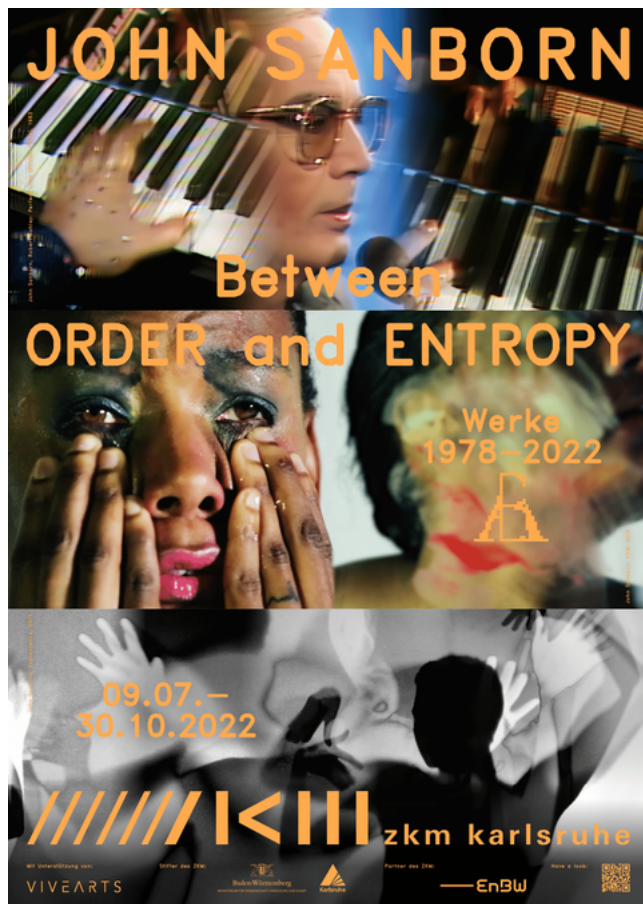


PRESS KIT

John Sanborn. Between Order and Entropy Works 1978 – 2022

July 09, 2022 – October 30, 2022



July 2022

Exhibition
John Sanborn.
Between Order and Entropy
Works 1978 - 2022

Exhibition opening
Fri, 08.07.2022

Exhibition period
Sat, 09.07.2022 –Sun, 30.10.2022

Location
Atrium 1+2, 2nd floor

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Baden-Württemberg
MINISTERIUM FÜR WISSENSCHAFT, FORSCHUNG UND KUNST

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PRESS RELEASE

John Sanborn: Between Order and Entropy
Works 1978–2022
9.7.2022–30.10.2022

With *John Sanborn. Between Order and Entropy*, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe is mounting the largest solo exhibition in Europe to date of one of the most prominent representatives of American video art on July 8, 2022. The exhibition encompasses Sanborn's oeuvre from the beginnings of experimental video art in the 1970s, MTV music videos of the 1980s, to his contemporary media installations.

John Sanborn's works date back to the 1970s and 1980s and range from the beginnings of experimental video art to music videos for MTV and interactive art and digital media art. He was an early consultant for Apple and Adobe, and played a major role in the digital image revolution that was coming out of California. As a media artist, he worked closely with the founder of video art Nam June Paik and the composer Robert Ashley. Today, Sanborn creates media installations on issues connected with cultural identity, memory, mythologies, and the human urge to tell stories.

Between Order and Entropy is John Sanborn's largest solo exhibition in Europe to date. Several of the works have been newly commissioned by the ZKM especially for the exhibition, including *a dog dreams (of god)* and a virtual reality version of his installation *The Friend* with actor and director John Cameron Mitchell, which is supported by VIVE Arts.

Peter Weibel, artistic director of the ZKM says: »John Sanborn is one of very earliest protagonists of aesthetic video art. In Sanborn, the wild flowers of anarchy meet the new high-tech.«

Accompanying the exhibition, the ZKM is offering guided tours with John Sanborn during the opening weekend (Saturday, July 9, and Sunday, July 10). These guided tours will be in English and will begin at 3 p.m. (free of charge + museum admission). In September, John Sanborn will return to Karlsruhe with the avant-garde cult band and art collective *The Residents*. To celebrate their 50th anniversary, they will present the multimedia performance *God in 3 Persons* exclusively at the ZKM (dates: Saturday, September 10, 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., and Sunday, September 11, 6 p.m.). Advance ticket sales will begin soon.

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The exhibition was curated by Stephen Sarrazin, professor of film and the moving image and film critic, who divides his time between Paris and Tokyo and teaches at internationally respected universities, and Philipp Ziegler of the ZKM.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive publication on John Sanborn's work with around 250 pages long in English, with texts by Peter Weibel, Jean-Paul Fargier, Stephen Sarrazin, Mark Alizart and contributions by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Kit Fitzgerald, Dean Winkler, Homer Flynn of Cryptic Corporation, Lynn Breedlove, and Robert Cahen. The catalogue concludes with a discussion between John Sanborn and Dara Birnbaum and an interview with the artist on four decades of video and media art.

Curated by: Stephen Sarrazin and Philipp Ziegler

Exhibition team: Hanna Jurisch

Technical project management: Felix Pausch

Supported by: VIVE Arts

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Interview with John Sanborn

The retrospective *Between Order and Entropy* features artworks from over 40 years of your creative output - an incredibly long time span for media art. How has your art and creation changed since then?

John Sanborn: Retrospective is an interesting word because it speaks to something that's comprehensive. This show has a lot of work in it but I have been and always will be prolific. It never mattered to me over time what the venue was or what the impulse for the work was. I have a lot of ideas, there were a lot of spaces I wanted to experiment with and a lot of changes in technology over time. All of that is something that I'm still preoccupied with. Many of the early works were done instigated by wanting to collide images and sound, often involving music, but very much as structuralist experiments, that had some story elements to them. They weren't necessarily narratives but they had story structures the way a symphony will have a story structure. The difference between then and now is that I've got more into richer and denser emotional situations. My recent works have to do with aging, there's always kind of a specter of death. But I continue to do many of the things that I was doing in the 1970s or 1980s. I work very closely with composers and choreographers; I'm mixing different kinds of media and different formats of presentation. These things have remained constant for all those years. My more recent work is informed by being an older guy and all the pressures and knowledge and experience that I have now. The early works just seem to explode because that's who I was when I was in my 20s and 30s.

What role has the expansion and technical advancement of the Internet - especially the invention of platforms like YouTube - played in this?

John Sanborn: I first discovered video art, not that it was hiding, in 1974. I walked into probably the first big museum show of video art in Paris. I actually decided that day, that this is what I was going to do for the rest of my life. Over the course of a few months, I was introduced to many of the first-generation video artists including Nam June Paik. He became my friend, my personal video master and mentor. He very famously said that in the future everybody would have their own TV-Channel. And to me, YouTube is exactly what he was talking about. The proliferation of distribution is a revolution he

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predicted. I was a part of it as we went from analog in museums, to broadcast on Television, to digital systems encoding on discs and now with the internet, we have the ability to stream and involve so many different eyeballs. I have 22 million views on YouTube and 110.000 subscribers. If you are an artist and you want to communicate, you need to be in front of an audience. And throughout my career, being strategically placed where those eyeballs are was always something I was interested in - whether it was a museum, or a nightclub, Television or now the Internet. I've done a few interactive projects, one of them is *Nonself* commissioned by Jeu de Paume, which is only at the Internet and also on the show here at ZKM. Typically, you see a cause and effect between technology and distribution and creation. And I'm probably the poster child for that.

From art to mass product: from your artistic perspective, what value do music videos still have today?

John Sanborn: The idea of music videos in 1980 was brand new, when I was approached by Jo Bergman. She was the first the A&R manager for videos at Warner Brothers Records. She liked my artworks and asked me: "Have you thought about making music videos?" As MTV had just started, I was very interested because it was a sort of musical storytelling and had operatic conceits. I was working with different composers and performers, for example David Van Tieghem who in the piece *Ear to the Ground* plays Manhattan as if it was a musical instrument. To me, that was a music video. It's not the he was mimicking a pre-recorded soundtrack. He is playing New York City! The idea behind it was: what's the relationship between image and sound? Of course, I also did a lot of traditional music videos. With Jo Bergman my first music video was for the band King Crimson. I did many mainstream projects throughout the years including ones with Nile Rodgers, Rick James, Grace Jones and Tangerine Dream. I'm always experimenting with the conversation between image and sound. I wrote an opera with the composer Dorian Wallace, called *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, and we're writing another opera based on *Fantomas*. This idea of music as an embodiment of emotional expression complements the way that I think about setting mood and tone by using images. The two are fused by me in different kind of relationships. It's an absolute marriage that will last forever: image and sound.

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For the exhibition at the ZKM, you are transforming your recently created artwork *The Friend* into a virtual reality experience - what can visitors imagine?

John Sanborn: *The Friend* premiered in 2021. I was thinking about beliefs and faith and why in America we seem to follow the hoaxers and the con artists. Some of this was Donald Trump influenced, but it was also a recognition that we have a long history of picking charismatic leaders who promise us answers to questions, that we know cannot be answered. But we follow them anyway: Elvis, Oprah, Beyonce. We dedicate ourselves to this quest even though we know it's fruitless. So I started my own religion and created an American messiah who calls himself *The Friend*. I wrote a script and got introduced to John Cameron Mitchell, who's a very successful and well-known performer. And he loved the idea! I created this work in the midst of the pandemic and it premiered as a physical installation in 2021. We're showing the physical installation here at ZKM too, but Peter Weibel asked me if I had ever done a VR-Project, which I hadn't so far. So he insisted that I turn *The Friend* into a Virtual Reality piece. I thought a lot about how the architecture, characterization and the philosophy of the physical work could be transferred into a Virtual Experience. So, it is interactive, it has a time base that the user controls. It is an environment of the mind that follows dream logic. What I'm really excited about is that the two versions of *The Friend* are going to be shown right next to each other. You'll be able to see the physical manifestation, which is pretty impressive, and then the virtual, where you are closer to where I thought the work should proceed. Afterwards you can go the gift shop and buy yourself a T-Shirt or some votive candles. Because god knows: *The Friend* wants your money!

In *God in 3 Persons* with the legendary band *The Residents*, you combine your video art with the band's idiosyncratic original compositions and bizarre foreign interpretations. In September you will come to ZKM for three exclusive European concerts. What do visitors have to be prepared for?

John Sanborn: I met *The Residents*, the anonymous and highly anarchistic music and performance group, in the late 1970s on my first trip to California. We showed each other what we were doing - watching videos and listening to music - and we became friends. Over the course of decades, we've done a number of projects together. One

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of them is a history of *The Residents* and is going to be shown at the exhibition. A few years ago, they came to me with the idea of adapting a project that they originally did in 1988 as an LP, for the stage. It's called *God in 3 Persons*. It's the story of a disgraced preacher who falls in lust with conjoined twins, who may or may not be miracle workers. It doesn't end well. In fact, it ends very badly. What's interesting here is the nature of the main character, who's not a very nice guy, and the darkness that he is trapped in. I thought that using video and inventing implements on stage, could bring the story to a much higher and more interesting level of interpretation. So I adapted the lyrics for the 14 songs and I envisioned how that would be portrayed on stage. I then came up with a series of multi-channel video projections, that question the narrative and expose various aspects of the story that are hinted at, but when studied, become deeply disturbing. The live video/theater version takes you into the mind of this less than honorable man, down to his very soul. It's a wild ride, surely not for the faint of heart. But when we humanize this very troubled character, we ask you to look at yourself and see just how close you are to this disgraced preacher who calls himself Mr. X. There's a little bit of Mr. X in all of us and we do well by confronting the darkness inside of us.

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Year of birth, place

1954, Huntington, New York, United States

Biography

John Sanborn is a key member of the second wave of American video artist, whose career spans the early days of experimental video art in the 1970s to the digital media art of today.

John Sanborn's work has been exhibited on television (MTV, PBS, Comedy Central), as video installations (ZKM, Videoformes, Jeu de Paume, Whitney Museum, The Kitchen), video games (Electronic Arts, iD), Internet experiences (MSN, Yahoo), live performance (The Lab, MoMA, NY) and music/videos (together with Rick James, Van Halen, Phillip Glass, Nile Rodgers, Grace Jones, King Crimson, Tangerine Dream).

Recent projects include live video/theater performances of *God in 3 Persons*, a collaboration with The Residents, at Museum of Modern Art, NY (2020); commissions from the National Museum of Qatar and Jeu de Paume, Paris (both 2019); and the premiere of »The Friend«, starring John Cameron Mitchell, at the Digital Arts Festival Videoformes, in Clermont-Ferrand, France (2021).

John Sanborn holds an honorary Master of Cinema degree from ESEC, in Paris, and was honored as a »Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres« by the Minister of Culture for Republic of France. Sanborn's [YouTube channel](#) has over 21 million views and over 110,000 subscribers. In 2017, the Mill Valley Film Festival honored him with its lifetime achievement award.

John Sanborn lives and works in Berkeley, California, USA.

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The ZKM | Center for Art and Media

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media is a cultural institution that is unique in the world. With its art collection, publications, archives, and artistic, scholarly and scientific research on the electronic arts, the ZKM stands for a program of interdisciplinary projects and international collaborations. In its exhibitions, symposia, concerts, and workshops, the ZKM communicates the theoretical discourses of philosophy, science, technology, politics, and economics from a contemporary artistic perspective.

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Opening hours:

Wednesday-Friday	10 am – 6 pm
Saturday & Sunday	11 am – 6 pm
Monday & Tuesday	closed

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