

KUNSTVEREIN

(MILANO)

presenta

THE THINKING EYE#2
screenings & talks

*The Thinking Eye. Culture
as an Instrument of Active
Thought*
by Juan Downey

Tuesday 22 November 2011
at 7pm
talk by Antonio Arevalo,
Art as Experience, Juan
Downey the Alchemist

Downey's videos are on
view Tuesday 22 from 11am
onwards at Careof, Milano
And subsequently at DOCVA
from 23 November until 6
December 2011, Tuesday-
Friday, 3-7pm

Careof – Fabbrica del Vapore
Via Procaccini, 4 | Milano

c/o careof docva:

Netherlands Media Art Institute

A.K.A. Kunstverein (Milano)
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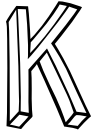
Tuesday 22 November Kunstverein (Milano), hosted by Careof, presents four videos by Chilean artist Juan Downey (Santiago, 1940 - New York, 1993) from *The Thinking Eye* conceived for public TV in the 1980s. The work that inspired the title of this series of Screenings and Talks by Kunstverein (Milano) is the centrepiece of its second chapter. It is subtitled: *Culture as an Instrument of Active Thought*.

Juan Downey is one of the pioneers of the early video art movement, although his controversial and innovative practice covers a variety of media including paintings, drawings and installation. This chapter of *The Thinking Eye, screenings and talks*, focuses on Downey's series of the same title and brings together all four films. Started in 1979, the series' ambition was to project Downey's own autobiography onto the official languages and historiography of Western Culture throughout the ages. It was also an "attempt to decipher the self by means of cultural obsessions" as Downey explained himself. Complex interpretative systems of analysis -- linguistic, psychoanalytic, art historical, semiotic -- are applied to the intellectual, artistic and historical myths and traditions of Western culture. Downey uses the video technology to address the 'self' through cultural, political and economic systems. The cognitive eye evokes the relativity of perception through a questioning of subjectivity and interaction between artist, spectator and subject.

The Looking Glass (1981) is the first part of "The Thinking Eye" series and was shot in London, New York, France and Spain. It is a multilayered essay whose visual complexity parallels its subject: the meaning of reflections, illusions and mirrors in Western art, culture and life. Downey considers the mirror as one of the sources of our visual culture, and while experimenting with documentary's conventions, he introduces various experts (from art historians to the tourist guide) who elaborate on the theme, alternated by short staged scenes in which the artist gives his own personal interpretation of the subject.

The second part of the series, **Information Withheld** (1983), is a 'program on signs', a semiotic quest with many sidetracks that seeks the origins and the contemporary use of signs. *Information Withheld* is structured around a lecture given by the art historian Leo Steinberg on the effects of signs and paintings. Downey decodes from signs from everyday traffic signals to Michelangelo's paintings, drawing on Steinberg's statement that the sign -- "simple, unambiguous and universally understood" -- contrasts with art's essential premise of '*information withheld*'. Again, Downey interweaves subjective associations with intellectual analysis.

Shifters (1984), the third part of "The Thinking Eye" series, elaborates on the themes developed in *Information Withheld*. It deals with the various means and levels of communications, and specifically concerns the differences between sign, symbol, icon and 'shifter'. Here, Downey adapts the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory of the 'shifter': "it designates the subject of an enunciation but it does not signify it". Using video effects and non-linear narrative modes, Downey creates an associative 'hall of mirrors' of meanings and representations that echoes the elusiveness of his subject.



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The fourth part of "The Thinking Eye" series, **J.S. Bach** (1986), is a subjective essay that merges a reflection on identity and the creative process with a lyrical documentary on the life of Johann Sebastian Bach. This densely layered, nuanced work intertwines biography with Downey's personal visual and verbal commentary. The tripartite structure -- Death, Flashback, and Counterpoint -- and complex associative visual strategies function as a compositional analogy to Bach's own musical principles of equal temperament and counterpoint.

Biographies

Juan Downey was born in Santiago, Chile in 1940 and died in New York 1993. He received a B.A. in Architecture from the Catholic University of Chile, and also studied at S.W. Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris and the Pratt Institute in New York. Downey received numerous awards, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. He acted as associate professor in both the School of Architecture and the media department at Pratt Institute. His videotapes, drawings, performances and installations have been exhibited in solo shows at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Jewish Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; International Center of Photography, New York; Schlessinger-Boissante Gallery, New York; El Museo del Barrio, New York; and IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, in Valencia, Spain. Downey's work has also been included in group exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Documenta 6, Kassel, West Germany; four Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial exhibitions, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Venice Biennale; and the World Wide Video Festival, The Hague. In 1998 IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, in Valencia, Spain hosted a major retrospective of Downey's extensive body of work. Downey has had recent shows at the Bryce Wolkowitz and Nohra Haime Galleries in New York City, and was the focus of an exhibition, in 2006, at El Fundación Telefónica in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Antonio Arévalo, (Cile 1959)

Arévalo is a poet, creator of projects, consultant and curator of contemporary art; he organised numerous international surveys, exhibitions and cultural events in museums, art institutions and private galleries in Italy, Chile, France, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, USA, Spain, Germany, Slovenia, Sweden, Czech republic and Belgium. He was the commissioner-curator of the Chilean Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennial and Curator of the Adriatica Arti Nuove Biennale di San Benedetto del Tronto (Italia) as well as commissioner of the Chilean Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial. He collaborates with various publications in both America and Europe, and translated and adapted for the theatre texts by Bataille, Donoso and Rulfo. He published six volumes of poetry and is presented in many poetry anthologies as well as art catalogues in America and Europe.

Kunstverein (Milano) | www.kunstverein.it

Kunstverein (Milano) is an experimental curatorial platform for exhibitions, research and production of contemporary visual art. Kunstverein (Milano) is part of a network of sister organisations with Kunstvereins in Amsterdam and New York, and is founded and co-directed by Katia Anguelova, Alessandra Poggianti and Andrea Wiarda.

careof | www.careof.org

Careof is a non-profit organisation for the promotion of research and artistic practice based in Milan since 1987. Careof produces and presents exhibitions, events, screenings; it promotes a didactic programme through workshops and conferences; and offers documentation and archiving services on visual art.