

# THE EMPRESS OF FORGOTTEN TIME

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The idea for our Active Images arose from our love of video photography and from our subsequent despair over the loss of these images when turning them into a film.

What we call the Active Image is a displayable motion picture image that bridges the recognizable gap between photography and narrative film.

Simply put, a photograph is a single suspended sliver of time; a film is an edited narrative. In between these two temporal extremes exists the ›extended photo‹ or what we call the film ›take‹, which is a recorded moving image that constitutes the raw material of the film.

The individual images that enable the visual language of a narrative film or a television show pass by. The average length of an image on television is maybe three seconds, in feature film usually even less – before it is substituted by the next one.

So, the raw material of a television or film document always serves another purpose, that of the narrative or whatever flow of meaning it has been shortened – edited – into. This raw material never has value of its own.

Aesthetically speaking, our Active Images are based on the desire to show the individual images exactly for what they are, no more, no less. Traditionally, in narrative film and television, each individual image is edited into something else, serving the narrative or drama of the film; by editing these individual images into something else they cannot be seen for what they are themselves, and flow away in the stream of a larger construct, that of the edited film narrative. In other words, the individual images that constitute a film work are never seen for themselves but always in an ulterior context. These individual images, or ›takes‹, for some reason in now 130 years of film history, have never been recognized for what they are themselves, have never been shown for what they are themselves and therefore never been experienced as art.

Our Active Images arose from the desire to actually see and linger with the individual images, to pay attention to them for their own sake, to allow them to unfold their own intrinsic beauty by letting them stand alone. We needed to liberate these images from the confines of an ulterior film narrative and show them purely for what they are themselves. This was achieved by displaying these

Active Images like paintings or photography on a Digital Canvas on a wall or any surface. Their context needed to be changed by not only removing them from the narrative of the film (or TV show) but also by simultaneously changing the context within which they could be seen from the cinema screen or TV set to the installation space of a wall at home or in public.

In freeing the individual images from the context of a value judgment induced by edited film, it is our desire to attract new value to them – value without judgment.

Our Active Images don't mean anything specific. They are not put to use, they are simply shown.

Television's prerogative is to commission shows that are normally based on preconceived ideas or themes which in turn need to exist within very confined contextual and technological boundaries. In this respect television, whether public or commercial, succumbs to fairly rigid rules that don't allow experiments, coincidence, or individual initiative. Anything more adventurous is more or less cynically left to the wild-life documentarians and unconventional art school types (who have no access to broadcasting, so they are ineffectual anyway).

The craft of the television film maker is directed towards achieving a broadcast product as quickly as possible. It is like informational ›fast food‹.

In order to understand the nascence of our Active Images one needs to remember that in television production it is unthinkable to record images without dialog or music for very much longer than ten seconds. This is the approximate time ratio generally considered sufficient to give the editor enough raw material for cutting the shot or angle desired into the film assembly.

Everything in film production is aimed at keeping this shooting ratio, as we call it, as low as possible, for the simple reason of saving time and money. Furthermore, no matter how much raw material is shot and minimized into the film product, it is destroyed immediately after broadcast since the broadcaster does not see any reason to store or save it.

Thus, countless documents are lost forever. Within such a television climate any idea that a film document or the image itself could

contain emotional significance is thoroughly wasted.

When Van and I first met we immediately discovered – equally as film makers and film viewers – our mutual love for these lost images, these pictures that always pass.

Coincidentally, that same year Van and I met, in 1989, the advent of professional broadcast video tape (Betacam SP) allowed shooting continuous images of up to 35 minutes in length without interruption, and this was not previously possible either with film stock (too costly), or with prior video formats (too poor in quality).

However, the creative possibilities of this crucial detail of modern video technology remained a mystery to the broadcasters. No television channel would ever show a single continuous image of 35 minutes length – but to us that possibility was the gateway to a new and fascinating universe of imagery.

Almost immediately, Van and I began recording images of extended duration, knowing that only a sliver of these images would be used for the resulting TV shows we had been commissioned for. These were the images we wanted to see more of.

Paradoxically, in taking advantage of high-quality, professional television production within the demands of television we could see these lovely moments that were not meant for anything, and inadvertently we began producing waste for our own enjoyment. This, in turn, became something useful.

Formally, our images are photographs extended into time. In their appearance as Active Images, they display two basic principles: (a) they do not adhere to any preconceived narrative, and (b) they are of indeterminate duration.

Simply enough, breaking the time barrier of precious film stock suddenly allowed space for random events to manifest themselves for us film makers. Within the frame of the locked-down video camera, over time, these moments could sometimes be caught. Little random everyday events that we normally don't pay much attention to.

We are interested in the culture of the Everyday, to show things that are so-to-say ›hidden right in front of our eyes‹. We are interested in the unusual in the common,

the extraordinary in the ordinary. We are interested in the road-side peculiarities that swiftly pass by because one is traveling in a car focused on going somewhere else. We try to pay attention to things along the way-side, things that get overlooked.

In one way, we are finding chance.

As for the choices of our Active Images: we surf the waves of popular culture. We have traveled the world; we've taken the camera to Japan and Hong Kong, across the United States, Latin America, and to nearly every country in Europe. We go where everybody goes – or potentially can go. We don't go to war zones or to distant, uninhabited places where we could likely die before getting back home. We visit places that are, in some way, familiar and accessible to everyone. That's exciting and sensationalist enough for us.

Over the past 25 years we have collected about 1,600 hours of video footage. The extracted Active Images from this raw material are the result of questioning, over the years, whether these images still resonate with us, whether they retain the ability to continuously fascinate us. In reliving these pictures we are looking for an ongoing emotion. And, we worry about them again and again.

Our Active Images result from the simple desire to show something beautiful, something interesting and hopefully elegant, a picture worth looking at.

Van and I began our Active Images for our own enjoyment; and although we always wanted to do something with them, it was due to the help of others that they can now be seen.

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