

Exhibition: *Bill Viola: Slowly Turning Narrative*

On View: April 1–June 27, 2021

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 3)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Bill Viola: Slowly Turning Narrative*, an important early installation by pioneering video artist Bill Viola (b. 1951). *Slowly Turning Narrative* (1992), from LACMA's permanent collection, is an immersive environment of image and sound with two projections on a large rotating central screen. The work speaks to the universal human condition and encompasses themes of presence and absence, childhood and aging, creation and destruction, and the many and the one. One projection, in color, shows vignettes of society's most corporeal, social, and cultural selves: newborn babies, children at play, people at work, sickness, healing, commerce, car accidents, celebrations, lovers, nature, death—in short, a catalogue of universal human experiences. The other projection portrays a black and white close-up of the artist's face, while his voice chants phrases of human activity such as: "the one who lives," "the one who acts," "the one who reads," "the one who talks," "the one who cries," "the one who loves," "the one who dies," etc. One side of the central screen is mirrored; as the reflective side comes into view, the visitor's own image is subsumed into the video imagery (both on the mirrored screen and reflected onto the surrounding walls), evoking the fullness of human existence. LACMA's presentation of *Slowly Turning Narrative* marks the first time this work will be on view in the United States in over 20 years. This exhibition is curated by Carol S. Eliel, Senior Curator of Modern Art, LACMA.

In Bill Viola's own words, the work "is concerned with the enclosing nature of the self-image and potentially infinite (and therefore unattainable) states of being, all revolving around the still point of the central self. The room and all persons within it become a continually shifting projection screen, enclosing the image and its reflections, all locked into the regular cadences of the chanting voice and the rotating

screen. The entire space becomes an interior for the revelations of a constantly turning mind absorbed with itself. The confluences and conflicts of image, intent, content, and emotion perpetually circulate as the screen slowly turns in the space.”

### **About the Artist**

Bill Viola, born in 1951, is a pioneer in the development of video as a major medium of contemporary art. For over 40 years he has made work that consistently addresses life, death, and the intervening journey—all of which he has rooted in Eastern and Western art as well as in spiritual traditions including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism. Born in New York City, Viola graduated in 1973 from the College of Visual and Performing Arts of Syracuse University, where he studied electronic music, performance art, and experimental film, and created his first video works with the timely invention of the portable video camera/recorder. After graduating, Viola spent 18 months working in Florence, surrounded by Renaissance art and architecture. Later, a fellowship allowed him—along with Kira Perov, his wife and collaborator—to live in Japan from 1980–81, studying Zen Buddhist philosophy and experiencing the architecture, calligraphy, Noh theater, and many other aspects of Japanese culture that influenced his work. Viola then moved to Southern California, though extensive travels have taken him to the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, the deserts of Tunisia, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, Hindu fire-walking ceremonies in Fiji, and Native American archaeological sites in the Southwestern United States, all formative destinations. Viola represented the United States at the 1995 Venice Biennale, and two years later, a major survey of his travelled internationally, including to LACMA. He currently lives in Long Beach, California.

### **Exhibition Related Programming**

[ Virtual ] Art & Conversation | January 25, 2021  
Noon–1pm | Free, RSVP on [lacma.org](https://lacma.org)

On Bill Viola’s 70th birthday, learn about the artist’s work and his installation *Slowly Turning Narrative* in LACMA’s collection. Join David A. Ross, chair, MFA Art Practice, School of the Visual Arts and longtime friend of the artist, and Carol S. Eliel, senior curator, Modern Art, LACMA. Ross was formerly the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art and SFMOMA. He began his museum career in 1972 as the world’s first curator of video art at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, NY.

Visit [lacma.org](https://lacma.org) for the latest on exhibition-related programming.

**Credit:** This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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#### **About LACMA**

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 142,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

**Images captions:** (Left): Bill Viola, *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992, video/sound installation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council Fund, © Bill Viola Studio, photo: Gary McKinnis; (Right): Bill Viola, *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992, video/sound installation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council Fund, © Bill Viola Studio, photo by Kira Perov, courtesy of the artist

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