



**JOHN GILLIES:
VIDEO WORK
1982-2001**

Where Performance Space, 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern

When Wednesday-Saturday, noon-6pm, until May 15

More information 9698 7235

The Invisible Man chose his camouflage poorly: John Gillies and Tess de Quincey's *The de Quincey Tapes*. **Left:** a still from *Techno/Dumb/Show*.

exhibitions

Wizard of vid

From the Sydney Front to Cecil B. DeMille, John Gillies has his eye on the prize. By DOMINIQUE ANGELORO.

If you're into video art, you no longer have to search hard for that next pixel fix. With video and DVD works starting to make cash registers ring, the art establishment has truly welcomed this media into its midst.

John Gillies: Video Work 1982-2001 is an important reminder that video art hasn't just spontaneously combusted into the scene, but has a vivid history of experimentation in Australia. This retrospective includes four of Gillies's seminal works in which he has taken video footage and technically messed with it, creating unfamiliar viewing experiences.

Hymn is a two-monitor installation from 1983. On one screen, three figures pray feverishly in a looped sequence. The other

plays the momentous parting-of-the-waters scene from Cecil B. DeMille's iconic film *The Ten Commandments*.

The latter footage is almost unrecognisable, offered as a flickering image that washes light over the viewer in hypnotic waves. If you received a similarly degraded image on your TV at home, you'd no doubt check your reception.

Yet in the context of the installation, there is something incredibly moving about a scene of such magnitude being rendered in such an intensely grainy and faltering aesthetic. The strangeness of the image is heightened further by its pairing with the gesturing devotees.

Techno/Dumb/Show (1991) is a work Gillies produced in collaboration with the groundbreaking performance group the Sydney Front.

In one compelling sequence, Gillies cuts footage of a performer's movements into tiny slivers, repeating these fragments to create a stuttering video dance that's halfway between performance and seizure.

At other times the images are layered over each other, like a pulsating video collage. Instead of producing a logical narrative, this results in a form of video hypnosis, edging the viewer into unknown territories of subliminal association.

In a particularly dense montage, a group of distraught faces have their mouths stretched open in anguish, creating a strange, sad choir.

Elsewhere, *The Mary Stuart Tapes* (2000) is a single-screen projection that developed out of a project with performer Clare Grant.

In this work, a woman is seen weaving through city streets, speaking directly to the camera. Once again, Gillies has cut this video feed into fragments, but this time the audio track has also been dislocated from the visuals.

A female voice is heard, but it has not been synchronised with the movement of Grant's lips. This elicits an acutely unsettling viewing experience similar to the discomfort of watching a badly dubbed foreign film.