

BLACK SCREEN

THERE are only two major distributors of video art in the United States. I visited both in March 2018 in search of works by black video artists. Video art, an outcast in the family of the visual arts, isn't much talked about. Even less talked about are the contributions of artists of color to the field. In Chicago and New York, the homes of Video Data Bank and Electronic Arts Intermix respectively, I spent hours glued to screens, watching work that stretched back to the early 70s and extended into present day. Black artists have used video art to make social critique for a long time. I was blown away by the commonalities in works by artists creating in vastly different places and eras.

As a medium, video art often re-purposes materials and themes from broadcast media, like television and radio, which for a long time were the primary forms of news communication in this country. Now perhaps eclipsed by Internet-based forms like social media and YouTube, traditional broadcast media still provide a fairly reliable way to gauge what the most relevant issues of the day are. These poems, each a response to a work by a video artist of color, represent my wish to provide another platform for this hard-to-find work, and to play with what video, a time-based medium, shares with poetry: image, syntax, rhythm, and sound. Both poetry and video art also investigate what it means to be a citizen at any particular time and show that the social problems that were relevant decades ago—far from being resolved—ring true even to contemporary ears.