Interview with Kathy R. Huffman, Lead Curator of *Exchange and Evolution: Worldwide Video 1974-1999* at the Long Beach Museum of Art

By Kelly Sun Kim, March 2012

**KSK: How did you get involved with Exchange and Evolution exhibition in Long Beach Museum of ART?**

KRH: I was invited by The Getty, to propose an exhibition about the Long Beach Museum of Art’s video program, for PST. It was in late 2008. I had been to the California Video exhibition in 2008, and I was aware of the LBMA Video Archive, it’s content that had been turned over to The Getty in 2006. The proposal was accepted, but living in Europe, it was important to have a ‘local’ curator involved. Originally this was Alice Hutchison who was curator at the Cal State University, Long Beach Art Museum. When she resigned her post, I suggested Nancy Buchanan, who was a member of the advisory committee for the project. This proved to be a good choice and resulted in a strong exhibition partnership.

**What was your inspiration from curatorial point of view?**

I was interested to explore the role that visiting international and American artists had, on the Southern California media community. Artists from all over the world visited Long Beach, worked in the video studio, and showed work in exhibition programs. They were encouraged to collaborate with our team, and with artists from LA, in talks programs, exchanges with regional art schools, and in social events. This kind of research had not been done and I hoped it would show some new aspects of the museum’s influence in the field of video.

**How was the process for the selections?**

The first step was to build up a time-line of all the artists and exhibitions that the Long Beach Museum of Art had hosted. We looked at precedents to the video program as well (film screenings on the museum’s lawn). This information is all in the catalog text.

Next, we had to both identify works in the LBMA video archive, and ask for the to be prepared for viewing (which took quite a long time) and make a long list of artists who we felt were influential and artists that had a strong presence (or important impact) on the Southern California
video history. When works were not in the Getty Research Institute’s holdings, we had to either ask the artists to send preview copies, or work with distributors to see the work (often this was possible via an online system for preview). We also met with curators who worked on the program over the years, and also talked with artists who participated in the Long Beach program, to get the highlights of their experiences, how the program affected their careers and future.

After we had identified the artists, we had to decide on the works. LBMA has rather limited space for exhibition (as it turned out) and we had to really stretch to fit in 12 installations. They were selected by availability, and by cost…there is always a reality factor of the cost! A couple of works were so important that we had to ‘bite the bullet’ and budget the cost.

The curatorial selection was presented to the exhibition’s Advisory Committee for their feedback. One of the problems of course, was acquiring the necessary equipment for a spectacular exhibition presentation. It was important that the show was professionally presented – old works already have quite a lot of flaws, and dropouts for example…it was always a point of concern also that each installation had a discrete environment. Installation by definition is a controlled layout for the presentation of the work…and it was important that each of the works had a good and comfortable gallery setting.

**How good are film, video and new media art at attracting a museum audience?**

Today (unlike the 70s and 80s) video is accepted as an art form, and is seen just about everywhere, in every country, side by side with painting, sculpture, photography, and installation – and can in fact have elements of other disciplines as part of their content.

*Exchange and Evolution* is a particular history within a history of the Long Beach Museum of Art. It is a big enough history to be selective. It is an important history for Southern California to understand, especially how a small regional (community) city art museum can be such an influence. It was never because there was a lot of money, it was passion and dedication to the art form that created the attraction.
We hope that audiences who never saw video before would come away with a respect for the art form. Many people did not like it, I’m sure. We also wanted the knowledgeable art audience too learn more about what happened in Long Beach. Memory is very short these days, and I have seen many claims for ‘being first’ at this or that, when indeed there is no understanding of what really happened.

**Any advice for CalArts students who just starting their career as artists?**

I advise writing, reading (a lot) and travelling to understand more fully where you sit as an artist, with your ideas, your passions, and your vision. Enter your work in media art festivals, and if accepted --- GO. Meet artists you share interests with, be part of the discourse of ideas and concerns.