

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

BILL VIOLA EXHIBITION OPENS NOVEMBER 5

Reception for the artist: Friday, November 11, from 6 to 8 p.m.



Beginning November 5, 2005, the James Cohan Gallery will present an exhibition devoted to new work by pioneering video artist Bill Viola. The works in the exhibition explore various thematic motifs, among them illumination, ecstatic union, dissolution, and ascension. Viola continues to use technology in ways that, rather than distancing us from one another, bring us closer to an understanding of the human condition. The exhibition runs through December 22.

The largest piece, *The Darker Side of Dawn*, is an hour-length work that details the quiet passage of the earth from light into darkness, and into light again. In evoking this never-ending transformation, the piece explores threshold states of being. Time seems suspended, as the viewer is

lulled into a meditative state. Recalling the nineteenth-century American landscapes of the Luminists, Viola manipulates our perception of time and space, opening the viewer to a higher state of consciousness and revelation.

In the second large projection piece, *Night Journey*, Viola continues to explore states of being, with fire serving as the element that effects change. In the work, a man walks toward a billowing flame, and emerges as a single candle. This passage through heat and light suggests both purification and enlightenment.

In *Becoming Light*, a large-scale work on a wall-mounted display, two underwater figures merge and slowly sink together into darkness. Their enraptured union dissolves into abstract form.

Many of the works on view are directly related to material created for "The Tristan Project," a meditation on the Richard Wagner opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The project was made in collaboration with director Peter Sellars and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, and was staged in project form by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in December 2004 and premiered in April 2005 at the Paris Opera. Viola has written, "*Tristan und Isolde* is the story of a love so intense and profound that it cannot be contained in the material bodies of the lovers." A new staging of the opera will premiere in New York in 2007.

Bill Viola (b.1951) is widely recognized as perhaps the premiere video artist on the international scene. For over 30 years he has created videotapes, architectural video

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installations, sound environments, electronic music performances, and works for television broadcast. Viola's video installations—total environments that envelop the viewer in image and sound—employ state-of-the-art technologies and are distinguished by their precision and direct simplicity. His single channel videotapes have been broadcast and presented cinematically around the world.

Since the early 1970s, Viola has used video to explore the phenomena of sense perception as an avenue to self-knowledge. His works focus on universal human experiences—birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness—and have roots in both Eastern and Western art, as well as spiritual traditions, including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism. He has been instrumental in the establishment of video as a vital form of contemporary art, and in so doing has helped to expand its scope in terms of technology, content, and historical reach.

Viola represented the U.S. at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995. In 1997 the Whitney Museum of American Art organized "Bill Viola: A 25-Year Survey," an exhibition that traveled to six museums in the United States and Europe. In 2003, The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles presented "Bill Viola: The Passions," which traveled to the National Gallery London and other museums worldwide. Viola lives and works in Long Beach with his wife and long time collaborator, Kira Perov, and their two sons. Viola is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including a John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

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