

home, a close friend of the family. Since he spent considerable time with the British, he spoke fluent English with only a slight accent. One afternoon in the city, he paused at the entrance of a French antique shop, unaware that behind him the owner of the shop was wrestling with a bulky chest. The owner abrasively suggested that Rolando should move aside. Rolando, being polite offered his help. Once the chest was secured, the owner brushed him aside, tipping him a quarter. A week later at a dinner party, Rolando found himself across the table from the shop owner once more. He paused

in the story, grinning at the recollection. Disguised in the formality of a tuxedo, the shop owner remembered meeting Rolando but not under what circumstances. Finally the owner asked Rolando if they had met. Rolando reached into his pocket, handed the quarter to his acquaintance and replied «yes». Afterwards they began to talk, and Rolando became his assistant buyer in the shop. Rolando's eye for authenticity, style, and beauty enabled him to excel in the business, but after four years of the fast-paced life of New York, he felt consumed by it and returned to Florence.

At this point, face lined with re-

gret, Rolando came back to the present reality of his small salary and long hours. The prospect of dying in Rome, the city he scorned with Florentine pride, left his thoughts chilled and barren. His experience had been marred by the convivication and squandering of his inheritance. His coat of arms remained locked away in his villa in Florence, resentment turning his haven into the corpse of his youth. He was another ex-patriot who softened the aches of age with scotch and memories and the familiarity of a fading era.

E.B.

IMAGES CHANGING

Theo Eshetu may be the only video artist in Rome. He differs with that title, saying, «I don't call myself an artist.» The field of video has not had time to evolve its own rules and vocabulary, but instead the individual determines what to do and what to name it when it is finished. Eshetu said his interest in video stemmed from his concern with moving images. He found that video enabled him to take his photographic ideas another step forward, so his interest in video quickly outpaced that of photography. He is known primarily for his work in video, which has been shown at the International Festival of Youth Cinema at Torino, at Video Roma, an annual international collection of the latest work in the many branches of video, from documentary to computer-synthesized images, and at several nightclubs here in Rome. His most recent work is being shown at the Film Festival of Salsomaggiore, April 20-27.

'Machina ex Deus' met with Eshetu in a studio in Villa Medici, where he was taping a T.V. interview. A window gave us a view of all of Rome, from Piazza del Popolo to EUR, and when tired of such splendor, there were the football players in Villa Borghese from another. It was an appropriate setting to ask Eshetu why he works in an avant-guard medium in a city whose artistic masterpieces are from other centuries.

But what exactly is a video artist?

«An artist who uses video instead of paint, for reasons of expression, experimentation, or research; video attracts artists from other media because it is adaptable and easy to use. Because it is so new, there is plenty of freedom for interpretation».

What is it that attracts you to video?

«I like images, to play with images. Video equipment makes self-indulgence so easy that you can even tape things right from the T.V.

and remix them to come up with some great stuff, without ever using the camera. My video is always about images; I never use a plot. I mix, tamper with, and distort different images, some filmed, some from T.V., to investigate the type of effects that video equipment can produce».

You say the equipment is easy to use. Does that mean that anyone can make a good video on their first try? If a person can make a good film, can they produce a good video?

«No. Video is much faster moving than film. It has a different 'time'. You can see on the monitor exactly what you're taping while you're doing it, but with film you need time and money to develop the results. People also have a different way of looking at film, which is taken into account by those who make them. You're content to watch a film for two hours, but not to look at a video for that long. So video needs to be speeded up com-

pared to film, with more cuts and quicker editing, to hold the viewer's attention. Since video is so cheap and available, it leads to a lot of experimentation and therefore, new ideas. But it is also criticized for this; since it is more accessible, people tend to use it in a trashy way».

Why did you come back to Rome? A more obvious choice would have been to remain in London, where a lot of work in video is going on, especially in music video.

«Rome is the nicest place to live in the world. You have to choose between being hectic and neurotic and working a lot there, or staying here and working in a better environment at a slower pace with less money. The ideal would be to live in two places, one to wind you up, and then Rome to wind you down. The good thing about Rome is it's relaxed and loose and therefore you need a clear mind to work here, because if you become too loose you stop working. So you must be determined, know what you want to do and then you can relax and do it».

What outlets for your work are there in Rome?

«Very few, unfortunately. In cities like New York and London, vi-

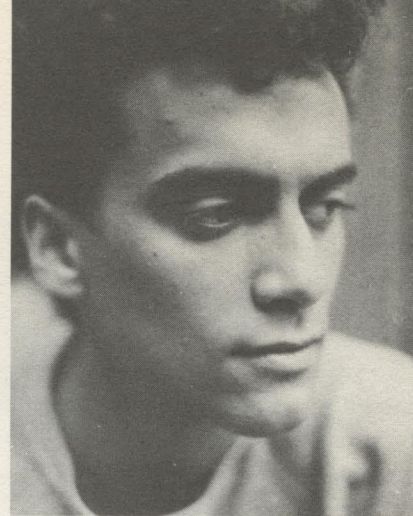
deo is an accepted medium. In Italy, people are only beginning to accept video as something worthwhile to watch. New York, for example, has organizations to fund video, galleries for video installations, nightclubs for music video and so on. Yet you can't make the presumption that Rome should be like New York. That presumption shouldn't exist. Here art videos are shown at film festivals, or at the occasional nightclub».

How has the reception been in general?

«There has been very good reception, but no money. The good reception is due to your experience, it's the fact that you're doing something new that interests people. Someone coming from America or England will be well-received because of their wider experience».

So you would say it is difficult to make any money working in video here in Rome.

«There is commercial work available. I worked for a short time with a production company that made programs for T.V. or for companies that wanted promotional work done. But Rome essentially is not a working city, Milan is a working city. The main Roman industry



is fleeing tourists».

What is the state of Italian video?

«They have their own sensitivity to it-but they lack the financing to develop that sensitivity. Their ideas are good, they have lavish taste and are good with grandeur. When Americans have a large budget, they waste it on car crashes. Italians have never learned to adapt their taste to allow budgeting. They have never learned to make good things out of nothing».

How does Rome relate to your view of photography and video?

«I like to do things with a mixture of influences; African, Italian, and English, because those are the things I relate to, I suppose. I have often used traditional Roman songs and the classical Roman environment in my work. It creates something new. The director of the Salsomaggiore festival was really excited by a video I did using «Il Barcarolo Romano» as a soundtrack. He wants to enter it in the video music competition with the rock videos like ABC and Duran Duran».

It's a good thing to see someone recording the well-deserving beauty of Rome. It remains to be seen whether Rome will adapt to this new medium in the continuation of its long history as a center of inspiration for artists. It has seen so many changes it can certainly make room for one more. Cut to view of Piazza del Popolo and fade.

Jennifer Clark

