

Stan VanDerBeek: *Micro Kosmos*

May 7–June 20, 2026

Level Two

Magenta Plains is pleased to present *Micro Kosmos*, an exhibition organized around Stan VanDerBeek's interrelated filmmaking and printmaking practices.

This select group of works focuses on VanDerBeek's involvement with early computers as a new means of generating imagery. In his engagements with the computer VanDerBeek saw a "future" developing and changing at a rate so fast that he posited human intelligence may struggle to fully grasp its consequences. Through collaborations with Bell Labs engineer Ken Knowlton and others, he made a series of films entitled POEMFIELDS (1962-1971) that explored the increasing potential of such a complex machine during its nascent development.

Poemfield No. 1 (Blue version) (1967), is a 16mm silent film where powerful sequences of words emerge from mosaics of geometric forms, move around the frame, and eventually disperse. The graphics were produced through a pioneering computer animation language called BEFLIX (short for Bell Labs Flicks) that manipulated a pixel grid with eight shades of gray on an IBM 7090 computer. The combination of text, image, movement, and color exemplifies the multilayered, moving image experience for which VanDerBeek is best known.

VanDerBeek isolated single film frames from his computer animations translating the pixelated patterns via traditional printmaking processes such as color silkscreen and etching. This series of prints is presented for the first time since their display in the 1976 exhibition, *Machine Art*, at University of Maryland-Baltimore County. Two works titled *Moveable Mandalas* (1976), group nine color silkscreens arranged in a grid that take inspiration from the ancient diagrams of mandalas that were often transient in nature. In VanDerBeek's work, these new "Intergraphics" sought to be iterative and interactive, centered around his belief that it was imperative to hold onto our humanity in an increasingly technologically driven world.

VanDerBeek wrote many texts that illuminate this precarious balance. ***The Technological Revolution*** was written over fifty years ago while he was in residence at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. It was selected by the Stan VanDerBeek Archive and is presented alongside this text to bring in the artist's voice and contextualize the exhibition. Its message retains a striking relevance to our current moment where generative artificial intelligence is informing a new understanding of creation and consciousness.

Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984) was a prolific multimedia artist known for his pioneering work in experimental film, expanded cinema and computer art. VanDerBeek believed in technology as a tool to further the human experience. In his words, “new technologies will open higher levels of psychic communication and neurological referencing.” Throughout his career, VanDerBeek was deeply invested in how technology had the potential to build new cultural spaces, calling for a broader understanding in the ways accelerated media impacts our experience of the world, and ultimately each other. During his tenure at Bell Labs (1964–71) and as the first artist in residence at CAVS at MIT (1970), VanDerBeek developed new-media works in collaboration with other multidisciplinary researchers and artists interested in expanding and advancing an audience’s experience. This led to his explorations in various forms of transmission and feedback, such as his *Movie-Drome*, multi-site fax murals *Panels for the Walls of the World*, and his later engagements with public television broadcasting. Each encapsulates VanDerBeek’s technological prescience, humanist idealism, and poetic curiosity.

Stan VanDerBeek studied at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York (1948-1952), and at Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina (1949-1950). Recent exhibitions that have featured VanDerBeek’s work include *Looking Back / The 15th White Columns Annual*, Selected by Elisabeth Kley, White Columns, New York, NY (2025); *Electric Op*, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, NY (2025); *The Living End: Painting and Other Technologies, 1970-2020*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2025); *New American Cinema*, Eye Museum, Amsterdam, NL (2025); *Transmissions*, Magenta Plains, NY (2024); *Signals: How Video Transformed the World*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2023); *Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952-1982*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2023); *CONSOLAS: Democracia para la imagen digital (1972-2003)*, ETOPIA Centre for Art and Technology, Zaragoza, ES (2020); *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek*, Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center, Asheville, NC (2019); *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2018); *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950-1980*, Met Breuer, New York, NY (2017); *Merce Cunningham: Common Time*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2017); *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2016); *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2015); the 55th Venice Biennale, IT (2013); and *Stan VanDerBeek: The Culture Intercom*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, TX (2011). VanDerBeek’s work can be found in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, ES.

The Stan VanDerBeek Archive is dedicated to preserving and providing access to artwork produced by American multimedia artist Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984). Established in 2018 as the formal entity for the artist’s estate, the Archive keeps VanDerBeek’s work visible through maintaining the collection and providing support for acquisitions, exhibitions and publications. The Archive is comprised of an advisory board that includes the artist’s children, scholars and curators. Chelsea Spengemann has been involved with the estate since 2007 and currently serves as Director of the Archive.