not know that was a bad idea.

Unknown to me or the other staffers, George was attempting to sell off EZTV, to a businessman who had no interest in EZTV's art side. Lenny Goldberg, had been in negotiation with George, and wanted to completely abandon the gallery, screening room and community services, and replace them with even more paid production services and editing rooms for hire. He correctly saw that EZTV could become a cash cow, if managed in a certain way. Which meant, among other things, getting rid of money-losing policies like free and low cost equipment access, or exhibitions. He wanted to make every square foot of EZTV a money machine.

EZTV had about four years before, tried to legally separate the money-losing arts side, from the income generating video production & editing business. We created the EZTV Arts Foundation, as a 501c3 not-for-profit organization. We thought we would kickstart it, by offering it, temporarily, free office and screening room rent and hired an administrator to oversee it. The administrator turned out to be ineffective, and proved to be more enamored with her job title ("Executive Director") than with any ability to fund-raise. We let her go after a few months. Strawn Bovee stepped in, for a short term, but without a background in fundraising, virtually no money was ever raised. It was a fiasco. Dorr and I decided that the last thing the staff needed, was to be a group of low-paid workers, supporting a non-profit organization. Years later, I tried one more person, to see if she had what it took to be an arts administrator. She had a well-heeled relative, whose friends could all be seen as potential donors. I introduced her to Joe Smoke, who was soon to head art grants for the L.A.'s Dept. of Cultural Affairs. I thought she'd be all set up. But instead, she did nothing, and ended up answering phones for us, for a few months, leeching even more money from our debt-soaked budget. After that, I let EZTV Arts lapse.

We first had hoped that a non-profit arts organization could be built grass-roots, instead of using trickle-down Regonomic principles. I then, tried to find someone who had connections to moneyed persons, to initiate a capital campaign. Neither had worked. The notion that a separate organization had been formed was illusionary; it was still all the same people laboring to finance the rent, and the exhibitions. Only now we had a figurehead who thought themselves the head of an organization, whose only true existence was in their own mind.

I learned a great lesson from EZ Arts, that what EZTV was was an integration of a video team, who could use their unique position to self-curate, and self-administrator cultrure based events when we were so inclined. And I learned to leave the world of the 501c3 to those

whose skills of fundraising and networking were clear. But EZTV was different, it was a self-supporting arts community, who self-produced, and self-curated in addition to its primary focus, as a media center.

George was especially unhappy with EZ Arts, as we called and must be why he was so interested in selling EZTV to Lenny, once John Dorr died. George rightly saw that EZ Arts could never survive, not even briefly, without the total support of its only sponsor, EZTV. Obvious to all of us, Lenny Goldberg would have been very comfortable, with EZ Arts's instant demise.

I suppose what Lenny envisioned was a sort of media production Walmart- big, cheap, and financially speaking, extremely successful. We could have easily done it. But that was a thing that neither Dorr, nor I, ever wanted.

#### **PARTNER, WHAT PARTNER?**

George, perhaps due to grief, had somehow failed to ever mention to Goldberg, that during their negotiations, he had already given me one-half ownership. I was George's equal partner, and could veto instantly any deal on the table. This made the entire sale to Lenny less likely, unless I was willing to sell him my half as well. But I was most concerned with assuring the continuance of the art side. Which meant a deal with Lenny was now very unlikely.

When Goldberg found out about my half-ownership, he was incensed, having felt misled by George. He however was still very interested in the sale, and then tried to negotiate with me.

When first meeting Lenny, I found him to be a nice enough guy, but just a guy who was only out to make a buck. He had no idea what EZTV really was. I told him that if I had simply wanted to make money in the video production business, then I would certainly never have given EZTV the time of day. I would have pursued a more typical 'Hollywood' dream. But that was not ever what I had wanted. I told him that EZTV was going to remain an alternative art space, as long as I had any significant role in its future. He thought I was nuts, and pretty much told me as much.

George made no secret of his crippling emotional strife over losing John, and would make terrible scenes, venting his rage and anger at EZTV, often in front of customers. We lost a few good clients, most regrettably, in my opinion the pioneering African-America supermodel Beverly Johnson. I admired her, and her courage, where years before, as a

younger black woman, she took on the lily-white world of fashion modeling. And proudly became the first black woman on the cover of Vogue. I saw her as a sometimes over-looked champion of the civil rights movement, a woman who proved, in no uncertain terms, that black was beautiful. I also really liked her as a person, she was cool, with none of the attitude problems normally associated with professional models.

Simultaneously, Apple was beginning to market a multimedia computer called "EZTV". Some were even already in stores. I was terrified, thinking that we would lose our name, after all this struggle. I contacted California Lawyers for the Arts, and they got me in touch with Stuart Weinstein, esq. He wrote a single, simple letter to Apple. EZTV, because of the efforts of LA-SIGGRAPH, CyberSpace Gallery and a number of digital artists, was well-known in the computer art circles. So having a major computer corporation use our name, would absolutely destroy us. And Stuart Weinstein informed Apple, that their actions would hurt a good, community-oriented artists' run community.

To my astonishment, and eternal thanks to all involved, Apple did not continue to market that product name. We kept our name, and identity in the computer community, and Apple, no doubt, in helping us, lost a bit of money in the process. But I learned a critical lesson, that if EZTV was to survive, I would need to learn the basics, at least, of business and of law.

Acknowledging my complete lack of business skills, I contacted the Small Business Administration, and asked for help. I was assigned an affable retired executive, Sandy Wilson. He had been a CPA who was kicked upstairs to senior management. Sandy asked me to describe my business I went into a seemingly endless tome about EZTV, how it was an experimental media arts lab, focusing on the advent of the emerging digital revolution. I talked about alternative art spaces, and their role in the community, and about new distribution models. And on and on and on...

When I finally finished, Sandy took a moment to contemplate his response, hesitated, then parting his lips, about to speak, paused again, and smiled. He finally looked me in the eye and said "I have no idea what you just said. Didn't understand a word of it. But I do know one thing. If you are not absolutely world-class, then nothing I can say can help you." Sandy was cool, very cool. Here was a man who had spent much of his life in affluence, where the importance of what a business could do for someone was obvious. I had spent years working insane hours and had little materially to show for it. We obviously lived in different worlds, but without understanding me, he saw my situation clearly. I understood. And he was right. I must have learned something from Mr. Wilson, because 20 years later, in part thanks to him, I am writing this story.

I went back to EZTV and tried to inventory its options. I saw what the staff was going through and started to see how destructive the situation was for them. And how that would jeopardize EZTV's chances of making it through another year.

With George's pervasive grief stricken presence, the climate at EZTV became unbearable. Staffers stated, in no uncertain terms, that they would not work under George, but they would work under me. Without that staff, EZTV would have died a quick death. But, unexpectedly, an angel swooped in to give the space another chance at continuation.

### **NATASHA VITA-MORE**

It is fitting that someone who has dedicated her career to the study and advocacy of life-extension should be the one who came forward to extend EZTV's life.

Natasha Vita-More, artist, exhibitor and long-time friend of EZTV (and eventually a founder/leader of the Transhumanist movement), saw the daily emotional strife that the staff was experiencing.

Unknown to myself or the other staff members, she called George and took him out to lunch. She told him that his presence was damaging EZTV, at the time it was most vulnerable. She convinced him to move on and leave EZTV to those who could best serve it. He came back from lunch, asked to meet with me, and offered to sell me his remaining half of the company. With that one simple lunch date, Natasha Vita-More personally saved EZTV. The impact of her selfless gesture cannot be over-stated.

### **CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS**

During John's several year-long illness, the focus of building EZTV as a business was ignored. The simple truth was that EZTV had been on a collision course with bankruptcy for quite some time, and only a major course correction could possibly save it. The decade-long policy of over-generosity, giving free, or near free services, to almost anyone with a feature-length script, or interesting project idea, had made paupers of us all. The core staffers were all paid a paltry \$150 per week, and ia and I were each working up to 80 hours a week.

I joked that we were the richest poor people I knew, having a huge facility to play in, and offering such generous opportunities to strangers, the vast majority of whom took it all for granted. Many thought that we were actually rich, and had said so. But the truth could have

not been more different. During the mid-1980's, I was actually homeless, sleeping on the floor in the 9'x12' windowless and ventilation-less office that I had rented from EZTV since 1985 (and which after two years was given to me for free, in recognition for all my service).

But the various revenue streams which we had developed, editing, duplication and production services, brought a constant stream of paying customers. We were operating a maximum of six editing rooms, two duplication systems, a darkroom, a music lab, three complete camera productions set-ups, all making money around the clock. Money we never personally saw.

During all the turmoil leading up to George leaving EZTV, Lenny Goldberg continued to check in, see how we were doing (he assumed badly) and asked if I might be interested in selling the company to him.

At that time of Dorr's death EZTV was raking in over ten thousand dollars a week, yet almost all of it was going to overhead. Very little went to salaries. Unlike some alternative art spaces, which benefited from sweet heart deals with the city, and were paying little or no rent, we were paying \$7,000 a month (in the mid '80's) plus many thousands more per week in electricity, phone bills, printing costs, postage, equipment purchases and repairs, construction and maintenance materials, tapestock, etc., etc., etc.

The money was spent before it was even deposited in the bank. Lenny Goldberg knew how to fix all that ( as we all did), and it meant cutting any cost that was not involved in making more money. This was a 'deal breaker' for me.

Lenny was unable to negotiate an outright sale. But he still wanted some official involvement. So instead, he then proposed that he'd be willing to invest 'a sizable amount' in EZTV.

EZTV's editing rooms were still (as was almost all video editing facilities) analog. We had actually, years before, pioneered the use of a hybrid system, based around the computer based "Video Toaster". Nerds from SIGGRAPH had helped us integrate some digital capability, using cheap, modified, computers, but our video decks were all analog, and effective video editing on a hard-drive was still, for us, a faraway dream.

At the time, digital non-linear editing was in its infancy, the results low-quality, and the hardware and software was unreliable and very, very expensive. Lenny said he buy such a system to experiment with, and set it up at EZTV. We could all, presumably experiment with

it as well, and make our art, but he would, for those very few who were interested, offer paid use of it to EZTV's clients. He'd keep the small amount of income that could reasonably be expected from such a service. He said he would do this if I signed a contract stating that he would, onto perpetuity, receive all of EZTV's non-linear editing business. What a joke, if not outright insult.

Unknown to Lenny, over two years before, at the CyberArts International Conference, I had already made the then-radical assertion that in the near-future, video editing would be done on personal computers. My lecture had since become a chapter in the seminal textbook "CyberArts-Exploring Art & Technology", edited by Linda Jacobson and culled from various lectures at that conference. But of course, Lenny, and most others 'in the business' had not read that book.

At this time, most of the tech pundits writing for video production magazines saw little short-term use for digital video editing in professional applications, only for rough off-line editing. But I knew about Moore's law and realized that was a very temporary situation. And from my friends at SIGGRAPH, I saw a more accurate trajectory for video's future.

In what was probably my most astute business decision ever, I told Lenny that I actually believed that in a few short years, despite the conventional wisdom being published by 'expert authorities' out there, that computer would take over video editing. And to agree to Lenny's terms would, in short-order, mean suicide for EZTV. I showed him the door and never heard from him again. Lenny took me for a fool, and although in many cases he'd be right, in this case I wasn't as dumb as I looked.

So instead of selling EZTV to Lenny Goldberg, I had to legally commit to purchase the one-half stake in EZTV, which George Lafluer held. I had no financial means to do so, and had no idea how I could make the payments. But I promised George that somehow, I would. But knowing that it was the only chance, although remote, for EZTV's continuance as an art space, I signed the legal papers, committing to the purchase of his half of EZTV..

Few people believed in my ability to pull-off EZTV's survival, and perhaps for good reason. I had no, nor claimed to have, any business experience at all, and during Dorr's tenure, EZTV's operation as a business was always marginal at best. I came to find out that those, who sit on the sidelines, and pontificate about their business acumen, rarely have any. If you want to make waves, you've got to actually row the boat. Even if you have to row it, upstream.

Several key people, who might have played larger roles in EZTV's future, and fearing the worse, quickly abandoned it, and others, from the side-lines, simply criticized any actions I made. The tedious visits (we'd laughingly call them 'audiences') from those who'd waltz in, point out everything that was going wrong, and then waltz out again without ever providing a solution, bugged everyone. These ney-sayers didn't help, either myself or the staff, with the already difficult situation. I pulled together those few staff members who were hard-working and positive, and could withstand the seemingly unbeatable obstacles. I let go of some. And I hired a few newcomers.

Key among these newcomers would be Kate Johnson, It would ultimately be her, someone who never knew John Dorr, that would save his legacy. And it would be her, that would fulfill Sandy Wilson's advice, to be 'world-class'.

Media theorist Dr. Peter Lunenfeld ( now a professor at UCLA) , who had participated in EZTV and CyberSpace gallery's digital exhibitions, approached us with the idea of EZTV becoming part of Mayor Tom Bradley's plan for Hollywood's revitalization. It would mean much cheaper rent, and increased art legitimacy. It would not occur for at least two years, but we'd need to get in now, in order to be considered. It seemed perfect, and I made the long-term steps to get ready.

I assembled the staff and told them that it never was my dream to run a movie-theater, or a large scale editing business. I said that it was my intention to downscale the space within a year into something more economically manageable. I also said that I could not guarantee that EZTV would even be able to survive that year, or that their jobs were secure. All I committed to was to somehow finish, with producer/director Mike Kaplan, John Dorr's last project, a documentary on filmmaker Robert Altman.

Some heeded my words, and, understandably, made other plans. Those that stuck it out worked hard and somehow, each month, we made rent, and paid, if not all, most of the bills. All the ones, if unpaid, would shut us down. We survived, but the outgoing costs far outweighed the incoming. We needed to implement the downsizing I had announced upon my assuming the role of captain of this sinking ship.

A year and two weeks later, we moved to Melrose, coinciding with the completion of Dorr's doc on Altman. A month before I completed my last big event for a quite a while, creating an entire digital art aspect called "Fast Art" at LA Art 1993, for the grand re-opening of the LA Convention Center.

LA-SIGGRAPH threw us a going away party, and declared their faith in us, going forward. Many years later, they would throw another celebration for us, at UCLA's Broad Art Center, for our 30th anniversary.



## IX. MOVIN' TO MELROSE

EZTV left the City of West Hollywood, after 11 years as a space, and three years of development prior to that. It never returned. It moved to Hollywood and was to stay there for six years.

ia Kamandalu had first spotted the "For Rent" sign on the two adjoining spaces in Melrose Avenue's trendy fashion district. I liked the location immediately. I showed it to George Lafluer, who, as holder of the 'deed', per se, to EZTV, wanted assurance that this was a wise business move. George saw that cutting our rent in half, as well as other wise steps, were a good idea. We were to become a media 'boutique' and cater to our best clients, and let go of everyone else.

Strawn Bovee, accompanied me in negotiating the deal with the landlord.

### **EZTV AS AIDS SURVIVORS**

In any frank discussion of the trauma facing AIDS survivors, the unforeseen economic tragedies, after the fact, are often overlooked.

Besides the financial commitments that I had made to George, a number of previously undisclosed money problems quickly materialized once I took over. Creditors, seeking payment for John Dorr's numerous unpaid medical procedures, came forward, saying that EZTV was responsible for his debts. Piercing the corporate veil would have been easy. They hounded us for years. We were ignorant of our legal rights, and avoided those that we could, but paid some. We did not pay many others. Depending on my mood, when I'd take the phone call, I was either cooperative, defensive, cagy or belligerent. Our receptionist Carmella soon learned to screen my calls, so that I wouldn't have to talk to them, unless that day, I was in a mood for a fight.

When EZTV became my legal responsibility, I offered ia, Strawn and Kate partial ownership of it, in exchange for their work in saving the organization. All they needed to do, in addition to working, was get a lawyer, and have the papers written up. Fortunately for them, they never bothered to, so the sole liability for all of EZTV's debts remained my sole responsibility.

We estimated that approximately \$85,000 dollars of such debts were being demanded of us. I soon realized that I had not only assumed the debt I owed to George Lafluer, in payment for

his half of EZTV, and the monthly upkeep of the space and the salaries for the staff, but I had also been being pursued for additional large debts I had known nothing about.

I was shell-shocked from the decade-long series of deaths, of people I had known during the AIDS pandemic. John Dorr was only the most recent, and obviously, the most emotionally traumatic.

I went into a shell, and focused on making EZTV, for the next two years, a money machine, to pay as many of the debts which we could. I often self-medicated, and was in a fog a great deal of that time. But I had a team of people around me, who supported me in my efforts, and for the most part, didn't let me down.

I hated being the "boss", and often needed time to crawl up into my own private world, and heal. I wasn't making art, and I hated every minute of it. Although many at the time thought me a 'successful businessman'. We had two suites of offices, in a trendy neighborhood, with my own private office, and an outdoor patio, to glance out to the fashionistas on Melrose. Additionally, we rented additional space in "Telegence" a media art start-up in Beverly Hills, where we could stage screenings. We also shared "Re:Solution Gallery" with LACPS in Hollywood, and did exhibitions there as well. EZTV's staff was made up of very attractive, often beautiful, people. Some became clients just to be able to flirt with the staff. We had movie stars and rock stars and their major studios as clients. But I felt like a complete failure.

Fortunately for me, and for EZTV, Kate Johnson had come on-board the year before, and the quality of the work which EZTV has produced from that time forward reached the level that it always needed to be.

## **KATE JOHNSON**

Kate Johnson would take EZTV to the level of the arena, and her large scale projected digital graphics and animations, have been seen behind everyone from the Dali Lama to Michelle Obama. It was not by using the low-end home equipment, and John Dorr had hoped, but with the highest-level of media production tools, that EZTV found its niche and its survival.

Ultimately it will be someone who never knew John Dorr, who would be willing to do all that was necessary to preserve this story. Without her, I would never have been able to do it alone. She didn't just offer lip-service, or condescending criticisms. She committed all her time, efforts, and what little money she had, to keep it going. In the hard beginnings, when expenses seemed insurmountable, she often worked 12 hours a day, often unpaid, and often

went home, hungry, to an empty pantry, of maybe just crackers. But she never complained. She became EZTV.

She had everything going for her, brains, beauty, talent and guts. With the whole world ahead of her, and so many options in her grasp, the brilliant and striking 24 year-old actor/dancer/photographer, already making a living as an actor, with a degree in business, and a love of art, computers, and archaeology found a home for herself amid emotional turmoil, economic scarcity and uncertainty.

It is my hope that she decide to write her part of this story herself, but I must introduce it at this point.

At the time when I first assumed the sole role of leader of EZTV, I was actually pessimistic as to my ability to pull it off. I calculated that we would perhaps be able to survive about six months on pure inertia and then a few more by putting off the landlord until we'd get evicted. I thought that would, at least, be enough time to complete John Dorr's unfinished last documentary. It actually took six months longer than that, and EZTV was still there.

During the first few months after Dorr died, I decided that I wanted to say 'thank you' to some of the people who had moved on from EZTV, but had been so instrumental in ways unrecognized by anyone. One of these was Robert Hernandez. Bob had loaned EZTV a rather large amount of money twice during our history, first time was to buy our first serious editing system in 1983, and second time was to get the gallery screening room a video projector in 1985.

When I caught up with him, he was teaching an acting class. I offered him and/or his class free video services as a sign of my gratitude. He liked the idea but instead, said he would stage an acting contest with his class. The students would team up and present scenes. I would decide the winning team, and produce for them, a high-end acting demo reel, which at that time was a valuable and very useful commodity.

The winners were Kate and her acting partner, Rodger. Kate wasn't really interested in making the demo, but Rodger definitely was. He insisted Kate accompany him to meet with me and plan the video. She was very reluctant, but obliged him. When they arrived, Kate saw CyberSpace Gallery and immediately felt at home. She asked if there were any job openings at EZTV. Coincidentally, there was. I desperately needed someone to help me with the final editing of John Dorr's posthumous final project, a documentary on Robert Altman. I offered

her the gig, with the caveat 'as long as you can put up with this mad house'. I meant it as fair warning. She took it as a dare. I'd make sure to test that caveat soon.

## **DART MAN**

Kate Johnson should best tell this story, but I'll introduce it here. Johnson was still new at EZTV although she had proven herself instantly to be talented, smart and dedicated. And ready for anything. She absolutely 'got' EZTV.

In order to make sure that she really got it, I assigned her a client, whose name, we don't/can't/won't remember. But I wish we knew it. We now simply refer to him as "Dart Man".

Dart Man was a successful accountant by profession, methodically dressed in his executive business suit and fancy tie, but who really dreamed of becoming an edgy performance artist. He had some footage of the piece he was working on, and needed our help in making it a finished video. I had already seen at least some of the raw material, and thought this project would be the perfect 'rite of passage' for Kate, in order to prove, once and for all, that she had EZTV in her veins.

Dart Man had hired three dominatrix-style women, to dress up as Amazonian warriors, and chase him through a secluded forest. The landscape was rough, with many small hills and valleys, streams and large rocks to get in the way. Someone else was hired to videotape.

Dart Man was completely nude as he was chased, while the pursuing women attempted, often successfully, to use blowguns to shoot darts straight into his ass. The women, while running, or while strategically positioned for ambush, lifted the blowguns to their mouths, and with a powerful burst of breath, shot the darts at him. And into him. A trail of his blood was left behind, on the dirt, as he attempted, half-heartedly, to get away from his tormentors.

The video showed his saga, as one, two, finally many darts, stuck into his bloodied bottom. The women continued their attack, gaining ground as he continued, in vain, to escape his tormentors. Ultimately, Dart Man was captured by the women, who threw him to the ground, tied him to a rock, and proceeded to cut open, his scrotum. Nasty stuff, but Dart Man called it art. And based on my previous curatorial decisions, who was I to say otherwise?

Dart Man was clearly part of an aesthetic tradition that had proliferated in Southern California, arguably stemming from the seminal piece by Chris Burden "Shoot". I wanted to

make sure that the young Kate Johnson whose background included modern dance and archeology was comfortable with the true diversity that was the EZTV experience.

Both Johnson and I had real trouble watching the raw footage, whose close-ups left nothing to the imagination. These close-ups constituted a good deal of Dart Man's cinematic vocabulary during his "climax". Fortunately, Dart Man's accounting practice took hold. In what were probably the most accurate editing notes I have ever seen by a non-professional filmmaker, Dart Man's edit 'selects' were absolutely frame accurate, and Johnson soon realized that she could precisely edit Dart Man's masterpiece, without even looking at the video monitor.

Johnson passed her 'test', and she has been here ever since. We both wondered, since both of us had apparently blocked out his name, if Dart Man had gone on to international artistic recognition. Maybe he has received the notoriety that so many of the EZTV alums, had not?

Several years afterwards, we were partying with a friend at his home. He had a date with him, a woman from San Francisco. While small talking with her, she asked us what we did, and we told her we worked in video. She perked up and proudly said "I did a video, once!". We asked about it, and she proceed to tell us how she, and a couple of her girlfriends had once been hired by a guy to chase him around a park, while he was nude, and blow darts into his ass. Before she could finish her story, Kate and I looked at each other, burst out laughing and blurted out "Dart Man!!!!".

So Kate Johnson proved that she had what it took to 'put up with this mad house', as was my caveat when she first asked for a job. 20 years later, she has reinvented EZTV several times, each in more and more amazing ways.

#### **ANY OTHERS?**

In addition to all those that I managed to remember and include, in this expanded history of EZTV's core group, there were likely others, that due to my age and the passage of time I have overlooked in this first draft. To them, I offer my apology, and promise to rectify when I am alerted of my possible oversight. My point, of course, was to include. But included or still excluded, they were all part of a story that brought popular recognition, through LA's press, of the, until then, esoteric world of independent video and video art. John Dorr's legacy must be shared by them and all those who helped him in his quest for a place where independents, Queer or straight, male or female, could produce, exhibit and thrive. I did my part, but would never claim I did it alone.

EZTV was always, at least conceptually, an artists' collective, exchanging ideas, labor as well as equipment. It was never a business. I hope that, in finally writing this story that I have fleshed out, at least as way of introduction, the many minds, hearts and hands that were the true and accurate story of EZTV. No one person could have possibly done it alone. Or be given credit for that.

## X. THE LEGACY

John Dorr's vision of the wide-spread use and acceptance of feature-length narrative cinema created on home analog video equipment, of course, never came to pass. At least not in the way he envisioned. Even today, almost never is a low-cost narrative feature film widely seen or distributed. This year's Academy Award nominated film "The Beasts of the Southern Wild" (which cost \$1.8 million) is a rare exception.

In many ways it was YouTube, which found the magic formula for no-cost independent work, with its viral videos, often shot on a smart phone, grabbing a worldwide attention. John Dorr may have taken great exception to the following statement, but in so many ways, EZTV anticipated the advent of YouTube, rather than the future of Hollywood. I don't say this as an insult, but actually, my intention is complimentary.

With today's digital 4K standard, productions are often as expensive as when shot on film. And digital effects actually make productions more expensive. High-end productions, with bigger and bigger budgets, have become more the norm. This may ultimately change, but has not yet. The recent movie theater distribution experiments with 3D, 48FPS, and Imax, demonstrate that audiences will pay a premium, to still see work they cannot experience at home. Or in a park on their digital tablet.

It was actually documentaries that best, initially, benefited from low-cost video technology. Cinema verite, and location based field production adapted well to the evolving video "portapacks", then camcorders and other relatively low-cost tools. When the Empowerment Project (previously another guest exhibitor at EZTV ) won the Academy Award for best feature documentary, in 1993, the year John Dorr died, independent video production had taken its place alongside film, as a viable medium for serious professional level documentary production. It would still take quite some time before any non-film based digital cameras became viable for narrative feature production. It would be George Lucas, in developing his "Star Wars" prequels, and then James Cameron, with "Avatar", that would redefine what a video camera (now called a digital camera) could be. Neither of these legendary producer/directors are known for productions which are inexpensive.

John Dorr's interviews by the late 1980's had a more and more defeated and perhaps almost bitter tone. His dream of video theaters around the country, screening works by independent filmmakers, never came to pass, except for the advent of the 'micro-cinema movement'. For the most part, analog video was simply never adequate, either in picture or sound quality, to

compete with even low-end film production. Betamax never was, nor ever would be, a viable way to make movies.

It would be of course, a decade later, when the computer and digital camcorder were finally at a quality level where the world would take notice. EZTV contributed to this through its early advocacy and implementation. Along with artists like Kamandalu, Victor Acevedo, Michael Wright, Joan Collins, Coco Conn, Robert Gelman and curator Patric Prince, among others, an early articulation of the impending power of personal computing took shape at EZTV, well before general acceptance among mainstream art circles. EZTV became Los Angeles' true center for the early desktop digital revolution. Any other assertion is simply nonsense.

Today, the investigation of EZTV's diverse and multi-purposed role in media art history is in the hands of those who can bring some objectivity to the history. Hopefully they will ask the right questions, and look in the right places, for the clues as to just how important EZTV was in shaping the independent video scene in California.

The modern contemporary art space, which routinely combines static art with projected media, often with a live performative component, was rare in Los Angeles when EZTV was formed. By the end of the 1980's the EZTV model of combining live performance, electronic media and curatorial collaboration migrated to many other spaces, often without recognition. Now this type of exhibition is ubiquitous around the world.

Among the many communities which EZTV championed and served, the central role of its many LGBTQ founding members is clear. Although decimated by the AIDS pandemic in the 1980's and early 1990's, EZTV persevered and continued amid seemingly impossible odds. As Michael Kearns (Hollywood's first openly gay actor) stated, EZTV became an "AIDS survivor". That survival was at considerable cost, both emotionally as well as financially to the core EZTV artists that chose to keep EZTV alive. EZTV's story after founder Dorr died in 1993, became just as important as the years in which Dorr ran the space.

In my view, John Dorr and early EZTV's greatest legacy is the understanding that time-based media, such as video deserves and exhibitional approach which acknowledges that its similarities to cinema are greater than the art world's typical presentational paradigm of displaying video as if it was painting. The exception, of course would be video installation where the video content has no specific beginning, middle or end.



## **HISTORIFICATION**

In 1984, a publication of the American Film Institute declared that EZTV was the first independent gallery to spend “all of its space, all of its time to the ‘box’”. This total commitment was unlike concurrent art spaces, such as LAICA, LACE or even the Long Beach Museum. On this simple fact alone, EZTV deserves inclusion in any history of California video.

As I argued earlier, Historification is more a function of fashion trends and their academic advocates, than any plausible semblance of true history. At least in the anthropological sense. EZTV failed to be written into the first drafts of media art history, perhaps mainly through the sheer ignorance of the persons presuming to be capable of telling such a complex and diverse story. Or perhaps, as some have said to me, it is because we failed “to play ball” with the right people. Those people, including curators, art administrators and art historians, however, should have done their job, and found out this story for themselves.

Although conspicuous in its absence from the Getty Museum’s self-proclaimed “comprehensive” survey of California video, EZTV’s place at the center of such a history, should be clear to anyone willing to take even the most rudimentary exploration of its rich and diverse story. It is the hope of this online museum, that among other things, the Getty’s inexcusable over-sight will be corrected, and rightful recognition of EZTV’s central role in the history of California video will be, at last, secured.

## **COMPREHENSIVE, OR INCOMPREHENSIBLE?**

It seems shocking that a seemingly responsible and fact-based organization, such as the Getty Museum and Research Institute, would endorse an assertion as ridiculous as the notion that their show California Video was comprehensive on any level. I have snipped on a number of occasions that it is patently absurd for any scholastic undertaking to presume a ‘comprehensive survey’ of almost anything. Few exceptions, I would further snip, could be a hypothetical situation where we suppose an artist dies, leaving an entire body of work of just four paintings. Nothing else, just four paintings. Now if a museum were to exhibit all four of her paintings, only then could they plausibly claim a comprehensive survey of her work. Any other assertion, such as presuming that the scholarship involved in the study of the US’s largest state’s contribution to a medium it helped create is well beyond preposterous, and border on the two equally unacceptable prospects, either gross incompetency or intentional fraud. California Video, was regrettably not the only equally presumptuous exhibitions by major institutions, claiming comprehensibility. For me, it’s incomprehensible.

It is widely accepted that the advent of personal computing was as significant a step in human culture, as the proliferation of the printing press. Both created innovations in the communication and preservation of ideas that were previously impossible. Those who were not merely early adopters but articulated advocates of the philosophical invention of true independent media production, ( now called DIY) are as much authors of the digital revolution as are the brilliant scientists, engineers and technologists, both hardware and software that made this revolution possible. This is truly a story of California Video, and on oversight that demands remedy.

History is the art of forgetting. And when we forget that, we are making neither history nor art.

*"History is the Art of Forgetting"*  
*Written by Michael J. Masucci*