

Sights and sounds, the changing illusion of the world in which we live, and the world that lives only in the mind, are the basic materials of film creation. The full flow of color, sound, synthesized form, plastic form, light and picture poetry have in no way begun to be explored in man's range of experience.

—Stan VanDerBeek, "Re:Vision," *The American Scholar* 35, no. 22 (1966): 340.

DOCUMENT is pleased to present *Poemfield*, Stan VanDerBeek's first solo exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition will present a 16mm film installation of *Poemfield no. 7* (1967-68), a digital projection of the film *Symmetricks* (1972), and a selection of works on paper (1973-83).

VanDerBeek's *Poemfields*, the artist's most well-known series of computer-generated films, are complex, multilayered moving tapestries of abstracted images, colors, visuals, texts, and sounds. Fascinated with the computer's ability to generate text on a screen, VanDerBeek established an "image-based poetry language." For this series, he collaborated with computer scientist Ken Knowlton at AT&T Bell Labs beginning in 1964. Using an IBM 7094 computer and BEFLIX (short for "Bell Labs Flicks"), a computer graphic programming language that Knowlton conceived in 1963, VanDerBeek and Knowlton created eight *Poemfields* films between 1966-71. Each film combines the artist's own poetry with a range of digital illustrations. Since studying under poet M.C. Richards and composer John Cage at Black Mountain College, VanDerBeek incorporated collage-like practices of chance and simultaneity, experimenting with representations of text and poetry in cinematic time.

The poetry of *Poemfield no. 7* presents a thought-provoking message, one that maintains its political relevance in 2018. VanDerBeek's poem ends: THERE IS NO WAY TO PEACE; PEACE IS THE WAY; NO MORE WAR. Movements 1 and 4 of John Cage's composition *Amores* comprise the soundtrack; this same composition premiered at the historic performance of Cage's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943. The synthesis of text, pattern, and sound in *Poemfield no. 7* conveys a bizarre sense of foreboding, a quirky yet urgent uneasiness. Some words appear and then dissolve on the screen so quickly that one must focus intently to capture the phrase in its entirety; VanDerBeek anticipated the blink-and-you-miss-it effects of newsfeed overload and image overstimulation.

*Symmetricks* invites a slightly more meditative viewing. While artist-in-residence at the MIT Center

for Advanced Visual Studies, VanDerBeek experimented with computer-animated drawing to explore the visual effects of rapidly tracked drawn line, symmetrical patterns, and flickering images. White forms pulse, shrink, expand, and mirror each other against the black screen, and the contrast subtly suggests colors as Symmetricks progresses. One reflects on their own interpretation of the cinematic Rorschach test upon the film's completion.

VanDerBeek was a pioneer in the growing fields of "movie art" and "Expanded Cinema" during the 1960s and 70s. His multimedia practices forecasted many facets of later iterations of contemporary art—network aesthetics, Internet art, graphical user interfaces, and appropriations of desktop computing. Rather than employing a camera to traditionally capture images, VanDerBeek made use of the computer as an abstract notation system for making movies. He wrote pictures and visually manipulated language. VanDerBeek challenged the formal paradigms of film and moving images, adopting a collaborative, pluralistic, and multisensory approach to filmmaking that resonates with today's prevalence of multimedia art and the feedback loop of everyday digital life.

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