

Idearium

Museum of Memory

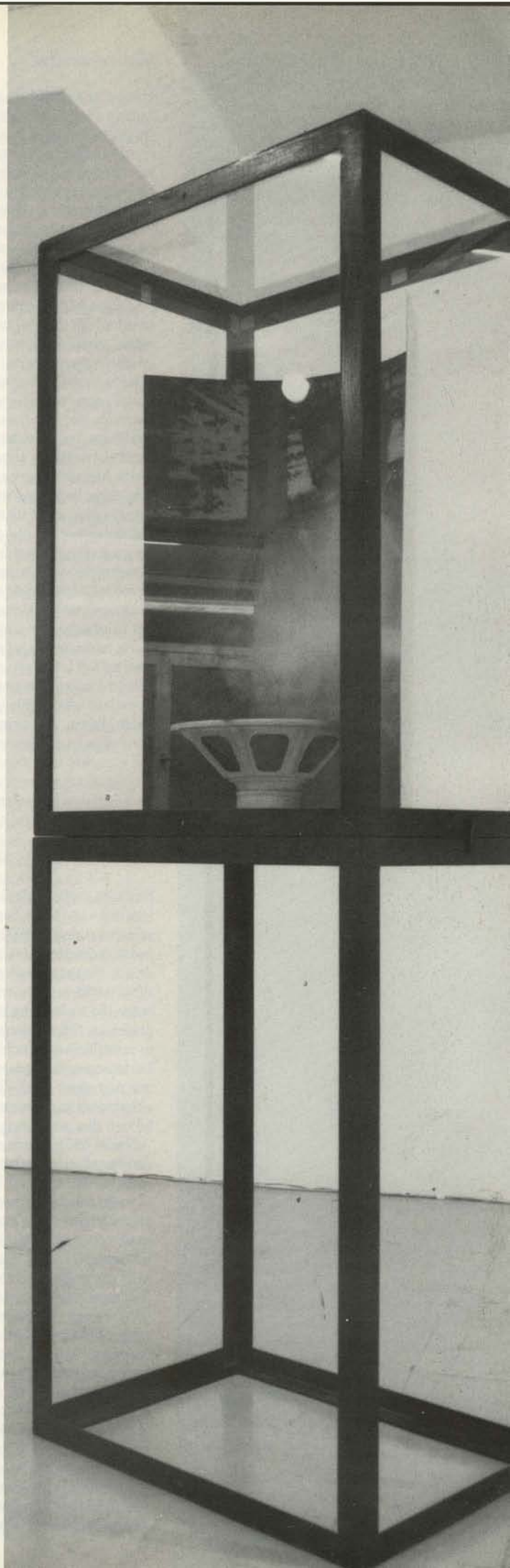
LAKKE

●...From the *Museum of Memory*, the cycle of video installations by ELSA STANSFIELD and MADELON HOOYKAAS consists at present of six installations, some of which have been realized a number of times (see the list at the end of this article). There will be a seventh instalment of this cycle in ARNHEM CITY MUSEUM'S *Koepelzaal* in September of this year.

I

●Human thinking exists by grace of the fact that memory establishes, preserves, orders, maintains thought, and – provided it's good – can recall it again. In a figurative sense you could picture memory as being a gigantic system of halls, rooms, corridors, cupboards, drawers, folders, indexes, lists and so on and so forth. An imaginary structure with spaces full of industriousness and activity where the mind's clerks hurry to and fro, and with silent, forgotten places that haven't been entered for ages.

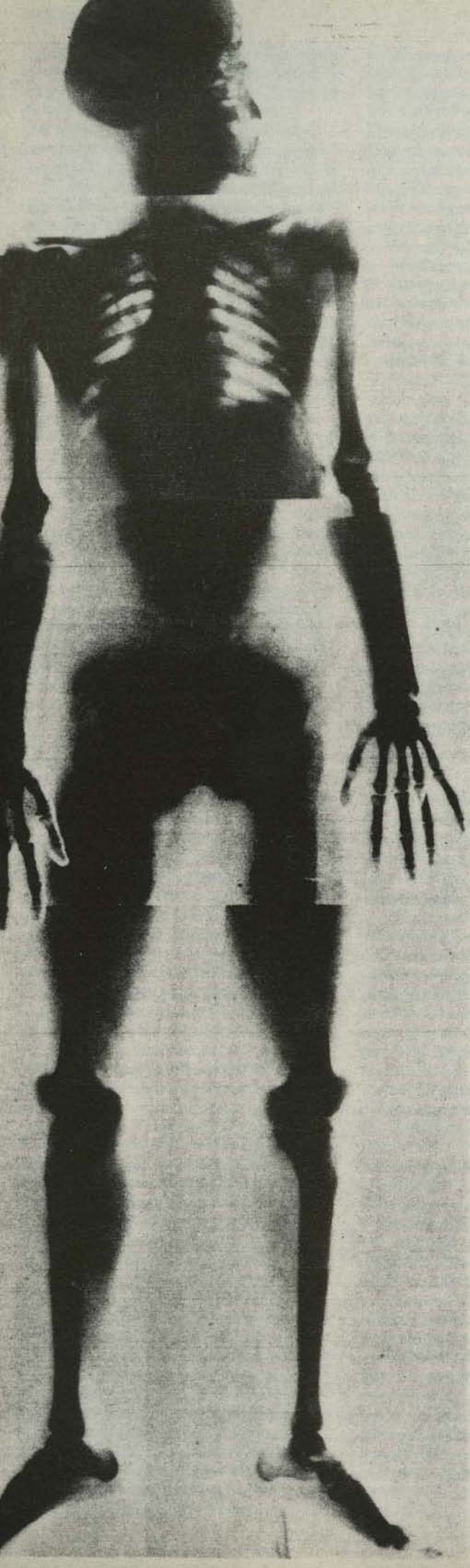
If you imagine the mind in such a concrete way the association with the institution of the museum becomes obvious. The museum is also a place for collecting, classifying and conserving. This typical mixture of the strictly personal (thoughts, experiences, recollections and emotions) with the collective (culture in general, behavioural norms) is stored up practically inextricably in each person's memory, you also find it in museums – albeit in another form. After all, the art objects that museums collect are the individual expressions of artists and craftspeople that acquire a significance and value within a culture that is beyond the individual (= general). By means of its mediating function, the museum erects a bridge between the



De Umbris

STANSFIELD HOOYKAAS'

GERARD



De video-installatie-cyclus ...*From the Museum of Memory* van ELSA STANSFIELD en MADELON HOOYKAAS bestaat momenteel uit zes installaties, waarvan sommigen meerdere malen uitgevoerd zijn (zie lijst achteraan het artikel). Een zevende aflevering van de cyclus zal in september van dit jaar gerealiseerd worden in de *Koepelzaal* van het ARNHEMS GEMEENTEMUSEUM.

I

Het menselijk denken bestaat bij de gratie van het feit dat het geheugen *het gedachte* vastlegt, conserveert, ordent, onderhoudt en – als het goed is – weer tevoorschijn kan roepen. In figuurlijke zin zou je het geheugen voor kunnen stellen als een gigantisch systeem van zalen, kamers, gangen, kasten, laden, mappen, indexen, lijsten en wat dies meer zij. Een imaginair bouwwerk met ruimtes vol bedrijvigheid en activiteit waar de klerken van de geest heen en weer snellen, en met stille, vergeten plekjes die lange tijd niet betreden zijn.

Als je het geheugen op een zo concrete wijze voorstelt ligt de associatie met het instituut museum voor de hand. Ook het museum is een plek waar wordt verzameld, gerangschikt en bewaard. Die typische mengeling van het strikt persoonlijke (gedachten, bevindingen, herinneringen en emoties) met het collectieve (het algemene cultuurgood, gedragsnormen) die vrijwel onontwaaarbaar in het geheugen van ieder mens ligt opgeslagen, tref je – zij het in een andere vorm – ook in musea aan. De kunstvoorwerpen die musea verzamelen zijn immers de individuele uitingen van kunstenaars en ambachtslieden, die binnen een cultuur een bovenindividuele (= algemene) betekenis en waarde hebben gekregen.

individual and the rest, between I and they, but also between then and now.

The collective and the subjective, past and present merge imperceptibly with each other in the function of both museum and memory.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the cycle of video installations entitled *...From the Museum of Memory* by ELSA STANSFIELD and MADELON HOOYKAAS is that it thematizes this interweaving of the personal (present) and the general (past) so clearly and at the same time so elusively. On the one hand, the installations' video images, sound and carefully designed arrangements appeal extremely directly to generally acceptable notions and feelings and contain recognizable elements of cultural baggage. But on the other hand, they bear the unmistakable traces of the personal, of the two artists' individual taste and sensitivity in their internal successions, relations and combinations, and in the specific modifications which sound and image have undergone. Their *Museum of Memory* is built on the cutting edge between collective and individual memory, between the memory of the past and life at present, in the murky area between the subjective dream and the objective reality with offshoots on both sides. The central point of their building plan is the idea of creating a museum that exists in your own head. That is different for everyone, because everyone has individual memories.

II

ELSA STANSFIELD (1945) and MADELON HOOYKAAS (1942) began their artistic collaboration in 1972. Both had a background in the media. STANSFIELD's studies had included film at the SLADE SCHOOL OF FINE ART in London; HOOYKAAS had worked for a long time as the student of various photographers and film-makers. At first the collaboration remained incidental and they both continued to make individual work alongside their joint projects. Now all the work comes out of profound co-operation, although for them this is not an ideological choice per se.

From 1975, they have made a large number of video installations, frequently in combination with photography, objects (sculpture) and sound. Connected roughly with what was happening elsewhere in art, the exploration of the specific character of the video medium played an important role in the first years of their collaboration. A structuralist approach in which elements specific to the media such as time and movement, the electronic construction of the video image, the framing of the screen and the monitor's physical object-like character were explored for their qualities and placed in relation to the environment. During this period there were strong conceptualist undercurrents in their work, which did not hinder the individual works' extremely sensual and physical aura.

III

STANSFIELD and HOOYKAAS have made

no less than 40 tapes and installations since 1975 often in combination with photography, objects (sculpture) and sound. What is characteristic of their video-work is that they (almost) always start out from a point of reality; their surroundings (which can mean nature or sources such as their working material) are recorded, made visible and analysed by means of the work. There is no cold-blooded, scientific or intellectual concept at the root of this analysis, rather a loving attention for and interest in nature, the elements, the environment and the medium of video. It is a sensual investigation by the senses, conducted intuitively, that acquires a lasting form and emotional transference in the works.

Travel is a particularly fertile source of inspiration for STANSFIELD and HOOYKAAS. Some of the countries they have visited over the last few years include Norway, the Shetland Isles, Japan and more recently, Burma and Nepal. The videotapes and installations that in time result from visual and sound material recorded on these journeys seek to capture and make understandable essential experiences such as that of landscape, sense of direction, orientation and distance, and cultural characteristics. Not in literal or documentary terms but in a poetic, evocative sense. Ultimately, these impressions and particularly the subsequent mental processing determine the result to a great extent.

STANSFIELD and HOOYKAAS' working method consists mainly of making a large number of recordings during their travels which are later edited into a significant relation after a sort of incubation period. So it's not surprising that HOOYKAAS and STANSFIELD opted for the subject of memory, recollection in *...From the Museum of Memory*. Recollections of particular journeys, places, situations and events have actually determined an important part of their work: after all, the concept for the tapes, the content is often only established subsequently, after the experiences have been filtered by the process of memory. Once that distance is taken, the experiences become memories.

This aspect is often assimilated in a subtle way into the video images and sound. Because although the recordings they use as a basic material are made on location, the artists add a dimension to this by means of a number of techniques that withdraw the images from recognizable reality and guide them into the domain of mind and memory. The soft, almost misty colours which lend the image something of the character of faded photos. The extreme close-ups of elements such as those of landscape that at first seem to be completely abstract and only later betray their true nature in the shifting transition between the unrecognizable and the recognizable. The camera's slow, rather jerky movements, sometimes in slow-motion. The subtle tension between image and sound that in a number of cases also has direct physical origins (e.g. heartbeat, breathing) and thereby achieve a kind of internalization in the viewer. All these aspects give the tapes