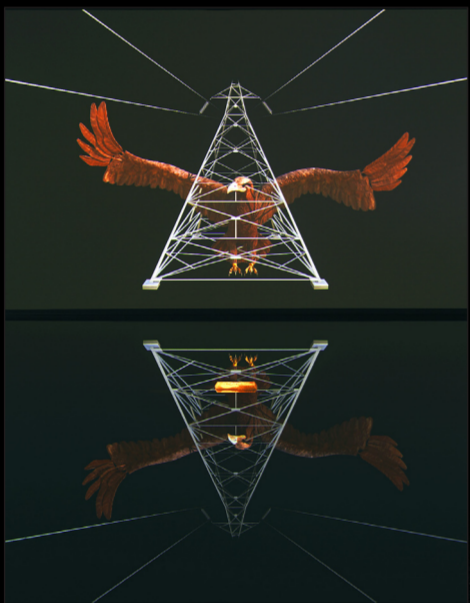
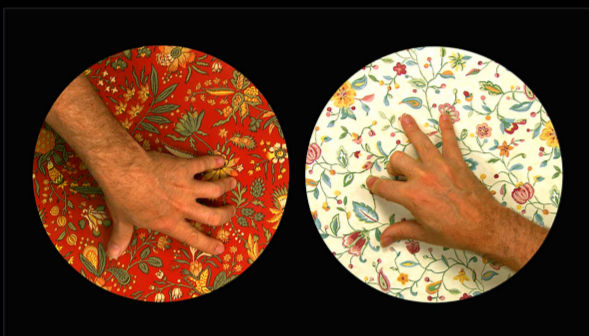


ART JOURNAL

Mis(ter) communication

New media pioneer Gary Hill, in town for Art Taipei 2008, has been stretching the boundaries of art for the last three decades

BY BLAKE CARTER
STAFF REPORTER



Gary Hill surfs, speaks backwards and snickers at the appellation most often used to describe him. While to many art fans he's the biggest pioneer of "video art" after Nam June Paik, the 55-year-old Hill is on a different wavelength.

"I don't think terms are what it's about really," he said in a recent phone interview from Seattle. "I'm probably more of a language artist than a video artist. That gives you an idea of the gap between what I do and what whoever makes terms up thinks that I do."

What Hill did do was establish himself as one of the progenitors of what has come to be known — to "whoever makes terms up" — as "new media art." He helped define an art, still growing in popularity, in which technology replaces traditional materials like stone, metal and pigment.

Hill has no shortage of fans and followers in Taiwan's tech-heavy art scene, which — along with a well-received solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei in 2003 — helps explain why he has been invited to speak at Taipei's World Trade Center on Saturday as part of Art Taipei 2008, the country's biggest art fair.

Hill will give a "kind of open-ended talk" called *Language Beyond Its Own Limits* with poet George Quasha. The pair have just finished a book titled *The Art of Limina*.

Art Taipei will include a gallery showing *Remembering Paralinguay* (2000), one of Hill's "single-channel" works (the art world's term for a straight-up video). In the piece a woman "struggles across an unknown gap or space until her face fills the screen," a description provided by the artist reads, and then shrieks "in extreme falsetto."

While some of Hill's work has been criticized for being inscrutable, the artist himself is anything but. Cerebral, perhaps, but the Santa Monica, California-born surfer describes his work in a lucid, refreshingly straightforward manner. West-coast *I means, you knows, uhs* and frequent chuckles have been omitted from quotes above and below.

"If it's challenging to the viewer, it's challenging to myself," Hill says. "I have to think, 'Does this make sense? Is this insane? Is this nonsense? Is there something here that makes me think, even though I don't know what it is?' I'm going through the same questions that, perhaps, the viewer goes through."

"It may be difficult, it may be 'What does this mean?' but for the most part I try to have everything available," he says. "Even if it's difficult, it's available."

Hill started making videos in 1973 on what was at the time a revolutionary device: the Sony Portapak camcorder, while unwieldy by today's standards, put video in the hands of the people. Trained as a sculptor, Hill was living in Woodstock, New York, and had already begun incorporating sound recordings into works made with metal bars. Video art had been making ripples in the art scene when Woodstock Community Video opened, and Hill stopped by "to check it out."

"It was somewhat by happenstance that it occurred, but I was ready for it."

To viewers not familiar with this kind of work,

some of the pieces that followed haven't aged well. The 2003 MOCA show included pieces with overly digitized images, grainy color separations and repetitious, drawn-out takes that resembled the results of someone tinkering with the "effects" buttons on today's cameras.

Other works in the show were friendlier to the casual museumgoer. For *Wall Piece* (2000), Hill repeatedly threw himself against a wall and uttered sometimes incoherent words. Each time he hit the wall, the pitch-dark gallery was illuminated by a split-second image of the artist, sometimes coinciding with the moment of impact, sometimes not. The effect was humorous and engaging.

One of the reasons even the newest media art can appear dated is that its techniques often overlap those used in cinema, television and music video. Commercial producers typically have more at their disposal than artists, and can therefore provide cleaner results.

"I really move back and forth, sometimes ... delving in technology, but typically not super high-end technology," he says. "I generally look for some sort of fallibility, some kind of crack in technology."

Hill laughs when asked to compare his work and music videos. His pieces "may have to do with opening up time, which is significantly different than most music videos, which are sort of trying to make things happen as quickly as possible. This isn't talking about apples and oranges; it's like talking about fruit and meat."

Commercial interests seem below Hill, making his appearance at Art Taipei all the more interesting. This afternoon at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum auditorium, the 2008 Asia Art Economy Forum includes a talk titled *Chinese Focus: Development and Trend of Auction Markets in the Chinese World*. On Sunday a speaker will tell listeners *How to Collect Young Artists*.

"The art market has destroyed artists as far as I'm concerned," Hill says. "I think that the prices are completely and totally inflated, all misrepresentational and bad for long-term creativity and reality people."

"When things sell for millions and millions of dollars and it's just because people have the wool pulled over their eyes, it creates a false idea of value."

While averse to terms like "video art," Hill isn't above coining a word or two himself. "Paralinguay" in the title of the work to be shown at Art Taipei is an anagram of the first names "Gary" and "Paulina" — from longtime collaborator Paulina Wallenberg-Olson, the woman who appears in the piece.

It seemed natural to ask an American artist famous for experimenting with language if he spoke anything other than English. A bit of French, he answered, and a little Japanese when he lived there for a year in the 1980s.

"And I can speak backwards. I learned it for some of my works."

Then he said something, followed by a quick chuckle, that I still can't understand, despite repeatedly listening to a recording of our conversation.

"It's not a very used language," he said.

EVENT NOTES:

WHAT: Art Taipei 2008 (台北國際藝術博覽會)

WHEN AND WHERE: Friday to Tuesday, noon to 7pm (closes at 6pm on Tuesday), at the Taipei World Trade Center Exhibition Hall I areas A and D (台北世界貿易中心展覽大樓A・D區) 5, Xinyi Rd, Sec 5 (信義路5段5號)

ADMISSION: NTS200

Above: Gary Hill's *Big Legs Don't Cry*, top, *Language Willing*, middle, and *Frustrum*, bottom.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DONALD YOUNG GALLERY, CHICAGO

Left: Gary Hill will hold a "kind of open-ended talk" titled *Language Beyond Its Own Limits* on Saturday as part of Art Taipei 2008.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DONALD YOUNG GALLERY, CHICAGO

Money and art meet at Art Taipei 2008, where local galleries look to network with international movers and Western galleries hope to tap into the big bucks Taiwanese collectors are famous for shelling out. The Art Galleries Association has gone to great lengths to make this year's fair entertaining for both investors and art fans. In addition to 63 Taiwanese and 48 foreign booths showcasing their best, there will be galleries focusing on new media art and emerging local artists.

SPECIAL EXHIBITS:

ART NOW — JAPAN promises 13 galleries showing the latest in Japanese contemporary art.
2008 ART PROJECT: ART & TECH — WONDERING finds the Art Galleries Association working with local curator Sean Hu (胡朝聖) to display the best in new media art. Works by the Korean godfather of video Nam June Paik, Taiwan's Chen Chieh-jen (陳界仁) Americans Gary Hill and Jim Campbell, Australian Shaun Gladwell and others will be shown.

MADE IN TAIWAN — YOUNG ARTIST DISCOVERY will showcase eight Taiwanese artists under 35 years old. The exhibit is meant to provide an idea of where local art is headed, as well as fresh material for collectors.

LECTURES:

**SATURDAY:
ART & TECH: LANGUAGE BEYOND ITS OWN LIMITS**
Gary Hill and George Quasha
1:30pm to 3pm

CULTIVATING A VISION — YOUNG ARTISTS IN JAPAN AND THEIR FUTURE
Ozaki Tetsuya
3:30pm to 5pm

**SUNDAY:
HOW TO COLLECT YOUNG ARTISTS**
Wang Yu-ling (王玉齡)
1:30pm to 3pm

A REVIEW OF MULTIMEDIA ART — COLLECTION VS MARKET
Sean Hu and Ricky Wang (王瑞祺)
3:30pm to 5pm

ON THE NET: visit www.art-taipei.com



Celebrity Interview

Together

CONTINUED FROM P14

TT: What in particular influenced your spring/summer collection, which will be shown during Paris Fashion Week in October?

SC: My ideas have come from a very diverse range of sources, actually. Looking through a book or at an antique can inspire me. And I work together with a design team, so there are even more facets to what influences our clothing. For this particular collection I got a lot of ideas from paging through antique books and from the illustrations I saw in them. The books came from both Europe and Asia and they aren't necessarily about clothing. I can pick up design elements while looking at, say, a chair.

TT: How did Shiatzy Chen develop over the years from a knitwear company to a high fashion design house?

SC: There have been a lot of things we have had to focus on in order for all this to come together. The most important that we've done, I feel, is to have had a very practical approach to business in terms of making sure that we are well-organized internally and that all of our employees — it doesn't matter whether they are on the design side or the corporate side — have been trained to work at an international standard. It really has involved a lot of hard work and dedication to get to this point.

TT: What direction do you hope the company will take as it continues to expand?

SC: I think that all fashion design houses work with the hope that they will one day receive international recognition. My hope is that every country will have a Shiatzy Chen store eventually or that it will be sold through the most exclusive department stores worldwide.

TT: As your company becomes more international, will you start keeping track of the differences in tastes between your European and Asian clients while planning your collections?

SC: The way I see it is that every season features a lot of pieces, and when you are known for having a style trademark, you design with that in mind. The process of designing clothing takes a long time — a year before a season actually debuts, I already have an idea of what I want it look like and even the atmosphere I want to create with that collection. I don't think, oh, this is what my Parisian clients or my Taiwanese clients want. I will take their ideas into consideration, but it doesn't change what I want to do with a season or the kind of feeling I want to create. Ultimately I believe that our clients come to Shiatzy Chen for who we are, and we want to maintain that.

TT: When people think of Shiatzy Chen, they think of clothing that is very much influenced by traditional Chinese styles. Do you feel that you are drawn to traditional design elements in particular?

SC: If you look at Chanel you feel that it is very French, right? If you look at Armani you think of Italian style. And when you think of Yohji Yamamoto you think of Japanese design. Why do we think of Yohji or Chanel as being particularly Japanese or French in the first place? I believe that this is because we consider their aesthetics from the vantage point of our own cultural background. In turn, every designer's clothing will be influenced by the milieu that they were raised in.

While I wouldn't say that my clothing is particularly Chinese in flavor, I do hope that when people think of Shiatzy Chen, they think of a brand that has Chinese elements as part of its style trademark. The basic elements of Chinese fashion descend all the way from the Tang and Song dynasties. It has gradually evolved over time, but the spirit remains the same. It has become woven into our mentality, and of course Shiatzy Chen reflects that.

TT: Do you think that your customers come to Shiatzy Chen specifically looking for clothing that has a traditional Chinese feel?

SC: To be honest, I think this is a matter of perception. Why do people think of Chinese style elements as being "old" or "traditional," while Western clothing is deemed "modern"? Perhaps we take our own culture for granted sometimes, and it is a matter of making Chinese styles more relevant to the current generation. People ask me questions like this quite often, actually. I think that part of the reason is because Western fashion has been quite dynamic and has changed constantly. For example, you can look at Western styles from the 1920s and 1930s, and there are obvious differences between the two decades. On the other hand Chinese clothing has revolved around several basic elements, like the qipao, for a long time.

Of course our clothing has the spirit of traditional Chinese styles because of our heritage. But, ultimately, what makes a design successful is if someone today can enjoy wearing it and looks forward to putting it on. If people feel that your designs fulfill all their requirements for something that is both stylish and practical, then you have succeeded in creating a truly modern aesthetic.