

1995

Reconstructions: The Video Image Outside of Time

University of Richmond Museums

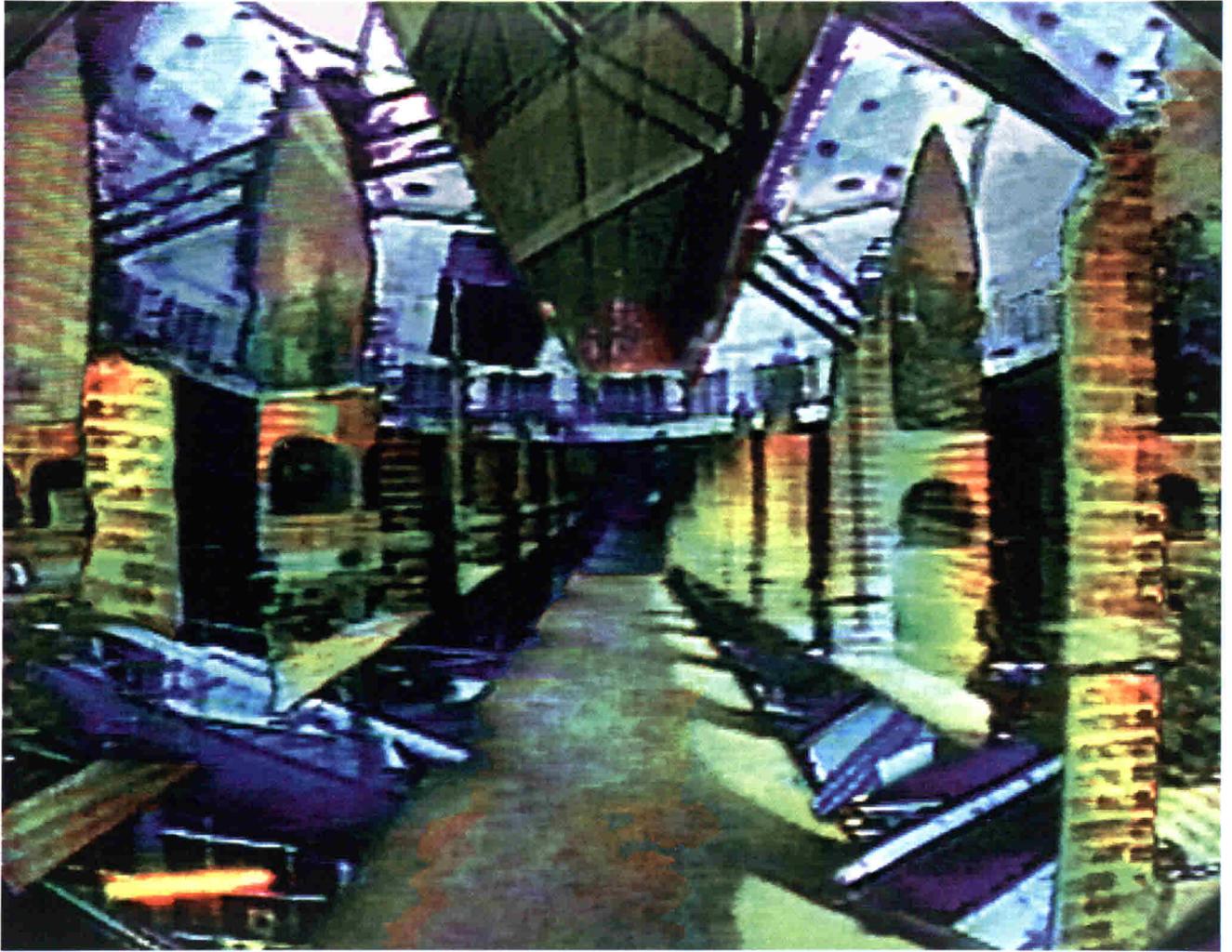
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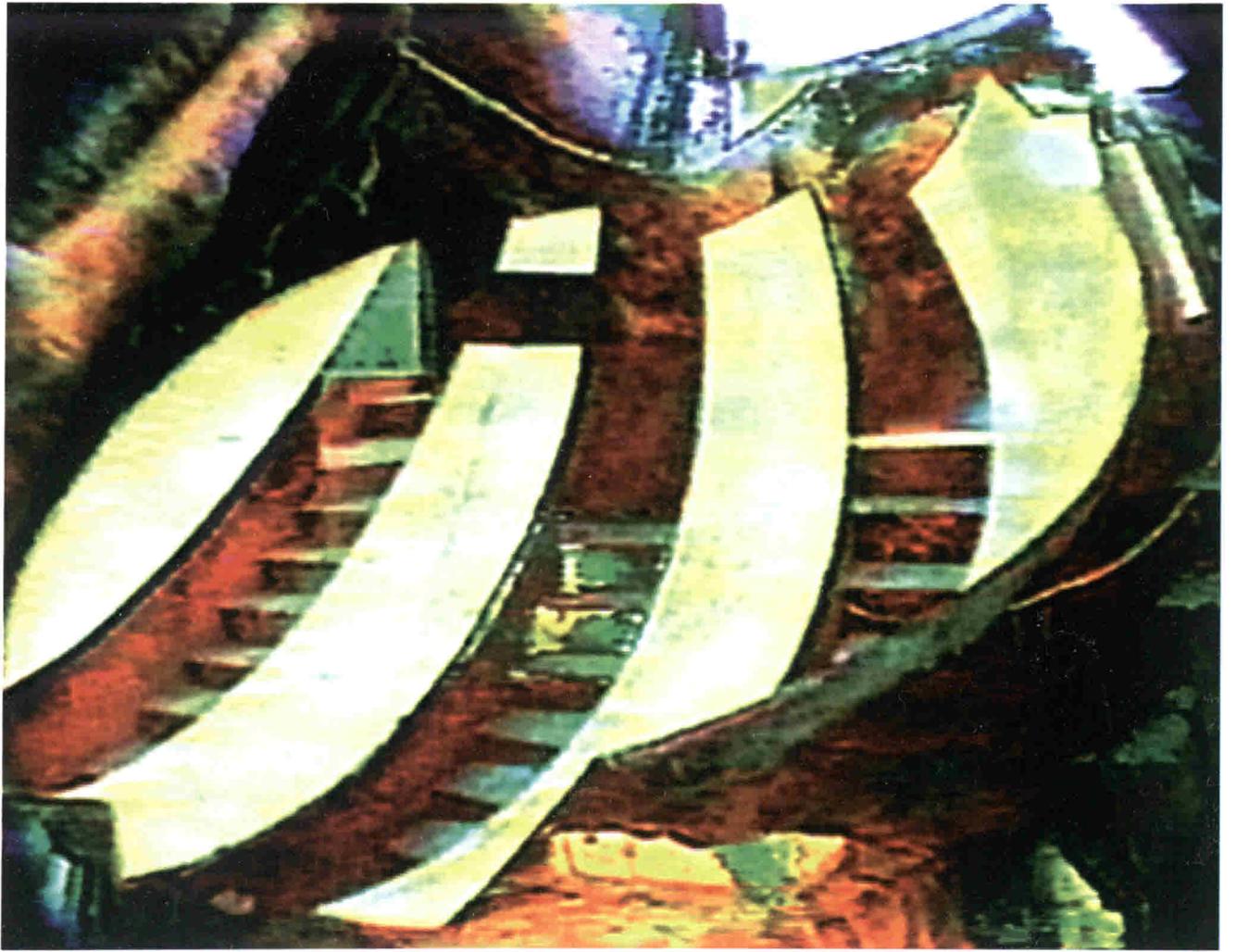
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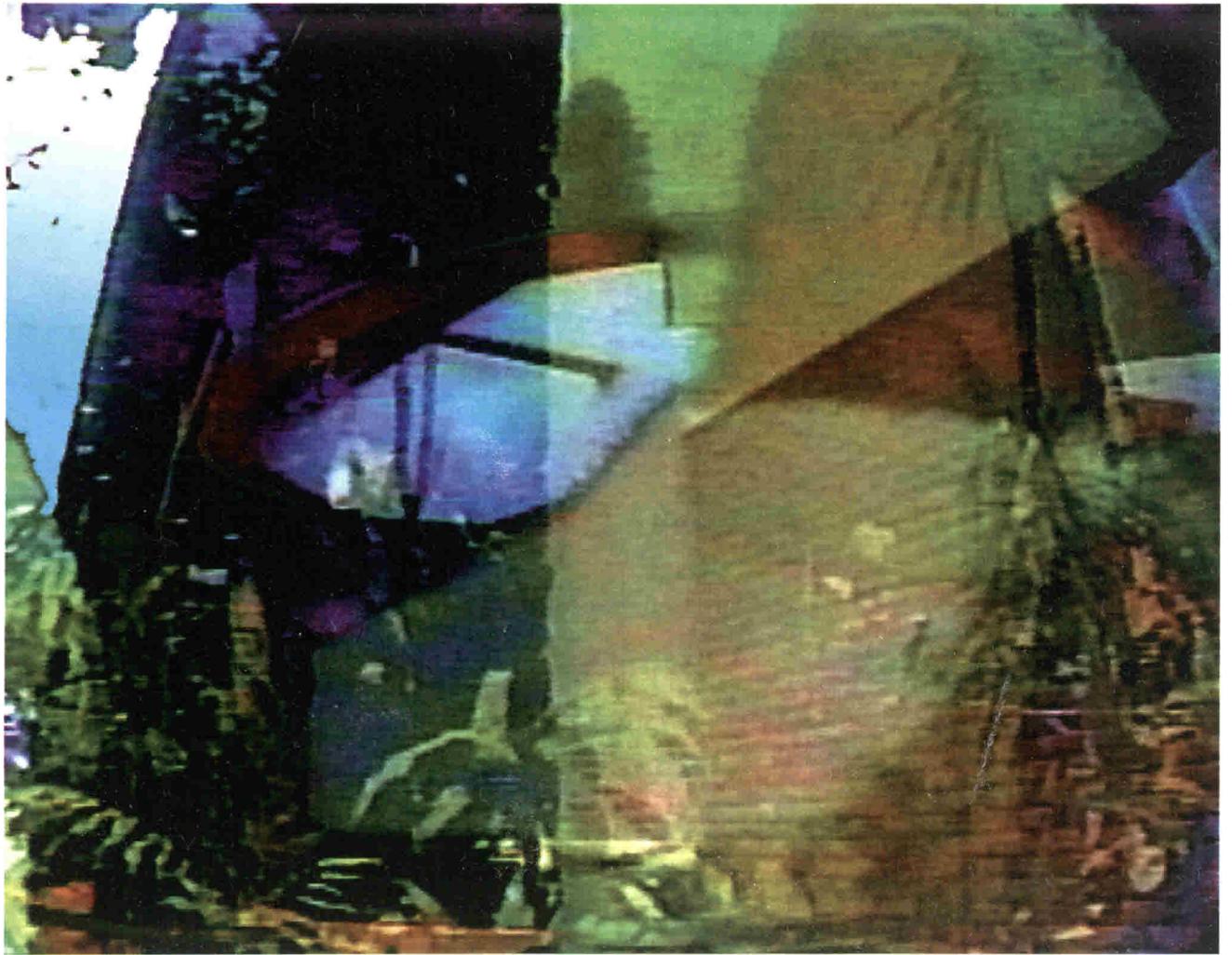


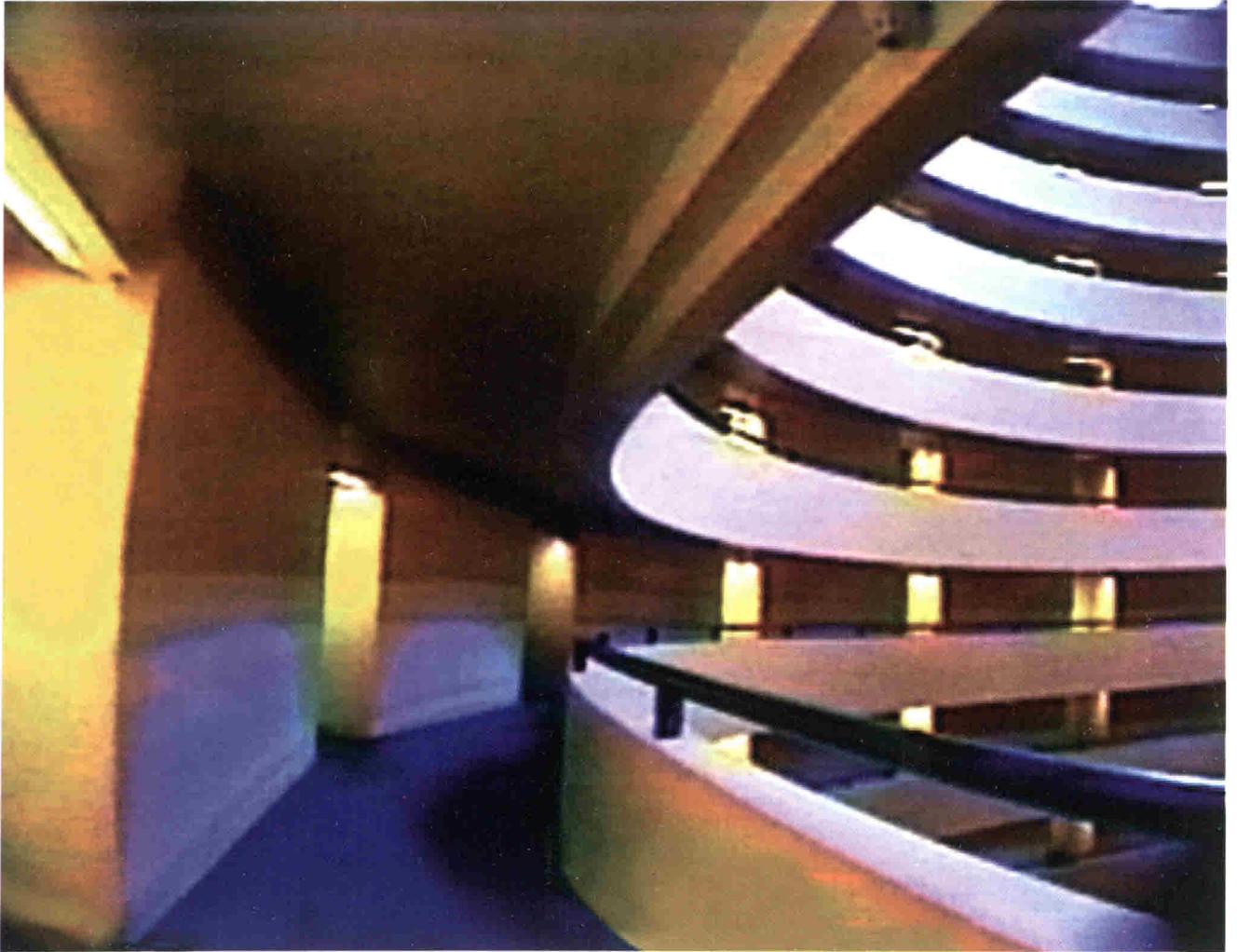
VAN McELWEE

RECONSTRUCTIONS

THE VIDEO IMAGE OUTSIDE OF TIME







Above: From *Space Splice* videotape, 1994

Overleaf: *Reconstruction #19*, 1994, Cibachrome photograph
(from *Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time* videotape)

Front cover: *Reconstruction #15*, 1994, Cibachrome photograph
(from *Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time* videotape)

THE VIDEO ART OF VAN McELWEE



AN McELWEE creates complex and esoteric video art where electronic fragments of the visual world are transformed into contemplations of how we receive and perceive this visual information. An artist who continues to experiment with the possibilities of this new artform, he uses the technology of the medium to delve into very personal explorations of the dynamics of sound, motion, and time in his video artmaking.

Images of architecture are often the basis for his lyrical and hypnotic investigations of experiencing the built environment. Influenced by Eastern culture and philosophy, Zen Buddhism in particular, his work often invokes a sense of ritual and meditation. "A temple is a landscape for the soul," stated the mythologist Joseph Campbell, and in *Fragments of India* (1993) McElwee transforms elements of Hindu, Muslim, and Jain architecture into a landscape where the viewer travels in an almost claustrophobic movement around and through temple spaces. *Folded Follies* (1993) is an improvisation on Bernard Tschumi's deconstructionist follies at Parc La Villette in Paris. The structures, which the architect has called "post-humanist," are translated into moving images subjected to a radical transformation. Video and audio signals are pushed to extremes as the artist literally folds the follies in time. *Space Splice* (1994) presents fast movement through a virtual network of hypothetical spaces in a form of conceptual architecture.

Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time (1994) is also about experiencing architecture. In this work the artist seeks to overcome the limitation and subsequent story-like interpretation imposed by screening time evident in his previous videotapes while also investigating the photographic nature of video. Interiors shot by the artist in the United States, Europe, and India are connected and often overlaid with fluid edits into a fusion of images seen in nonstop forward motion in the tape. The continuously-running video presents an unimpeded, rapid movement through an intricate network of interior spaces, a disquieting visual and aural journey through an impossible architectural landscape at breakneck speed.

In counterpoint to this journey are the stopped electronic images seen in the photographs. Comparable to movie stills that often remain the most memorable images from films, these

images are isolated from the tape and then altered through the computer as frozen electronic photographs. Similar to pushing the pause button on the VCR remote control, each image of colliding architectural forms resulting from multiple video viewpoints becomes a graphic composition of computer color and texture. Although the motion has stopped and the viewer's vision is allowed to rest upon a single moment, the intriguing stills continue to be as enigmatic and confounding as the concurrent roller-coaster ride of the videotape.

Reconstructions explores the impact of still photography on the viewer's memory juxtaposed with the ever-changing movement and sound of the video; in essence, the calm equilibrium of his still images versus the vertigo-inducing maelstrom of his moving images. The artist has stated, "My work explores areas where space and time, order and disorder become artificial categories. In the tapes, images and sound are two aspects of one composition. The result is a form of experimental music. There are no stories being told; the only subject is the viewer. Rather than make a point, I prefer to cast a spell. In this sense, the work is a kind of architecture, an environment to be inhabited by the viewer." To this video environment he has added still imagery, a largely unexplored dimension of video where the resulting photographs have unique visual qualities attainable only through the artist's computer manipulation of his own videography.

For Van McElwee, "Because it's a medium, video will always distort reality, so I'm not interested in making topic or issue-oriented tapes. I prefer to gather samples of the world and organize them into something new. I want the tapes to *be* something, rather than be *about* something. I'm interested in creating experiences, not fantasies, enabling the viewer to be a participant rather than a voyeur." His title for this piece clearly defines McElwee's non-narrative and process intentions, for his "reconstructions" through tape, sound, and photographs cause us to reconsider "the video image outside of time" on many different levels, some literal while others are perhaps more philosophical. *Reconstructions* is a wonderfully complex, spellbinding aesthetic experience involving time, space, motion, and meditation.

Richard Waller

Director, Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Van McElwee has been producing and exhibiting experimental video since 1976, and his body of work includes video installations and over twenty single-channel tapes. He has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including The American Film Institute Independent Filmmaker Award. He is a seven-time recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts Independent Production Fund. His many awards include a travel grant for video production from the Government of India; he was recently artist-in-residence at the Experimental Television Center in Owego, New York.

His videos have been screened widely at museums, cultural centers, and film festivals in the United States as well as in Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, Austria, Italy, Brazil, and Australia. He has had one-person exhibitions and screenings at the Artopia Gallery, New York; the Kitchenette at the Thread Waxing Space, New York; The Kitchen, New York; the Pacific Film Archive at the University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley; and the Saint Louis Art Museum. His video installations include a sixteen-monitor video wall at the Dallas Museum of Art as part of the Dallas Video Festival and a nine-monitor installation as part of a one-person retrospective at the Forum for Contemporary Art in St. Louis.

His work has been included in many group shows, including exhibitions at such institutions as The Kitchen, New York; Anthology Film Archives, New York; Art in General, New York; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; The Exploratorium, San Francisco; and Long Beach Museum of Art, California. His videos have been included in festivals such as The International Symposium on Electronic Art, Montreal; The New York International Video Festival; The New York Exposition of Short Film and Video; The Berlin Film Festival; The London Film Festival; Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria; Film + Arc, Granz, Austria; Artmedia, Naples, Italy; Videonale, Bonn, Germany; and the European Media Art Festival, Osnabruk, Germany.

In addition to television broadcasts in Germany and France, his videotapes have been shown extensively on Public Broadcast Service stations in the United States. His videotapes are distributed worldwide by The Kitchen in New York, Heure Exquise! in France, and London Electronic Arts in Great Britain.

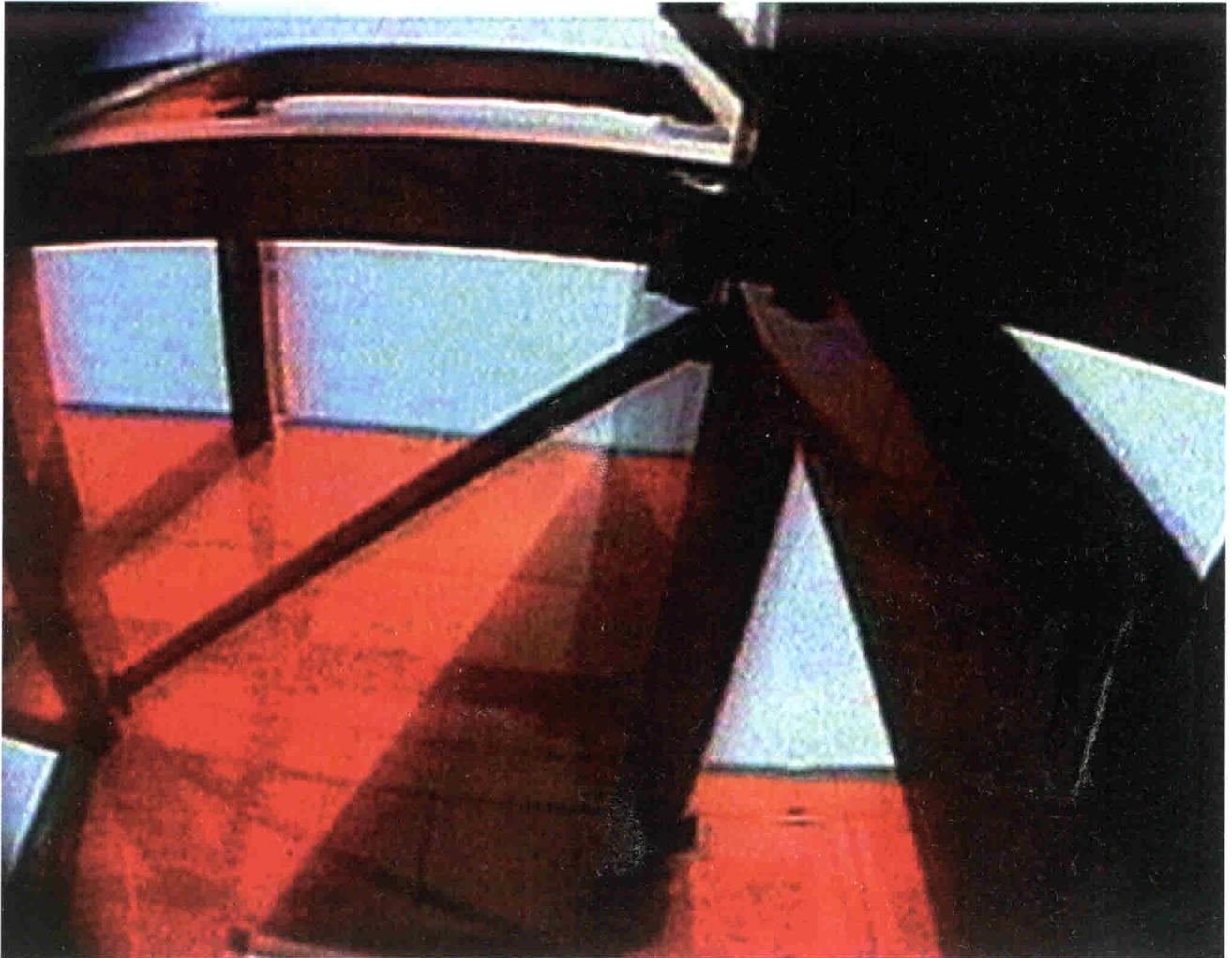
Born in 1948 in Meridian, Mississippi, McElwee received his B.F.A. in printmaking in 1973 from the Memphis College of Art, Tennessee, and his M.F.A. in Multimedia in 1978 from Washington University School of Art, St. Louis. Currently an associate professor of media at Webster University, the artist lives and works in St. Louis.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Co-organized by the Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, the exhibition is traveling throughout the Commonwealth through the Virginia Museum's Department of Traveling Exhibitions and Media Services (Eileen Mott, Statewide Exhibition Coordinator) following its venue at the Marsh Art Gallery (November 8 to December 17, 1995).

The exhibition, *Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time* (1994), comprises a continuously-running single-channel videotape and twenty-seven photographs. All the photographs are Cibachrome prints, 8 x 10 inches, printed from slides generated from computer-manipulated digital files that were created on the computer directly from the videotape. All the works are from the collection of the artist.

Accompanying the exhibition is a compilation tape of seven single-channel videotapes by the artist: *Fragments of India*, 1993 (8 minutes); *Folded Follies*, 1993 (8.5 minutes); *Space Splice*, 1994 (12 minutes); *Inside*, 1986 (4.5 minutes); *Space-Time Loops: Cityscape*, 1988 (8 minutes); *Reconstruction*, 1992 (6.5 minutes); and *Bindu*, 1993 (6.5 minutes). The videotapes are courtesy of and distributed by The Kitchen, New York.



Above: From *Folded Follies* videotape, 1993

Overleaf: *Reconstruction #6*, 1994, Cibachrome photograph
(from *Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time* videotape)

Back cover: *Reconstruction #13*, 1994, Cibachrome photograph
(from *Reconstructions, The Video Image Outside of Time* videotape)

