



48 WALKER ST | FEB 25 – MAR 25, 2023

Bill Viola, *He Weeps for You*, 1976  
Video/sound installation, Continuously running

# Bill Viola

*“I want to look so close at things that their intensity burns through your retina and onto the surface of your mind. The video camera is well suited to looking closely at things, elevating the commonplace to higher levels of awareness.”* - Bill Viola, 1980

James Cohan is pleased to present an exhibition of important early works by the pioneering video artist Bill Viola, on view at 48 Walker Street from February 25 through March 25, 2023. This is the artist’s eighth solo exhibition at James Cohan. The gallery will host an evening exhibition walkthrough with renowned media arts scholar and curator John G. Hanhardt on Thursday, March 9 from 6-8 PM.

Since the early 1970s, Bill Viola has used video to explore sense perception as an avenue to self-knowledge. His works focus on universal human experiences—birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness—and have roots in both Eastern and Western art as well as spiritual traditions, including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism. He has been central to the establishment of video as a vital form of contemporary art, and in so doing has helped to expand its scope for subsequent generations of artists.

This exhibition features two foundational large-scale installations, *He Weeps for You*, 1976, and *The Reflecting Pool*, 1977-9/1997, that employ the element of water as both a metaphor for cycles of rebirth and renewal, and a lens for the variabilities of human perception. Both works demonstrate Viola’s singular capacity to synthesize philosophical inquiry with formal innovation and technical experimentation.

In *He Weeps for You*, one of Viola’s first video installations, the artist employs the then-cutting-edge technology of closed-circuit live video to make the present immediately tangible, collapsing the remove between image and viewer. Within a darkened room, a copper pipe extends from the ceiling, terminating in a small brass valve positioned at about head height, from which water drips at a very slow rate. A live color video camera with a

close-up macro lens focuses on the single droplet as it emerges. This image is projected on a large screen at the back of the room. The optical properties of the waterdrop cause it to act like a wide-angle lens, revealing an image of a room and those within it. As Viola wrote in notes accompanying a 1976 drawing for *He Weeps for You*, “each time they are revealed within the drop, it falls, destroying the tiny world within and themselves along with it.” Then, in an endless cycle of repetition, a new droplet of water begins to emerge and again fills the screen.

*The Reflecting Pool*, 1977-9 /1997, is a meditation on the body in time and space that employs a sophisticated approach to nascent video editing technology to complicate perception. In *The Reflecting Pool*, the artist emerges from the forest and stands before a pool of water. He leaps up and time suddenly stops. All movement and change in the otherwise still scene is limited to the reflections and undulations on the surface of the pond. Time becomes extended and punctuated by a series of events seen only as reflections in the water, building a tension between stasis and motion. The work describes the emergence of the individual into the natural world, a baptism into a world of virtual images and indirect perceptions.

Bill Viola (b. 1951) has exhibited widely both in the United States and internationally. His major solo exhibitions include presentations at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (1987); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1997); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2002) the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2003); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2006); Grand Palais, Paris (2014); the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2016); Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy (2017); Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2017); Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (2019); La Pedrada - Casa Milà, Barcelona, Spain (2019); Royal Academy of Art, London, UK (2019); Royal Museums of Fine Arts Belgium, Brussels, Belgium (2020); Busan Museum of Art, Busan, South Korea (2020); Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, Russia (2021); West Bund Museum, Shanghai, China (2021); Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria (2022), and Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy (2023). Viola represented the United States at the 45th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia in 1995. Viola’s works are included in major museum collections globally including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain among others. He lives and works in Long Beach, California with Kira Perov, executive director of Bill Viola Studio and Viola’s partner and collaborator for over 40 years.

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