

Innumerable Effects

Some Video Sculptures

By Alfred Frankenstein

As Dorothy Parker wired a friend who had just had a baby, "Congratulations! We always knew you had it in you."

Congratulations are now in order for Don Hallock, who, for the first time in history, has done something good with videotape. His good thing bears the hideous name of Videola and is now on view at the San Francisco Museum of Art every hour on the hour from 11 to 9 on weekdays and 11 to 4 on weekends.

Conceptual artists have been monkeying with videotape for some years now, and a bigger bore you never did see. The usual video job involves the artist talking to himself during a heavy rain to a mumbling sound track in which nothing whatever can be distinguished. Hallock's work isn't like that at all.

WORK

Somebody, maybe Hallock himself, calls the work a video sculpture, and that will do for a starter. It is a sculpture in an illusion of space, a huge sphere of color, apparently about four feet high and eight feet distant from the spectator, which rotates, now in one

direction, now in another, while on its surface very intricate patterns like those of some near-Eastern embroidery seethe and boil, erupt to the surface, and subside into the ball's apparently molten interior.

That's only one of innumerable effects I saw. Hallock does three compositions on each 50-minute program. Some, like the one just mentioned, have tracks by Hallock himself, exploiting love-

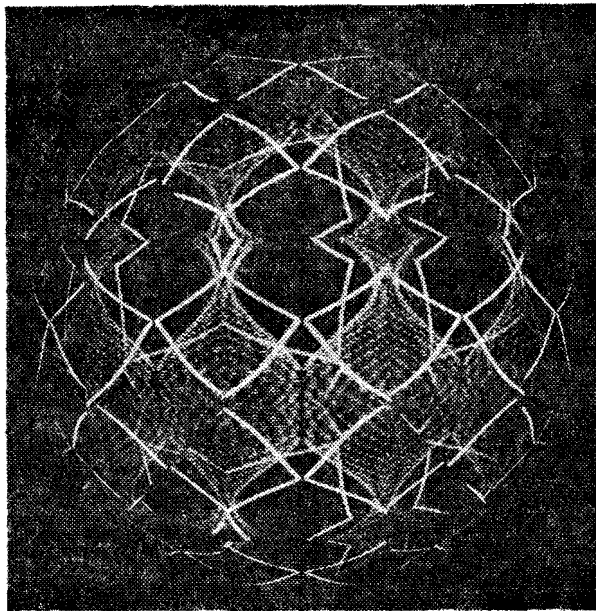
ly quasi-musical tones, soft and uninsistent, like gongs and water and the sound of the world turning.

One work I saw was an improvisation, largely in geometric forms, the visual part handled by Stephen Beck, the sounds by Hallock himself. Still another piece, also largely geometric, and marvelously pingy and glistening, is to a set of Scarlatti sonatas for the harpsichord as played by Fernando Valente.

PUBLIC

This is the first public showing of the work being done here in San Francisco by an organization, financed by the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, known as the National Center for Experiment in Television. The CIA could certainly take lessons in keeping a secret from this outfit, which has been at it hereabouts for four years but has never let on to what it was doing. Maybe they were waiting for experiment to turn into achievement before they said anything. If so, they have done what they set out to do.

The technique of preparing the videotape is much too complex to describe, and besides it varies in detail with each composition. The technique of presentation, however, is part of the show



Hallock composition and there are soft sounds too

and one of its more delectable aspects.

The Videola theater is like a hollow pyramid turned on one side. Four triangles of brightly polished mirror point toward a 25-inch screen at their apex. What one sees, then, is the imagery of the screen and its reflection in the four mirrors, producing the effect of a great, many-faceted globe, floating free in space like a moon or planet, but with effects of color and surface pattern such as no astronaut has ever seen.

The work is not without its flaws. After a time I found myself tiring of its persistent, inevitable symmetry. Obviously, if it's all done with mirrors, what happens on one side will be echoed by what happens on the other side, and that can pall. Some of the color and design, also, seems rather obvious. Yet there is great, hypnotic fascination about these compositions and their presentation. Hallock said people come and stay for hours and don't want to leave, and that is very easy to believe and understand.