



# Bill Viola

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS

2015

## Selected Works

**Exclusive to Adelaide**

FREE

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## Art Gallery of South Australia

Fri 27 Feb – Sun 29 Mar

## Queen's Theatre

Fri 27 Feb – Sun 15 Mar

## St Peter's Cathedral

Fri 27 Feb – Sun 15 Mar

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*Tristen's Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall) (detail), 2005*

## A NOTE FROM DAVID SEFTON

Amongst the most important and influential visual artists in the world today, it is my enormous honour to bring the broadest review of Bill Viola's work ever seen in Australia to this year's Adelaide Festival.

Across the three sites – the Art Gallery of South Australia, St Peter's Cathedral and Queen's Theatre – festival audiences can see works made between 1996 – 2012, many of which have never been seen in Australia before.

Viola's work ranges from the intimate to the epic while always retaining elements of deep spirituality and thoughtfulness; poignant, often moving and always evocative, Viola is without doubt one of the artists responsible for video art being considered an art form worthy of proper attention and his work appears in many of the world's most prestigious galleries and collections.

I would like to express my enormous gratitude to Bill Viola and Kira Perov and their whole team in the US for all the effort they have put in and help they have given – I also would like to express my gratitude to the Art Gallery of South Australia and St Peter's Cathedral for their partnership – and to warmly thank Lucy Guster, Mark Pennington and the festival team for making this very special event a reality.

**David Sefton**  
Artistic Director

## BILL VIOLA STUDIO

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** Kira Perov  
**STUDIO DIRECTOR** Bobby Jablonski

**PRODUCER** Lucy Guster  
**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR** Taren Hornhardt  
**SPECIAL EVENTS PRODUCTION MANAGER**  
Adam Hornhardt  
**TECHNICAL MANAGER** Mark Pennington

**ADELAIDE FESTIVAL GRATEFULLY  
ACKNOWLEDGES THE ASSISTANCE OF**  
Jane Messenger, David O'Connor – Art Gallery of South Australia; Elizabeth Steele Basile, Astra Price, Christen Sperry-Garcia – Bill Viola Studio; The Very Rev'd Frank Nelson, Kate Palmrose – St Peter's Cathedral.



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## LIST OF WORKS

### ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA **The Crossing, 1996**

Video/sound installation  
Two channels colour video,  
four channels of stereo sound  
10:57 mins. Performer: Phil Esposito

### **The Encounter, 2012**

Colour High-Definition video on plasma display  
19:19 mins. Performers: Genevieve Anderson,  
Joan Chodorow

### **Walking on the Edge, 2012**

Colour High-Definition video on plasma display  
12:33 mins. Performers: Kwesi Dei, Darrow Igus

### **The Messenger, 1996**

Video/sound installation  
Single channel colour video projection,  
stereo sound  
28:28 mins. Performer: Chad Walker

### QUEEN'S THEATRE **Fire Woman, 2005**

Colour High-Definition video projection,  
four channels of sound with subwoofer (4.1)  
11:12 mins. Performer: Robin Bonaccorsi

### **Tristan's Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall), 2005**

Colour High-Definition video projection,  
four channels of sound with subwoofer (4.1)  
10:16 mins. Performer: John Hay

### ST PETER'S CATHEDRAL, LADY CHAPEL **Three Women, 2008**

Color High-Definition video on plasma display  
9:06 mins. Performers: Anika, Cornelia,  
Helena Ballent

*Photos: Kira Perov. Courtesy Bill Viola Studio*



*Walking on the Edge* (detail), 2012

## DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

BY BILL VIOLA

### ***The Crossing, 1996***

A large double-sided projection screen stands in the middle of the room, both sides of the screen showing a single action involving a human figure culminating in a violent annihilation by the opposing natural forces of fire and water. The complementary actions appear simultaneously on the two sides of the screen, and the viewer must move around the space to see both images. The image sequences are timed to play in perfect synchronisation, with the approach and the culminating conflagration and deluge occurring simultaneously, energising the space with a violent raging crescendo of intense images and roaring sound. The two traditional natural elements of fire and water appear here not only in their destructive aspects, but manifest their cathartic, purifying, transformative, and regenerative capacities as well. In this way, self-annihilation becomes a necessary means to transcendence and liberation.

### ***The Mirage Series: The Encounter and Walking on the Edge***

*The Encounter*, and *Walking on the Edge* are part of a body of work created in the summer and early fall of 2012. These works explore the layers of reality and illusion in the physical world, as well as the dimensions between and beyond it. The focus is on the place of human beings in the natural order, both physically and metaphysically.

### ***The Encounter, 2012***

Two women are taking separate journeys at opposite ends of their lives. At the intersection of their meeting, during a brief encounter, life bonds are strengthened and the mystery containing the knowledge is quietly passed on from the elder to the younger.

### ***Walking on the Edge, 2012***

This work represents the inevitable separation of father and son as they take separate paths in their life's journey. Two men arrive in the desert under a turbulent sky. They appear at the far extremes of the frame and walk toward us on a trajectory that takes them closer to each other, until they are walking side by side. Eventually they cross paths and begin to separate. The gap between them widens until they leave the outer edges of the frame.

### ***The Messenger, 1996***

The image sequence begins with a small, central, luminous, abstract form shimmering and undulating against a deep blue-black void. Gradually the luminous shape begins to get larger and less distorted, and it soon becomes apparent that we are seeing a human form, illuminated, rising toward us from under the surface of a body of water. The water becomes more still and transparent and the figure more clear on its journey upwards toward us. We identify the figure as a man, pale blue, on his back rising up slowly.

After some time, the figure breaks the surface, an act at once startling, relieving and desperate. His pale form emerges into the warm hues of bright light, the water glistening on his body. His eyes immediately open and he releases a long-held breath from the depths, shattering the silence of the image as this forceful primal sound of life resonates momentarily in the space. After a few moments, he inhales deeply, and, with his eyes shut and his mouth closed, he sinks into the depths of the blue-black void to become a shimmering moving point of light once again. The image then returns to its original state and the cycle begins anew.

### ***Fire Woman, 2005***

*Fire Woman* is an image seen in the mind's eye of a dying man. The darkened silhouette of a female figure stands before a wall of flame. After several minutes, she moves forward, opens her arms, and falls into her own reflection. When the flames of passion and fever finally engulf the inner eye, and the realisation that desire's body will never again be met blinds the seer, the reflecting surface is shattered and collapses into its essential form—undulating wave patterns of pure light.





Top: *The Encounter*, 2012

***Tristan's Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall)*, 2005**

*Tristan's Ascension* describes the ascent of the soul in the space after death as it is awakened and drawn up in a backwards flowing waterfall. The body of a man is seen lying on a stone slab in an empty concrete room. Small drips of water become visible as they leave the ground and fall upward into space. What starts as a light rain soon becomes a roaring deluge, and the cascading water jostles the man's limp body and soon brings him to life. His arms move of their own accord and his torso arches upward amidst the churning water. Finally, his entire body rises off the slab and is drawn up with the rushing water, disappearing above. The torrent of water gradually subsides and the drips decrease until only the empty slab remains, glistening on the wet ground.

***Three Women*, 2008**

*Three Women* is part of the Transfigurations series, a group of works that reflect on the passage of time and the process by which a person's inner being is transformed. The medieval mystic Ibn al' Arabi described life as an endless journey when he said, '*The Self is an ocean without a shore. Gazing upon it has no beginning or end, in this world and the next.*' This profound vision of the eternal nature of human life is eloquently expressed in *Three Women*.

In the dim, ghostly grey of a darkened space, a mother and her two daughters slowly approach an invisible boundary. They pass through a wall of water at the threshold between life and death, and move into the light, transforming into living beings of flesh and blood. Soon, the mother recognises that it is time for her to return, and eventually her children slowly follow, each tempted to have one more look at the world of light before disappearing into the shimmering, grey mists of time.

Left: *Three Women* (detail), 2008



Courtesy Bill Viola Studio

## BILL VIOLA

Bill Viola was born in New York in 1951 and graduated from Syracuse University in 1973. A seminal figure in the field of video art, he has been creating installations, video/films, sound environments, flat panel video pieces and works for concerts, opera and sacred spaces for over four decades. Using the inner language of subjective thoughts and collective memories, his work explores fundamental questions concerning life, death, transcendence, rebirth, time and space—questions that reside at the core of human existence.

Viola represented the US at the Venice Biennale in 1995 with an exhibition titled *Buried Secrets*. Other key solo exhibitions include: *Bill Viola: A 25-Year Survey* at The Whitney Museum of American Art (1997, travels to five venues); *The Passions* at the J.Paul Getty Museum (2003, travels to three venues); *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)* at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo in 2006; *Bill Viola: Visioni interiori* at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, 2008; *Bill Viola: Reflections* at Villa Panza, Varese, Italy (2012); *Point of Departure*, Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2013); and *Bill Viola*,

Grand Palais, Paris (2014), the largest exhibition to date, that drew almost 300,000 visitors. In 2004 Viola created a four-hour long video for Peter Sellars' production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* that has had many performances in the US, Canada, Europe and Japan. Viola has received numerous awards for his achievements, including XXI Catalonia International Prize (2009), and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association (2011).

## KIRA PEROV

Kira Perov is executive director of Bill Viola Studio. She has worked closely with Bill Viola since 1979, managing, creatively guiding and assisting with the production of all of his videotapes and installations. She edits all Bill Viola publications and organises and coordinates exhibitions of the work worldwide. Kira Perov earned her BA (Honours) in languages and literature from Melbourne University, Australia in 1973.

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ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS

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