Bill Viola (b.1951) is widely recognized as one of the leading video artists on the international scene. For over 30 years he has created videotapes, architectural video installations, sound environments, electronic music performances, and works for television broadcast. Viola’s video installations—total environments that envelop the viewer in image and sound—employ state-of-the-art technologies and are distinguished by their precision and direct simplicity. His single channel videotapes have been broadcast and presented cinematically around the world, while his writings have been published and anthologized for international readers.

Since the early 1970s, Viola has used video to explore the phenomena of sense perception as an avenue to self-knowledge. His works focus on universal human experiences—birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness—and have roots in both Eastern and Western art as well as spiritual traditions, including Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, and Christian mysticism. He has been instrumental in the establishment of video as a vital form of contemporary art, and in so doing has helped to expand its scope in terms of technology, content, and historical reach.

Viola received his BFA in Experimental Studios from Syracuse University in 1973. Since then he has produced over 150 works that have been shown in museums, galleries, film festivals, and on public television worldwide. During the 1970s he lived for 18 months in Florence, Italy, as technical director of production in one of the first video art studios in Europe, and then traveled widely to study and record traditional performing arts in the Solomon Islands, Java, Bali, and Japan. From 1980–81 he lived in Japan with his wife Kira Perov on a Japan/U.S. Cultural Exchange Fellowship, where he studied Buddhism with Zen Master Daien Tanaka and was artist-in-residence at Sony Corporation’s Atsugi research laboratories. In 1984 he was an artist-in-residence at the San Diego Zoo in California for a project on animal consciousness.

Viola represented the U.S. at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995, premiering an ensemble of five new installation works titled Buried Secrets. In 1997 the Whitney Museum of American Art organized Bill Viola: A 25-Year Survey, an exhibition that traveled for two years to six museums in the United States and Europe. He was invited to be a Scholar-in-Residence at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles in 1998, and later that year created a suite of three new video pieces for the rock group Nine Inch Nails’ world tour. His 1994 videofilm Déserts, created to accompany the music composition of the same name by Edgard Varèse, received its American premiere at the Hollywood Bowl in August 1999 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. His most recent project is a large scale, five-part projected “fresco” cycle in digital High-Definition video, Going Forth By Day (2002), commissioned by the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin.

Viola is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including a John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1989, and the first Medienkunstpreis in 1993, presented jointly by Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, and Siemens Kulturprogramm, in Germany. He holds honorary doctorates from Syracuse University (1995), The Art Institute of Chicago (1997), and California Institute of the Arts (2000) among others, and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2000. He lives and works in Long Beach, California, with his wife and manager Kira Perov and their two children.

# # #