

ROSS, A., MEIKLE, G. and LEUZZI, L. 2017. *A polyphonic essay on memory*. [Video performance]. Performed on 9 November 2017, as part of the 9th North-East of North digital arts festival (NEoN Festival 2017): media archaeology, 7-12 November 2017, Dundee, United Kingdom.

# A polyphonic essay on memory.

ROSS, A., MEIKLE, G. and LEUZZI, L.

2017

*Curated by Alexandra Ross, Gayle Meikle and Laura Leuzzi. The text in this portfolio is distributed under a [Creative Commons BY-NC licence](#). Images reproduced in this document are copyright of the EWVA project.*

*This file contains a some text, an image and a few links to related materials, followed by a booklet that was produced alongside the event.*

# A Polyphonic Essay on Memory

"A Polyphonic Essay on Memory" was a performance, presentation and discussion on the theme of memory, generated through artworks selected from the [REWIND Artists Video Archive](#) and the [European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s \(EWVA\) project](#). EWVA was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), and is based at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design at the University of Dundee.

At this event, each curator unveiled their selected artworks both to each other and to the audience simultaneously. This event format disrupts the normal conventions of presenting artworks to an audience by introducing a live, spontaneous element of performance, in which the curators respond in the moment. The event therefore offered an alternative point of entry for reading artworks, with "live essaying" drawing on individually-gathered archives of material in order to contextualise the presented video art.

The event formed part of an ongoing project, "A Polyphonic Essay On...", which is a collaboration between Alexandra Ross and Gayle Meikle. The first iteration of this was commissioned by Transart and presented in 2016 at the Transart Triennale in Berlin. The "Memory" performance was presented as part of the [2017 NEON festival](#).

## Photographs from the event

This image is copyright of the EWVA project and was originally hosted on [the EWVA website](#).



Figure 1. Photograph of the event audience and speakers.

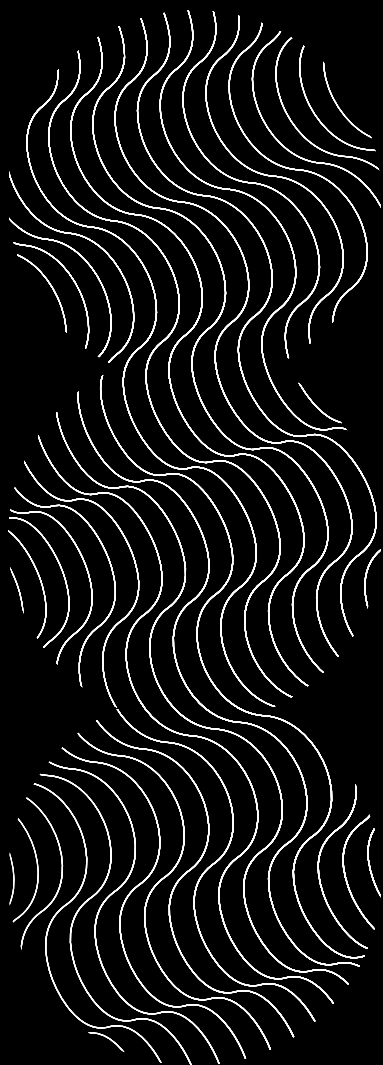


## Links

- EWVA page for the performance:  
<http://www.ewva.ac.uk/polyphonic-essay.html>
- Festival page for the performance:  
<https://neondigitalarts.com/event/polyphonic-essay-memory/>
- Festival website:  
<https://neondigitalarts.com/neon-digital-arts-festival-2017/>

# A Polyphonic Essay

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on  
Memory

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A curated collaboration by  
Alexandra Ross, Gayle Meikle  
and Laura Leuzzi

NEoN Digital Arts Festival  
Dundee | November 9 2017

**Tamara Krikorian**

*Vanitas*

1977 | 8 m 9 s

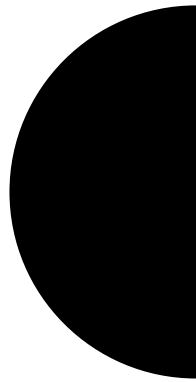
"*Vanitas* came after seeing a French painting attributed to Nicolas Tournier at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, *An Allegory of Justice and Vanity*. *Vanitas* is a self-portrait of the artist and at the same time an allegory of the ephemeral nature of television." (See Lux Scotland online).

Layering was a key element of her work, be it implicitly in the integration of her role in the creation of the work itself, or explicitly and the format and framing of the artwork – such as is the case with *Vanitas*. The interweaving of multiple narratives and voices in this work not only alludes to the presence of histories or *his*-stories; but also employs a powerful visual narrative which problematises the mode /device (television) and form of delivery. Issues of power, truth, and (fake)news are all brought to the fore when considered in the contemporary content.

*About the artist:*

Tamara Krikorian (1944 –2009) studied music and began making video in 1973 in Scotland. Krikorian was the founder of the artist-led distribution agency London Video Arts in 1976 and also taught in Maidstone and Newcastle. She lived in Wales and tirelessly worked across the visual arts sector to create, promote and support visual art practice. Through her work, she pioneered and encouraged practices which pushed boundaries and extended beyond conventional methods and accepted forms.

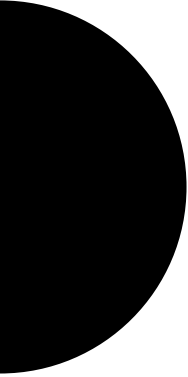
During the 1970s, she was one of the first female artists in the UK to work with video, with *Vanitas* being one of her seminal works. Interestingly for this project, she also created installations which spanned various art forms and combined video-conferences, collaborative works and also published texts. She also organised the significant exhibition *Video: Towards Defining an Aesthetic*, at the Third Eye, Glasgow in 1976.



**Rose Garrard**

*Smile Please*

1977 | 10 m 39 s



The video *Smile Please* explores notions of agency, potency and authority within the writing of history. Hero or villain, this artwork highlights that memory and the author of the dominant historical narrative are highly subjective and indeed can sit as uncomfortable bedfellows. The unfolding narrative and superimposed comically abject elements, serve to bemuse and confound what may be conventional reading of that notable 20th century event. However, what Garrard succinctly does is reveals the danger of singular reading, of where one can locate the formulation of an objective response to deeply subjective and inter-subjective moments. Pathos, confusion, and obfuscation move across the screen to diffuse consensus, rather unify.

Rose Garrard trained as a sculptor at Stourbridge, Birmingham and Chelsea Schools of Art and was awarded a British Council Scholarship to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris where she won the Prix d'Honneur de Paris Gold Medal for Sculpture in 1971. Her work extended into installation, multi-media, performance, video and audio pieces. For thirty years she received many further awards, curated group exhibitions and exhibited in major galleries both nationally and internationally, including in the Institute of Contemporary Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate, the Serpentine and the Hayward Galleries and abroad in the Venice Biennale, at the Museum of the 20th Century Vienna, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Messenhallen West Berlin and in many other cities across the world from Europe to Australia. As well as also being commissioned to make many public art works.

**Alexandra C M Ross**

Alexandra Ross is Lecturer in Contemporary Art and Curating at the University of Glasgow and has recently been accepted on the advisory faculty of the Transart Institute, New York. From 2015 to 2017 she was Postdoctoral Research Fellow with Centre for Curating the Archive, the University of Cape Town. Her more recent research works with the sonic space and the voice, with a curatorial focus on AR, VR, and virtual networks. Ross is recognised as a specialist in the exploration of the nuance and scope of conversational activity within curatorial critique and practice. In particular, her work explores the notion of critical conviviality as a vital and rich space that sits at the nexus of critical debate and hospitable generosity. With this, she plays with the conventions of tapping into and gathering the interstitial moments of recording and documenting curatorial and artistic process.

The video is in German, a translation of the voiceover can be found on your seat.

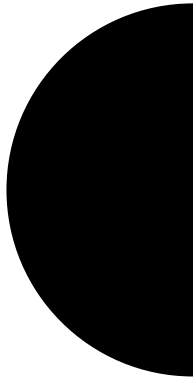
Artist 1

**Annegret Soltau**  
*Erinnerung [Memory]*  
1980 | 6 m 32 s

*Erinnerung [Memory]* is part of Soltau's *Schwanger sein II* (1980) a follow on from *Schwanger sein [Being Pregnant]* (1977–78). These two series explored Soltau's experiences of being pregnant; her changing body, her fears both as a woman and an artist. Distinct from *Schwanger sein* this later series opened up the socio-political aspects of pregnancy alongside the artists lived experiences. *Erinnerung* portrays the memories of Soltau's mother who gave birth to her shortly after WW2 in Lüneburg, Germany. The video contains references to threads which are prevalent in Soltau's other artworks, most notably in her photo montage work. The video was produced at ECG-TV-Studio, Frankfurt. The series was displayed as an installation of nine CRT monitors embedded in large photos of Soltau's pregnant body at Kunstverein Frankfurt in 1983.

About the artist:

Annegret Soltau studied painting and graphics at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg (1967–72), with Professors Hans Thiemann, Kurt Kranz, Rudolf Hausner and David Hockney. In 1973 she was awarded a DAAD scholarship to study in Milan. Soltau returned to Germany and in 1975 began to work with photo overstretching which later led to experiments in video. She is a pioneer of the European feminist avant garde whose experiments in performance, video and sound broke ground in the representation of female artists, their experiences and desires. As such she has received many art prizes including the recently awarded Johann-Heinrich-Merck-Honor by the City of Darmstadt in 2016.



**Marion Urch**

*Out of the Ashes*

1987 | 12 m 28 s

*Out of the Ashes* explores mythologies around femininity. Focusing on the properties of fire, this video constructs an allegoric portrayal of the power of the female spirit. Connecting ancient associations of fire, blood and goddesses to the subsequent eradication of this potency through the persecution of women (witch trials and Christianity). Urch retells these forgotten histories drawing them out from the ashes of misogyny to present a more positive possibility of celebrating womanhood and its ancient power. The video was originally conceived as a 5-channel installation arranged in a semi-circle like a hearth in 1986. The single channel version was made a year later.

*About the artist:*

Marion Urch is an award-winning artist and writer. She studied at Brighton Polytechnic and at the Royal College of Art in London. She was part of the second wave of British video art, gaining a significant international reputation for her work in single screen video, video installation and tape/slide. In 1987 she won first prize at II Bienal de Video Mamm, Columbia for *Out of the Ashes*, which was also broadcast on TV Finland. Her artworks are held in collections around the world including Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Illeanna Toynta Centre, Athens and Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam.

More recently, she has moved into fiction and has published two novels *Violent Shadows* (Headline Review 1996) and *An Invitation to Dance* (Brandon 2009), which has also been published in the US, Russia and Germany.

**Gayle Meikle**

Gayle Meikle is a curator based out of Newcastle Upon Tyne. Her practice is concerned with the curatorial and more broadly the systems and structures in how one encounters, makes and produces contemporary art. She studied both Time Based Art and Electronic Imaging at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee University (2002–2007). She is a founding committee member of the Dundee based collective Yuck 'n Yum, alongside Andrew Maclean and Ben Robinson. More recently she has worked with ATLAS Arts (2013–2016) to deliver a two-year visual arts programme in the Outer Hebrides. Currently, she is undertaking a practice-led PhD at the Bxnu Institute (Northumbria University) speculating on the potential forms of a university gallery through the lens of a feminist art practice.



Artist 1

**Antonie Frank  
Grahamsdaughter**

*Transit*

1986 | 5 m 50 s

*Transit* places the viewer between dream and reality, fiction and non-fiction, past and present, myth and sexology, nature and urban.

The image keeps shifting abruptly between the ancestral figure of the 'wild woman' hunting in the jungle and living with birds and snakes, in contact with her primordial needs, fears and sensations, and the reality of the contemporary urban environment. Suddenly a face that belongs to neither reality appears, harking back to ancestral memories preserved in the woman's genetic system.

*Transit* deals with retrieval of lost or hidden instinctual knowledge and memory in the human beings, alienated from the natural environment in which they first evolved.

About the artist:

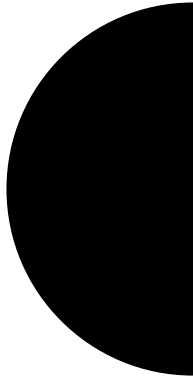
Antonie Frank Grahamsdaughter (b 1955) was born in Toronto and moved in 1962 to Sweden. She studied at the College of Arts in Stockholm at the Department of Fine Arts and received her Master of Fine Art in 1984.

In 1984 she began to study at the Jan Van Eyck Academy Maastricht in the Netherlands, specialising in Time Based Art to develop her skills in media art, particularly video.

In the 80s she experimented particularly with moving image, colour and composition using chroma-key techniques and installations with multiple monitors. Her pioneering video works include *Metamorforce* (1985) and *Transit* (1986).

In 1996, she received one of Film Forms' honorary fellowships for her work with the digital moving image.

She continues to work with the moving image, mainly working on experimental documentaries.



Music  
by Bettina  
Gruber, Igor  
Tillmann, Uwe  
Wiesemann  
and Gerhard  
Zilligen

Artist 2

**Maria Vedder & Bettina Gruber**  
*The Heartbeat of the Anubis*  
[Der Herzschlag des Anubis]  
1988 | 4 m 57 s

In *The Heartbeat of Anubis*, Maria Vedder and Bettina Gruber employ mythological elements from ancient Egypt and natural and staged scenes to reflect upon concepts of Life and Death.

In a 'boustrophedonic choral dance', the image of Anubis – God of Death, represented by the dog or the jackal, who led the souls of the departed towards the west over the waters in the underworld – alternates with Horus, the falcon whose eyes are the sun and the moon and whose wing tips touch the earth.

These mythological scenes – memory of an ancient and oneiric past – are alternated to two contemporary, parallel-conceived scenes: a man breathing in tooter with two feathers, which creates a rhythmic musical ode to the ka, the winging pneuma, the soul ascending to its destination; and a hunting leopard prevailing on an antelope, a powerful metaphor of the natural cycle of life.

About the artist:

Bettina Gruber (b 1947) and Maria Vedder (b 1948) gave a fundamental contribution to the development of video as a medium in the art scene in the 1980s and since then they have contributed to a public attention for video art. For several years they produced videos as a duo, in which they commented the social conventions, especially gender issues, with stage-like scenes and humorous, sometimes ironic performances. They jointly authored books as *Handbuch der Videopraxis* [Manual of Video Practice] (1982) and *Kunst und Video* [Art and Video] (1983) that were fundamental to the understanding and spread of video as a new art form. Since the end of the 1980s, they have been working separately. Maria Vedder works as a media artist in Berlin and has been professor for media art from 1991 to 2014 at the University of the Arts Berlin. Bettina Gruber lives and works as a freelance artist in Cologne, Germany.

### Laura Leuzzi

Laura Leuzzi is an art historian and curator. Currently she is Researcher on the Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded research project 'EWVA: European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s' at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee. She completed her PhD at Sapienza University of Rome in 2011.

Author of articles and essays in books and exhibition catalogues, her research is particularly focused on the relationship between words and images in visual art, video art and new media. She has curated exhibitions, screenings and events in Italy, UK and Switzerland with a particular focus on early video practice, art and feminism and media arts. She sits on the curatorial board of the Rome Media Art Festival and on the jury of the Wellcome Trust funded program *Transitional States* (2016–2018).

### *A Polyphonic Essay On...*

is an ongoing collaboration between Alexandra Ross and Gayle Meikle. The first iteration was commissioned by Transart and presented at the Transart Triennale in Berlin 2016.

This edition is a collaboration with Laura Leuzzi and explores the notion of memory as it pertains to women's video art practices. *A Polyphonic Essay On Memory* is a performance, presentation and discussion on the theme of memory generated through artworks selected from the REWIND Artists Video Archive and the AHRC funded research project EWVA (European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s).

Each curator will unveil their selected artworks to one another and the audience simultaneously. This format agitates expected conventions and the mediated response of presenting artworks to an audience. Introducing a live, spontaneous element of performance in which the curators will respond in the moment. As such, it is anticipated that this event proffers an alternative entry to reading artworks and is recommended to those interested in the expanded field of the curatorial. Live essaying will draw from individually gathered archives of material and will unfold, surround and contextualise the presented video artworks.

The resulting conversation, built from a highly researched, but unrehearsed form of delivery, will draw from a prepared bank of audio excerpts, quotes, and other materials. This conversation will weave around the artworks and artistic practices to pull the critique, audience and curators close to the screened artworks.

This edition has been generously supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded research project, EWVA, and NEoN.

NEoN (North East of North) started in 2009 and aims to advance the understanding and accessibility of digital and technology driven art forms, and to encourage high quality within the production of this medium. NEoN has organised exhibitions, workshops, talks, conferences, live performances and in 2017 its annual festival is on the theme of Media Archaeology, in part investigating hidden histories of media art.

The full programme is at: [www.northeastofnorth.com](http://www.northeastofnorth.com)

EWVA is based at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee. Led by the British video pioneers Professor Elaine Shemilt and Professor Stephen Partridge with Research Fellow Dr Laura Leuzzi and Media Archivist, Adam Lockhart.

The REWIND Artists' video archive is an extensive collection of preserved UK video works from the 1970s and 1980s. It has become an important resource for curators, scholars, students and artists, addressing the gap in knowledge in early media works.

The archive also consists of artist interviews, documents and ephemera that relate to the work.



**NEoN Digital  
Arts Festival**



**European Women's  
Video Art**



**REWIND Artists' Video  
in the 1970s & 1980s**



**Arts & Humanities  
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**Duncan of Jordanstone  
College of Art and Design  
University of Dundee**



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