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how would you like to go up in a swing/eventually she
was allowed to go up on point....

A VIDEO INSTALLATION

By

Helen R. Lester

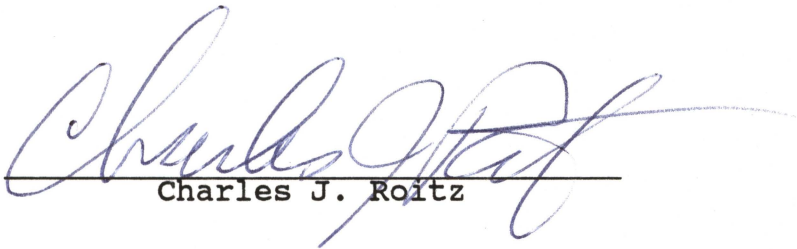
B.A., Oberlin College, 1960

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Colorado in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1986

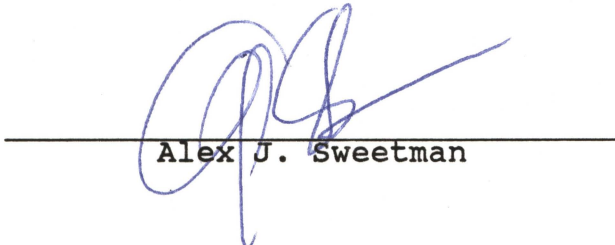
This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by
Helen R. Lester
has been approved for the
Department of
Fine Arts
by



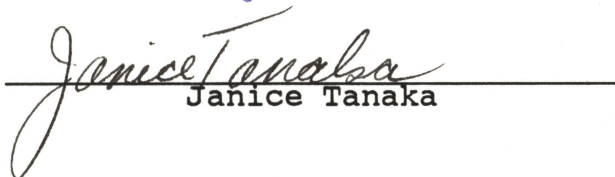
Charles J. Roitz



Barbara Jo Revelle

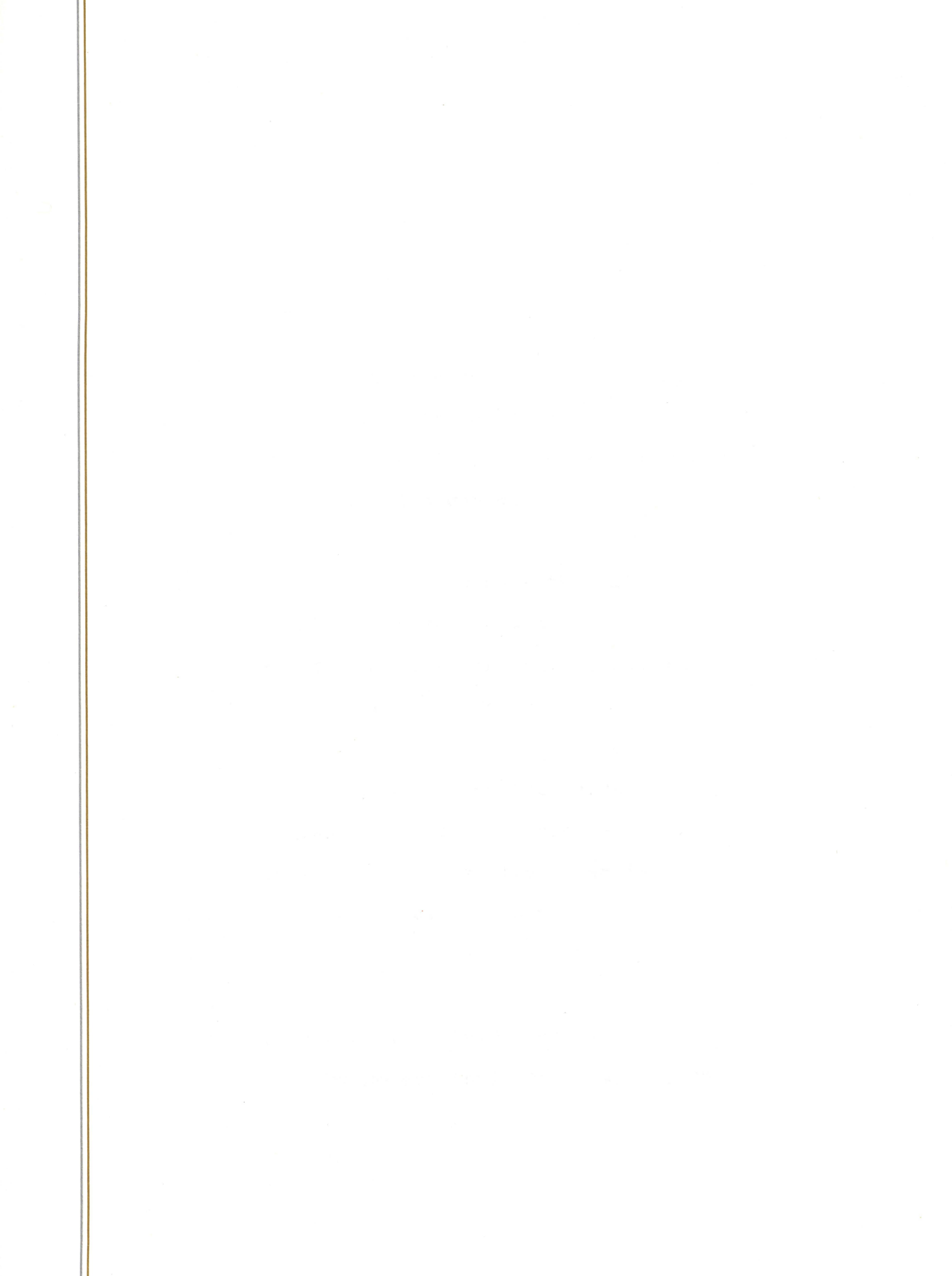


Alex J. Sweetman



Janice Tanaka

Date _____



THE SWING

How do you like to go up in a Swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside--

Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown--
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!

From A Child's Garden of Verses

by Robert Louis Stevenson, 1905.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My work is about pictures as visual literature. I sequence images to be "read" by the mind's eye. The images and the way they are sequenced communicate messages, tell stories, express ideas and feelings, raise questions and issues which in turn elicit from the viewer interpretations, reactions and sensations triggered by his/her own personal associations of memory and experience.

I specifically have chosen the camera as a creative tool to explore the "metalanguage" of imagery for several reasons: the camera is a direct and immediate means of personal expression which mirrors the world around us; because photographic images are mechanically reproducible, this facilitates the process of making, selecting, sequencing and juxtaposing specific images and offers a considerable measure of control with regard to strategies and systems of presentation for purposes of encoding and communicating messages; the reproducibility of the photographic image, from a negative, print or by means of electronic signals, makes available

a myriad of "found" or appropriated imagery with which to create visual language.

My use of electronic imaging--video and Slow Scan--is a way of extending the photographic medium: the combination of electronic signals with light and optics is an innovative alternative to the more traditional technique of using the lens in combination with light-sensitive film and chemistry to produce a photographic image, and is a particularly effective means of further stretching and delaying time in sequencing images.

Another very important technique made possible by the electronic format is the "freeze frame," an electronic version of the still photograph. With the aid of a device called a Slow Scan, I am able to "freeze" movement randomly on the video screen, revealing a visual "interval" between continuous frames. This strategy heightens our sense of "seeing" the gaps between the still or moving picture we see and informs our reading of the visual passage in much the same way as the verbal monologue interieur probes, in an "ultra-lyrical" way, the embryology of the formation of thought as certain narrative events pass through the consciousness, feelings, associations and emotions of James Joyce's character, Molly Bloom, in Ulysses. (In fact, the title of the installation references "stream of consciousness": non sequiturs, all lower case, obscure punctuation.)

My work is contexture of old and new imagery, stills, movie and video footage. I use a video tape format to weave these together for final presentation. My use of video as a visual continuum is a natural extension of the photo scroll format which characterizes my earlier work. The video format enables me to employ additional elements--rhythm, timing, movement, gesture, sound, freeze-frame--which enhance the complexity and lyrical quality of the work.

My pieces reference past, present and future with a mixed overlay of time and place. The structure is disjunctive: sequencing is determined by formal relationships and/or triggers of memory, dreams and associations of other imagery recalled to the mind's eye. I work with a selected framework of cultural and spiritual archetypes dealing with ritualized activities and events. My images are a personal iconography by which I note, mark, recognize, remember and relive the rituals.

The symbols become specific with continued repetitious variations. They can be discussed on one level by articulated language, but there is more to it than that. To view/read is to interact, to participate. The encoded images are messages, but the messages are often incomplete or intentionally obscure so that the viewer's own consciousness must come into play and is

forced to question the codes, my meaning, his/her interpretation. One must also read the (figurative) gaps between the images which then become fissures in the space of one's own consciousness. The end result is that the work is synesthetically experienced as epiphany or déjà vu.

Roland Barthes writes in Image-Music-Text:
"Thanks to the image...or much rather thanks to what, in the image, is purely image...we do without language yet never cease to understand one another."

CHAPTER II

A VIDEO INSTALLATION

how would you like to go up in a swing/eventually
she was allowed to go up on point....

We are entrapped in myths--personal legends perpetrated unknowingly. We believe and perpetuate them uncritically, fostering a concatenation of unfounded expectations passed on from generation to generation. These expectations are sacred and repressive: subconsciously there is a drive to demystify and escape them.

Myths are shored up by rituals.

All families have rituals, some ceremonial, others routine. Recreation is a routine rite, observed as refreshment from work or other commonplace tasks.

The most customary recreational pastime for me as a child was a regular Sunday trip with my "nanny" and my parents to the playground adjoining the Hudson River on New York City's upper West Side. In fact, the playground is the most prominent of my childhood memories.

how would you like to go up in a swing/eventually
she was allowed to go up on point.... is a weaving

together of real-time video (present and implied future) and old family movies and photographs (memory/past), imaging the same site and playthings and similar activities over a forty-five year period. The characters change with time and the life cycle, going back and forth between memory and real-time. The use of memory in the piece is structurally disjunctive, alternately changing, extending and destroying the real-time context, alluding to the future, a strategy intended to create a magical sense of crossing edges between ordinary and otherness.

The playground is the visual point of reference for the piece. It is a metaphor for childhood, a place for ritual: sometimes sliding down the slide, sometimes riding the see-saw, but mostly swinging on the swing--a metaphor for "growing up," individuation, passage, journey, escape: "up in the air and over the wall,..."

No less important than the swing as a central visual symbol are the images of swinging movement--back and forth, from ground and shadows to sky and trees and in between--and the gestures of the swinger: sometimes tentative, slow, awkward at gaining momentum to arc back and forth, up and down; sometimes determined, celebratory, exuberant, reaching for the apogee--that point in the arc of the swing's moving path where you could just jump off, take off, fly, escape. The second half of the title, eventually she was allowed to go up

on point...., alludes to and is symbolic of that apogee point of the arcing swing....

The dominant sound for the piece, the chanting female child's voice, is an aural sign which works in counterpoint with the swinging gestures of the movement, orchestrating and reinforcing meaning: the monotonous but arhythmical up/down intonations of the chant work synesthetically with the to-and-fro motion of the swinging, and the sexuality and physicality it implies.

The presence of the swings in the installation extends the video piece into the realm of direct personal experience by inviting viewers to participate, to swing, to experience their own personal connection to the work, not only visually but kinesthetically, so that a full range of physical and emotional sensations and associations is brought into play. The swingers can then create their own "metaphor," kinesthetic, conceptual or otherwise--questioning, destroying or changing the piece itself. This is reinforced by projecting the swingers' image in the gallery wall for them to see.

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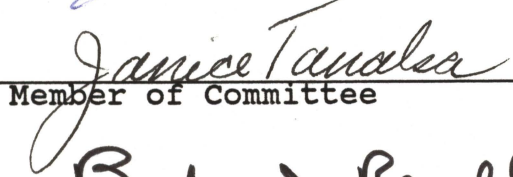
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts
Helen R. Lester
has submitted this written thesis
as a supplement to the creative thesis,
a video installation entitled,
"how would you like to go up in a swing/eventually she
was allowed to go up on point...."

Slides and video tape (1/2" & 3/4" formats)
are in the permanent possession of the
University of Colorado and recorded with the
Department of Fine Arts

Approved by


Chairman of Committee


Member of Committee


Member of Committee


Member of Committee


Chairman, Department of Fine Arts

