

# Temporary Gallery

THROUGH THE STARGATE

John & James Whitney

16 Sept - 12 Nov 2017

Opening: Fri 15 Sept, 7 pm



John Whitney, Experiments in Motion Graphics, 1968. Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles

Press release

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# Temporary Gallery

## THROUGH THE STARGATE

John & James Whitney

Curated by Regina Barunke

John Whitney (Pasadena, California 1917–1995 Los Angeles) and his brother James (1921–1982) were two of the most influential pioneers of early computer films and cybernetic cinema. In the 1940s, they jointly experimented in the field of 'non-objective film' and participated in the American West Coast avant-garde art scene. Looking for new forms of audiovisual expression, they were inspired by early 20th century music to construct a sound-generating device to accompany the abstract and geometric shapes in their early films. In the 1950s, while James was increasingly engaged with meditative and psychedelic perception enhancement in film, John bought surplus anti-aircraft technology from World War II to construct his own 'cam machine' creating the first computer-based animations. With that, he not only gained attention from the film industry and directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick but also of a whole generation of experimental filmmakers. With the help of John's machine James created the masterpiece "Lapis" in the years 1963-1966 - a ten-minute animation of hand-drawn graphics, which move kaleidoscope-like to Indian Sitar music. In the meantime, John is experimenting with the possibilities of generating perceptual sensations through the kinetic rhythms of moving points, which have a strong analogy to the modulations of a musical tension.

The development of computer graphics, which has been decisively promoted by aerospace and military research institutes, is applied by Whitney's pioneering work in an immediate but indirect way. In 1960, John founded Motion Graphics Incorporated and produced title sequences for television and advertising. Six years later, he was the first "artist in residence" to receive a scholarship to explore the aesthetic potential of computer graphics offered by the IBM Model 360 Computer and the IBM 2250 Graphic Display Console. Whitney was supported in his work at IBM by the visionary programmer and graphic expert Dr. Jack Citron (see image). In 1968, Whitney and Citron finished one of the first digital computer animations "Permutations," with a eight-minute duration consisting exclusively of the independent circular motions of 281 colour points. One of the most famous commercial works by John Whitney, who was also contributing at the IBM pavilion of Charles and Ray Eames at the 1964 World Exposition, is the animated title sequence in Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo" film (1958), which he developed in collaboration with the graphic designer Saul Bass. Ten years later, special effects pioneer Douglas Trumbull invites him to jointly develop the Stargate corridor sequence in Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968).

The films of the Whitney brothers are made accessible in an exhibition for the first time in Germany and are presented digitally as on a 16mm film.

# Temporary Gallery

## Public program

Thu 28 September, 7 pm – Lecture and film program (DE)

Henning Engelke: Pendulums, Canons and Computers. The Whitneys' Visual Music

The Whitney brothers are regarded as pioneers in many areas: Visual Music, synthetic sound generation, Expanded Cinema and computer art. Interpretations of their work are manifold, referencing synaesthesia, Asian philosophy, expansion of consciousness on the one side and cold war technologies and algorithms on the other. While James is often characterised as a mystic, John is the rational technician. The talk aims at a differentiated view on their artistic and technical proceedings, which were oftentimes conceived in cooperation, in context of their social and topographic background. Instead of contributing to the glorification of their metaphysical and/or technical aspects, the talk will be about the How and Where of their work.

Private lecturer Dr. Henning Engelke currently teaches Art History at the University of Cologne as part of the inter artes visiting scholarship for the Winter Semester of 2017/18. Research focuses include non-fictional film, experimental film as well as intersections of art history, media history and history of science. Publications: *Dokumentarfilm und Fotografie. Bildstrategien in der englischsprachigen Ethnologie, 1936-1986* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann 2007); *Metaphern einer anderen Filmgeschichte. Amerikanischer Experimentalfilm 1940-1960* (Marburg: Schüren 2017, forthcoming).

John and James Whitney: Films 1944-75

John & James Whitney (James), *Film Exercise #2-3*, 1944, 4:00, 16mm

John Whitney, *Matrix III*, 1972, 11:00, 16mm

John Whitney, *Osaka 1.2.3*, 1970, 3:00, 16mm

John Whitney, *Permutations*, 1968, 8:00, 16mm

Wed 8 November, 7 pm – Lecture

Herta Wolf: Aimé Laussedat's Métrophotography. On the Historiography of a French Invention (DE)

Photogrammetry is a visualization process resulting from the technical and instrumental innovations of the early nineteenth century, which corresponds to the economic dictation of industrialization and is a universal image process that integrates different disciplines and research fields (such as astronomy, meteorology or the military sector).

The measurement method is a synthesis of cultural techniques and forms of knowledge, which could only be realized in a social sector, which, like the army, follows state orders. On the basis of the French origin of the photography-based measurement method and its developer, Aimé Laussedat, Herta Wolf aims to prove this thesis and show that not only the métrophotography but the (rhetoric of photography) itself belongs to the military knowledge base and to an innovative training facility such as the Paris École Polytechnique.

Herta Wolf is a professor for the History and Theory of Photography, from 1994 to 2010 she taught at the University of Duisburg-Essen, since 2010 at the Art History Department at the University of Cologne.

# Temporary Gallery

## Funders, Supporters and Partners

SCREENING ROOM – is a project supported by the Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sport of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Cultural Office of the City of Cologne  
Deltax Contemporary  
Hotel Chelsea Cologne

All film copies courtesy: Light Cone, Paris

## About the Temporary Gallery

The Temporary Gallery was founded in 2008 as a non-profit art institution. Five years later it was recognized by the city of Cologne as a Centre for contemporary art. Its program includes individual and group exhibitions of contemporary artists and thematic fields, which have an extraordinary high artistic-historical and social relevance. In addition to regular co-operation with international guest curators and local and regional universities, the Temporary Gallery focuses on discourse-oriented and practical issues in the fields of the current arts.

## Information

Temporary Gallery  
Centre for contemporary art e.V.  
Maritiuswall 35, D 50676 Cologne  
T +49 221 302 344 66  
E [info@temporarygallery.org](mailto:info@temporarygallery.org)  
[www.temporarygallery.org](http://www.temporarygallery.org)

### Opening times

Thu & Fri 11 am-6 pm, Sat & Sun 1-5 pm

No admission, Events: 2,50 Euro / members free

# Temporary Gallery

## Press images

For receiving hi-res press images, please contact:  
Baptist Ohrtmann, bo@temporarygallery.org



Whitney\_Karte.tif (6,6 MB)

Image on invitation card

John Whitney

Experiments in Motion Graphics, 1968

Video

13 min, colour and sound

Voice-over: John Whitney (Lecture Aspen Design  
Conference, 1967)

Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles



Whitney\_A01.jpg (332 KB)

Archival image (John Whitney, Los Angeles)

Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles



Whitney\_A02.jpg (254 KB)

Archival image (John Whitney, Paris)

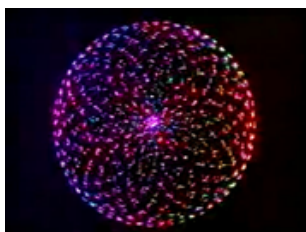
Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles



Whitney\_A03.jpg (442 KB)

Archival image (John & James Whitney, Los Angeles)

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Whitney\_01.jpg (135 KB)

John Whitney

Permutations, 1968

Animation, Computer Graphic; 16mm

8 min, colour and sound

Music: Sundaram Balachandra, Indian Tabla

Computer programmer: Jack Citron, IBM

Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles



Whitney\_04.jpg (135 KB)

James Whitney

Lapis, 1966

Animationsfilm, Computer Grafik; 16mm digitalisiert

10 min, Farbe, Ton

Musik: Ravi Shakar, Raga Jogiya

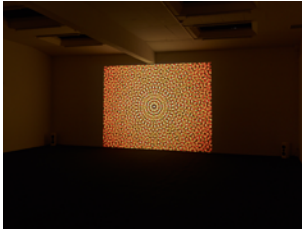
Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles

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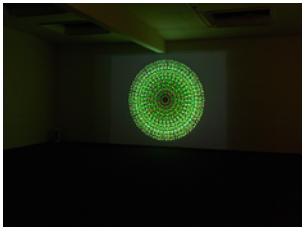
Whitney\_05.jpg (2,2 MB)

John Whitney  
Digital Harmony: On the Complementary  
of Music and Visual Art, 1980  
Publikation, Faksimiles  
Byte Books/A McGraw-Hill Publication/  
Peterborough New Hampshire  
Foto: Simon Vogel, Cologne



Whitney\_06.jpg (3,2 MB)

James Whitney  
Lapis, 1966  
Animation film, Computer Graphic; 16mm transferred to HD  
10 min, colour, sound  
Music: Ravi Shakar, Raga Jogiya  
Copyright / Courtesy: Whitney Editions™, Los Angeles,  
Light Cone, Paris  
Foto: Simon Vogel, Cologne



Whitney\_07.jpg (3,2 MB)

James Whitney  
Lapis, 1966  
Animation film, Computer Graphic; 16mm transferred to HD  
10 min, colour, sound  
Music: Ravi Shakar, Raga Jogiya  
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