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Of mentors, teachers and pioneers: herstories of video and media art in Europe.

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This file contains the extended abstract for the above presentation.

Of mentors, teachers and pioneers: herstories of video and media art in Europe

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Extended Abstract

In the 70s, many women artists perceived video – that at the time was relatively new - as a tool free from the heavy patriarchal imprint of traditional artistic practices. Thanks to its technical specificities, it facilitated performance to camera and allowed working in intimate contexts.

In several countries, including the UK, many women artists experimenting with video were in Fine Art and Sculpture Departments. These environments were marked by a strong male culture and most of the teachers were still men. A few years later, women video pioneers would become teachers in the Art Schools and Universities in Europe, inspiring a new generation of artists – and, more importantly, women artists - to explore video and new media. Their relevance and influence as educators have, however, not been acknowledged in the histories of the medium and are yet to be properly investigated.

An interesting and yet marginalised example of an artist and educator is the British artist Elsa Stansfield - who, as part of the duo Hooykaas/Stansfield, is now recognised as one of the most significant pioneers of video art in Europe. In 1980 Stansfield was invited to establish a Time-Based Media Department at the postgraduate institute Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, where she organised symposia and exhibitions, inviting some of the most important video artists and new media artists of the time - including Bill Viola, Joan Jonas, Marina Abramović, Al Robins and Toni Oursler.

Stansfield's work as an educator and mentor influenced several artists who were students of the Academy at the time. For example, Swedish video and media artist Antonie Frank Grahmsdaughter recalled: "For me, Elsa Stansfield was a great inspiration as a teacher. It was very important to meet female artists such as Joan Jonas and Marina Abramović, along with others who were invited to talk about their work at the Jan Van Eyck. It was also significant that they were female artists, as we female students could identify with these female video artists in a film world dominated by men, which is still the case even today."

This paper aims to question transmissions, teaching methods and approaches. It also aims to discuss and reassess the legacy of a generation of women video and new media pioneers – including Stansfield, Nan

Hoover, Tamara Krikorian, Maria Vedder and Ulrike Rosenbach - who became teachers and mentors in art schools and academies in Europe, and who deeply influenced successive generations of media artists.

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