



## **EWVA European Women's Video Art Interview with Antonie Frank Grahamsdaughter**

Interview by Dr Laura Leuzzi, January 2016

LL: When did you first start using video?

AFG: I started using video in my first video work *The Crocodile Street*, an experimental fiction presented as an installation and performance with dancers as actors. I applied to Jan Van Eyck Academie submitting the video work *The Crocodile Street*. At this time I made some performance work and documented the work in video.

LL: What equipment did you use at the time?

AFG: At this time I was filming with U-matic (analogue) which was edited by our technician.

LL: Why was video as a medium particularly attractive for you at the time?

AFG: I had previously been interested in working with the moving image and actually began at the age of fifteen to scrape and carve on celluloid film creating animated films, of which one was a film about a journey in the desert. I worked on the sound using an analogue tape recorder and I liked the combination of moving images and sound.

LL: You obtained an MFA in 1984 from University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. Between 1984 and 1986 you studied Time-Based Art at Jan van Eyck Academie Maastricht which was a vanguard department for video and media arts established by Elsa Stansfield. The programme included workshops and lectures with several international artists including Marina Abramovic, Joan Jonas, Bill Viola. Why did you decide to move from Stockholm to Maastricht?"

AFG: I searched for an establishment where I could work professionally with the moving image as video art. There were few opportunities in Stockholm, so I decided to apply to Jan Van Eyck in Maastricht having read about video art in a booklet by Sune Nordgren. I applied, submitted the video *The Crocodile Street* which I had made at Konstfack - University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm and succeeded at the first attempt, without interview, and Elsa Stansfield became my teacher and mentor.

LL: How did the Academie influence your practice and contribute to your development as an artist working with video? Which works did you make there?

AFG: I really enjoyed myself at Jan Van Eyck as there was time and opportunity to develop video art and where working with video art became enormously liberating.

Video art was in some way free from the history of art and we female artists felt a great freedom. It was also liberating as a film-maker/artist when you could take control of the production, filming and producing. Around the same time came the first compact cameras, a great revolution for film-makers. You did not have to wait for application responses and big money, you just started filming.

I bought my first camera, a Hi8 Sony. I always had my camera with me and filmed wherever I was.

It was a great time at the Jan Van Eyck. When I began in 1984, the first exhibition in video art was held (*The Luminous Image*). Jan Van Eyck organised workshops and seminars with, among others, Bill Viola, Al Robins, Toni Oursler. It was a strong experience for me to meet Bill Viola and to have him as a teacher during his workshop. During this time I worked on several experiments with performance and installation. In the academy there was advanced equipment with u-matic cameras, studios and possibilities for editing video. The academy students made several trips to exhibitions in the nearby cities such as Paris, Brussels, Dusseldorf and others. For me Elsa Stansfield was a great inspiration as a teacher. It was very important to meet female artists such as Joan Jonas and Marina Abramović, along with others who were invited to talk about their work at the Jan Van Eyck. It was also significant that they were female artists as we female students could identify with these female video artists in a film world dominated by men, which is still the case even today.

During this time I developed the following works:

1. *Transit* a performance with a five-metre long boa constrictor snake around my body. At the same time in the room the video was shown on seven monitors with the distribution of the video signals through a homemade video device.
2. *Metamorforce* with three video monitors with sound in an installation.
3. *The Zone* Kruisherenkirk video performance with two video monitors, sound and body.
4. *Whisper*. Time Based Art Gallery
5. *Homo Sapiens* experimental video and documentation of performance art with dogs and body. Studio Jan Van Eyck
6. *Scent* video installation. Dusseldorf Academy
7. *Agapheros*. video
8. Sound Installation. *In the garden*. Jan Van Eyck Academie

LL: In 1984 Stansfield organised the conference for the exhibition *The Luminous Image* which included Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Vito Acconci, Dara Birnbaum, Michel

Cardena, Brian Eno, Nan Hoover, Michael Klier, Shigeko Kubota, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Mary Lucier, Marcel Odenbach, Tony Oursler, Nam June Paik, Al Robbins, Lydia Shouten, Elsa Stanfield and Madelon Hooykaas, Bill Viola, and Robert Wilson, in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Did you attend the conference? And if yes, how relevant was this for your practice?

AFG: I remember the great event *The Luminous Image* in Amsterdam as it made a huge impression upon me, especially as I understood the workings of the moving image and space (video installation). The visit and the impressions that the exhibition gave me were incredibly liberating. I was inspired to develop the work with the moving image and break up the video stream in multiple monitors.

I saw the potential of the moving pictures in the room by placing monitors at different locations within the room. I started to use my body in different performances and installations. I especially liked to create different rooms with video media and create a conversation with the different elements. For me this time was immensely liberating and important. Several of the artists were invited to the Jan van Eyck Academy. I remember vividly Tony Oursler and participating in workshops with Bill Viola and Al Robbins from NY. For me it was ground-breaking.

LL: In 1985 you performed in a group exhibition at Kruisherenkerke, Maastricht. Can you tell us more about how this artwork developed and how you incorporated video in the performance? Is the video still available?

AFG: In *The Zone*, I developed a performance with my body and two monitors, audio and ashes. I used my body to throw and roll between two monitors approximately 10 meters apart. The video image, a flow of lighting and a rhythmically persistent sound from the speakers, composed the movement between the monitors. The sound was controlled from a sound desk and was a composition made of me. I used interference noise from radio waves, which I processed on a tape recorder. The performance piece ended with sprinkling ashes in a circle between the monitors. There is a video of this performance piece.

LL: In 1986 you made *Transit*, which was shown in several international festivals, in 'World Wide Video Festival 86', The Netherlands video festival. Can you tell us about how you developed this artwork and the production of the video?

AFG: *Transit* was one of my first works. When I get an idea for a video, I use the images that arise out of my inner world. I work from individual drawings and photographs but rarely on the basis of a complete storyboard. I work with an organic flow as "painting" with the camera. Working with a storyboard adds to the workload and closes the video too early. I want a work to be a journey and an adventure in itself, an exploration of our living conditions with the camera, a dialogue between myself and our living existence. I let the movie sequences come to me, shoot them and lead me ahead and during that time I worked unconditionally out of the subconscious. Video technology allowed experimentation since the technology was cheap and the filming could be unlimited in time. To also directly see the image was important for composing the film as the video

work was composed based on the results of the filming frequencies. Regarding the video installations that I developed, I always used a sketch of the room and the projections or video monitors and, as a result of the technology at that time, it was necessary to have an editing script before editing the filmed video material. Many of my works are rhythmically composed and I often likened it to composing music or writing poetry. I also write poetry, which has been published, and, in many ways, video art and poetry are similar.

The artwork *Transit* was included in an international group representing Europe at The Kitchen in New York and due to the strong colours created in Chroma Key (solarisation) the work was compared to the Beatles first films. Being able to change the filmed video frequencies using the Chroma Key technique fascinated me and this technology 'solarisation' reminded me to 'paint with digital tools'.

A wolf pack which I filmed was adapted using Chroma Key. The video sequences with wolves were complicated. I had to shoot with celluloid film and convert it to video for developing a slow-motion movement in the video. I then filmed myself naked in the studio and processed the video sequence in Chroma Key before combining both sequences. In *Transit* I did a performance with a boa constrictor five meters in length. The boa constrictor is part of the movie and was filmed at the home of a couple that bred snakes in their apartment. I trained myself to have the snake around my body and moved myself with its movements. This performance was shown to an audience during the festival at the Jan Van Eyck Academy. The video *Transit* was a free video that toured festivals.

LL: In *Transit* there is the recurrent theme of the naked body of a woman. This element can be traced in several women artists' videos and performance from the 1970s and 1980s. In many cases these themes and elements were linked to feminism. In the 1980s were you interested to feminism or were you part of any feminist collectives?

AFG: In my childhood I was a tomboy always looking for adventure. I explored my surroundings and enjoyed being with the guys. Somehow I never saw the limitations of being a young woman. I went my own way. During the 1970s, you felt free and could do what you wanted and I became involved in the political citizen movement with demonstrations and protests.

Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, was during this time part of the emancipation from authority and trapped traditions. During my time as an artist and teacher Ewy Palm invited the Guerilla Girls to Kulturhuset in Stockholm, where they did an exhibition. Ewy Palm was the one who pushed and introduced us students about the female artistry. She was also part of the organisation for a Frida Kahlo exhibition at the Kulturhuset. Ewy Palm arranged cameras so that I could film. After teaching training in video art I was employed at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm (1987- ) where I started one of the first video art courses at Kulturama. Later, I carried out KU research at the Institute of Art in Stockholm using one of the first streaming videos online.

The art was at the time dominated by men. Basically, we had few female artists to identify with. In that way, it was liberating to move to the Netherlands where women artists filled video art naturally. My teachers at the Jan Van Eyck were women. It was very inspiring and liberating.

LL: Were there any women's collectives or groups producing or promoting video in the Sweden or in Europe to your knowledge at the time?

AFG: Not really. We were not organised in the way as in The Netherlands. In the 1980s there were still few female artists worked with video art. We were a mixed collective called *Video Nu*, that involved both male and female artists. When I returned from Jan van Eyck, I introduced a lot of video art in Sweden. Sweden did not follow the current video art in Europe. Video art received very little support. Based on my experience of the Netherlands, Sweden was isolated in video art. It was difficult to work there. There was resistance between the traditional forms of expression and new media as video art. There was an apprehension that new media would crowd out the more traditional art forms and we were several artists who continued our career abroad through international festivals and platforms. I wanted to reside in the Netherlands as an artist, but it was difficult to obtain a residence permit. (The EU did not exist in those days). It lacked the flow and the openness to new media in art, whilst in the Netherlands it emanated from several established institutions such as the Time Based Art Gallery, driven by video artists such as Elsa Stansfield. There were also De Appel, Jan van Eyck Academy and several other established video art platforms.

LL: In 1986, you moved back to Sweden and started to teach moving images at Kulturama and the College of Art. Could you tell us more about this experience? How this influenced the following generation of video artists? Can you trace it in particular with women video artists?

AFG: I was invited to start up video art at Konstfack, the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm when I returned from the Jan Van Eyck Academy. The education included filming with a video camera, editing and installations. During this time I introduced several Konstfack students to video media opportunities. We hired equipment, as there was no equipment available at the school. I also organised a field trip for the students to a video festival in Arnheim and a study visit to the Jan van Eyck Academy. The training at Konstfack was one of the first serious teaching programmes in this area in Sweden. At the same time, I started video training in Kulturama which was also important to many young people working with video as an artistic expression. I later came to work at Fylkingen (scene for electronic music). Video art had earlier been introduced but fell away when the enthusiasts disappeared. I came back to introduce video art and organised several festivals to display video art. Here, I also started to work with choreographers and produced the first

performance/dance with live filming that was projected onto a large wall during the performance. During this time I came to work with the dance group *Tiger*. I also organised screenings at Konstfack of twenty video works from The Netherlands which was very much appreciated. Video art was moving around in small islands in Sweden and began to take off in the 1990s. I felt this was a difficult time to work in. The support we received was from the Art Forum – Konstnärsnämnden – was very positive.

LL: In the 1980s you give birth to two daughters, who appeared in some of your early video artworks. This element can be traced in several women artists who were experimenting performance and video in the 1970s and 1980s (Elwes, Soltau). Can you talk a little bit about their involvement?

AFG: I think it is natural to involve the children in my video works. They always accompanied me on my tours. They accompanied me to Iceland on several occasions when I was invited to the Reykjavik festival. During my first trip, I had my three-month-old child who lay in a bag during the filming of a whale slaughter called *Next Day*. During the second trip to Iceland we did the work *In the garden*. I also filmed our everyday lives which might become a documentary. Both children appeared in the cinematographic work *Fragments* (an experimental short film), filmed on 16mm film camera with assistance from the Swedish Film Institute. In another short film *Sweet Home* they were in the actual video work. They were always with me and it felt like a natural part of my creative work and life

LL: There were several women artists experimenting with video in the 1970s and 1980s in Europe. Did you personally know women artists and feminist artists who at the time were working with video in Europe, or specifically in the Netherlands and in Sweden? Did you know or were you familiar with their video artworks?

AFG: I was well aware of the Dutch artists through my teacher Elsa Stansfield as she was one of them as was Madelon Hooykaas. We got to know each other and I remained in contact long after my studies. I remain in contact with the video artist Asta Olofsdottir from Iceland.

In Sweden, there were a few who worked with video. In the Fylkingen art scene I introduced video art of choreographers Anne Külper and Ingrid Olterman and we started working together. Recently, I worked with the composer Paulina Sundin. In 1986 I exhibited at the Rotar Gallery in Gothenburg with Cecilia Parsberg but we have not remained in contact.

Fylkingen became our volatile platform. I organised festivals and invited other women artists who had begun to work with video. It was in the 1990s video art first started in Sweden. Filmform became an active organiser again and handed out an honorary scholarship. I was assigned there in 1995. Several galleries began to open up for video art, amongst others, the gallery Index.

One member of Video Nu was Theresa Wennberg but she belonged to a different generation and I came to know her much later.

LL: Were there some video centres with which you collaborated specifically in the 1980s? How did you produce your video artworks?

AFG: Since there were few players in Sweden during the 1980s, I continued to show my video works at international festivals. In the late 1980s, some stakeholders in Gothenburg and Frölunda Kulturhus organised a festival. (Mats Olsson)  
There was a video centre called Video Nu. I became a member and borrowed equipment and edited in their studio (U-matic). Video art received very little support and it was difficult to produce this in Sweden.  
Video art in Sweden developed later. The association Video Nu organised one of Stockholm's first screenings of video art at Kulturhuset. (Video nu - Japan)

LL: Did you collaborate with any TV broadcasters at the time?

AFG: It may be that it came first in the 1990s. Also the Culture programme *Nike* showed video (1996?). I was a part of *Nike* when I got the honorary fellowship from FILMFORM. I was in an interview by Swedish Radio in Gothenburg about the exhibition at Gallery Rotor where I showed the installation *Metamorforce*. The newspaper Göteborgsposten also published an article, with an interview, about the exhibition.

LL: How did you show, distribute and promote your videos in the 80s?

AFG: There was no distribution in Sweden so I arranged my own distribution in the 80s and circulated to various festivals.

I met other video artists among others from Denmark. I later curated festivals and shows with video and video artists: Fylkingen festivals and at the Culture Capital of Stockholm in 1998.

My work was distributed also by Time Based Art Gallery (Today, LIMA).

LL: What are the most relevant video and film festivals or screenings in Europe and in the USA you took part in? Did you take part in any event specifically dedicated to women artists' video and film?

AFG: World Wide Video Festival  
Video Femmes Montreal

LL: The *Guerrilla Girls* pointed out the marginalisation of women artists' work in 1989, quote: 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'. Can you recall if and how this inequality of treatment affected your career when you started using video?

AFG: I think that video art was groundbreaking for women and gave a sense of freedom. However, although video artists participated in video, the videos themselves were not acknowledged by the art scene, as it was a new medium.

I saw clearly that women were displaced in the art world. Based on this, I came to participate in the *Guerrilla Girls* group in Sweden as a filmmaker. We were in attendance at each Lucia feast galleries and museums in Stockholm.

Today I can certainly see that my career was affected by the dominant male artists in art in Sweden. Therefore the *Guerrilla Girls* became my role models.

My video work was received with much positive acclaim. The exhibition at Galleri Rotor was covered by the media, specifically the video installation at the time. Later I received FilmForms honorary award for my pioneering work in video art. I even received several scholarships through the Arts Council – Konstnärsnämnden - but it was complicated to operate in Sweden during the 1980s.

In moving from The Netherlands to Sweden I took several steps backwards in my career. I would say that there was no collective force to operate through and whilst video art was met with resistance and had trouble making itself heard, we were several individual actors appearing in a variety of locations

LL: Due to the obsolescence of the early video formats (open reels, U-matic), many video artworks from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are lost today. How and when did you recover your tapes?

AFG: Over the last two years I converted my video works into digital formats and almost all the works have survived. Most of the sketches for the installations and story boards have survived.

LL: Have you lost any of your videos on U-matic?

AFG: I am searching for my first work *Crocodile Street* (Konstfack - the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm) whilst the first performance/dance performance at Fylkingen is lost (There are still images from the photograph by Brita Ohlsson) as is the video work on Chernobyl.

LL: Do you still preserve the original masters and where are they kept today?

AFG: I still have all the filmed material, as well as all the original masters which are kept in my studio.  
I've converted many video works to digital media, and I will submit them to the film and sound archive in Stockholm.

LL: Did you keep the videos from the performance works as well?



AFG: Yes, I have the remains and transferred it to digital media. Sketches, catalogues and master tapes are available.

LL: When did you make your last video?

AFG: I continue to work with video. I received Konstnärnsnämndens project grant for artists to work on an experimental documentary about my family in Canada. This last year I filmed several other works including the refugee disaster.

Today, my films are linked to current events and people including the refugee crisis [Syria]. I am now working with choreography/choreographers and a composer covering the refugee crisis.

Recently, I worked on a photographic artists' book, where I am using earlier video works and new photographs.



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