

Sadie Benning. *TOP TEN*. **ArtForum**. Summer 2013. pg 167-168.

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TOP TEN

Sadie Benning

Sadie Benning is an artist and musician who lives and works in New York. Benning was included in "NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star" at the New Museum and recently staged a solo show of new paintings and videos at New York's Callicoon Fine Arts. Benning's work will also be featured in the 2013 Carnegie International, which opens this fall at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh.

1

VALIE EXPORT, *SEEING SPACE—SPACE HEARING*, 1973–74

In her 1973 film . . . *Remote . . . Remote . . .*, VALIE EXPORT sits in front of a large black-and-white photograph. She faces the camera with a bowl of milk on her lap and a box cutter in her hand. She starts to cut her cuticles. We hear a monotonous tapping sound. Fear builds. She starts to bleed. I had never seen anything like this. *Seeing Space—Space Hearing* is compelling too, but in a different way. I like the formal awkwardness of its manual video-switching, its split-screen format, and the stoic quality of VALIE EXPORT's standing-still performance. The video deals structurally with the fragmentation of space, sound, and body, inducing anxiety as it counters viewers' desire for syncopation and solidity.



VALIE EXPORT, . . . *Remote . . . Remote . . .*, 1973, 16 mm, color, sound, 12 minutes.

2

HOWARD ALK, *THE MURDER OF FRED HAMPTON* (1971)

This documentary about Fred Hampton—the charismatic, intelligent, urgently spoken Black Panther Party leader who was murdered by the Chicago police—captures Hampton's death, but it's also very much about living. Alk is a brilliant editor. He gives time and air to "being" so that you feel present in the atmosphere of the moment. He creates a kind of liveness in the film that promotes empathy and emotion without ever being corny, overwrought, or exploitative.

3

GEORGE KUCHAR, *WEATHER DIARY #6*, 1990

In the late 1980s, it seemed that everywhere I turned, someone was showing me yet another VHS copy of Kuchar's work. Cobbling together sound tracks, overlaid graphics, and cutaway shots (sometimes editing in-camera), he made his films alone or with groups of friends and students to create experimental narratives that wove together his personal obsessions—in this episode, tornado watching, puppies, and faulty plumbing—which he recorded while vacationing in Oklahoma.

4

KASE 2

I learned about Kase 2's work from Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's 1984 book, *Subway Art*. But I first became interested in graffiti while spending summers in New York City visiting my father as a kid. We didn't have a subway system in Milwaukee, where I grew up, and so it was really exciting to watch a train pull into the station covered top to bottom with cloud-bubble names. People called KASE 2 the King of Style, maybe because, as one of the most prolific and creative graphers, he was always changing up and inventing new ways of writing—"computer rock" letters, camouflage, etc. For whatever reason, one of his pieces, *El Kay*, managed for years to escape "the buff" (a washing system for erasing graffiti). Over time, KASE 2 grew infamous, not because his art was a crime, but because it moved and traveled through neighborhoods, starting and stopping, never held in one position in space.



A piece by KASE 2 in Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver's *Style Wars*, 1983, 16 mm, color and black-and-white, sound, 69 minutes.

5

BLINKY PALERMO, UNTITLED (TOTEM), 1964

Like his better-known *To the People of New York City*, 1976, this work by Blinky Palermo strikes a balance between formalist structure—the selection and sequencing of colors and materials—and interpretive openness. I particularly like its in-between nature. Featuring five small canvases serially affixed to what can be read as an architectural remnant, it's both a painting and a sculpture; a work made by hand that in turn suggests mechanical repetition.

6

MARLON RIGGS, TONGUES UNTIED (1989)

I first saw *Tongues Untied* in Amsterdam in 1991 at a gay and lesbian film festival. I was very inspired by the work. Structured as a documentary, it combined experimental material with the poetry of Essex Hemphill to address contemporary notions of race, sexuality, desire, and loss.

7

CHANTAL AKERMAN, DE L'AUTRE CÔTÉ (FROM THE OTHER SIDE, 2002)

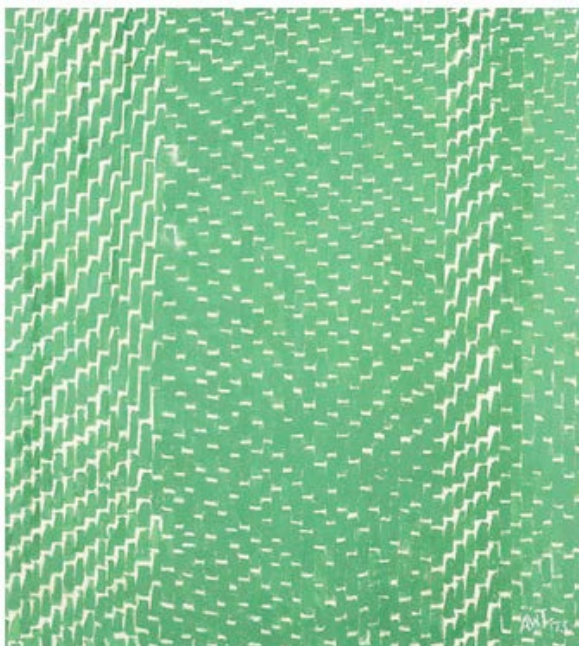
When my father showed me Chantal Akerman's 1976 film *Je tu il elle* (in 1989, on VHS), I had never seen lesbian sex in a movie before. But it was the image of Akerman eating a bag of powdered sugar that stayed with me. Decades later, the Belgian filmmaker continues to create indelibly affective meditations on space and time. And the properties of duration and size operate differently when her work is watched on video—or when it's shot on video, as was the case in 2002 with *De l'autre côté*, a moving documentary about the US-Mexican border told via the landscapes and stories of people living along this divide.



Chantal Akerman, *De l'autre côté (From the Other Side)*, 2002, 35 mm, 8 color, sound, 99 minutes.

8 ALMA W. THOMAS, *SPRING GRASS*, 1973

Around the time I started to become interested in abstraction, art historian Solveig Nelson gave me a catalogue of paintings by Alma W. Thomas (1891–1978). Up until then, for the most part, I had always considered abstraction to be something outside of my own experience, disconnected from the everyday. Thomas helped me to see otherwise. *Spring Grass* is a particularly strong example of her direct and repeated line-making, the canvas's entire surface filled with brushstrokes resembling tracks or treads or grooves.



Alma W. Thomas, *Spring Grass*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 59 5/8 x 54 1/2".

9 STAN DOUGLAS, *MONODRAMAS* (1991)

Douglas conceived of this series, along with *Television Spots* (1987–88), as works that would air during commercial breaks on Canadian broadcast television. Adhering to industry conventions such as crane and tracking shots, and sometimes featuring music or dialogue, these short thirty- to sixty-second sequences passed for regular ads—except that they had nothing to sell. The missing element was so disconcerting to home viewers that residents called into their local stations demanding to know what these mysterious episodes were about.



Four stills from Stan Douglas's *Monodramas*, 1991, television broadcast, color, sound, each 30–60 seconds. Clockwise from top left: "As Is"; "Up"; "Eye on You"; "Guilty I".

10 ROSCOE MITCHELL LIVE AT HOTHOUSE, CHICAGO

HotHouse was one of the main reasons that I stayed in Chicago for so many years. The brainchild of curator and activist Marguerite Horberg, its first iteration (which closed in 2007) was a great space in which to experience live experimental music and social/political events. Roscoe Mitchell is a jazz musician whom I first saw perform at HotHouse in 1996. His improvisational way of making sound and melodies is full of all that life has to offer—pain, pleasure, joy, humor, seriousness, spacing out, anger, calm, peace, and contemplation.