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What's good video art? Cinema. Or so the joke goes. Yet, as Matthew Drummond writes, a growing number of collectors are taking the art form seriously.

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There's a battle being waged in Clinton Ng's Sydney **apartment**. On one side is his love of contemporary art, on the other his need for space. And the art is winning. His two-bedroom-plus-study home is overwhelmed by paintings and sculptures. A large and moody Dale Frank covers one wall in the living area, a massive rendition of Manet's A bar at the Folies-Bergère by Brazilian artist Vik Muniz covers another. The only spot left for the giant Tim Maguire is to prop it unceremoniously against the kitchen bench. Sculptures by Nicholas Folland (a deer head wearing a chandelier), Lionel Bawden (thousands of pencils glued together into a wave-like cloud) and Patricia Piccinini (Vespas nestling like puppies) consume the living space. The spare room resembles a gallery storeroom while the study is "chockers, don't go in", says Ng as he pulls the door shut. This gastroenterologist has an acute space crisis on his hands. But there is one type of artwork he can still **buy** to feed his addiction: the stuff that comes on DVD and can be turned on and off with a TV remote control. "There are a lot of pluses to video art," Ng says. "You don't have to worry about storage."

Video art has successfully colonised contemporary art spectacles – the medium will make up a third of works in the upcoming Biennale of Sydney – and is making inroads into public gallery collections. Audiences are fascinated by video art says Nick Mitzevich, director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, which in 2012 spent $230,000 on one of five editions of a video piece by uber-cool Russian art collective AES+F. "The thing about a moving image is it's very accessible," he says.An acquired taste

Yet there's a major disconnect between what curators are putting on public gallery walls and what collectors are hanging at home. According to the Australian Art Sales Digest, auction sales of video art totalled just $72,000 in the past five years. Collectible video art may have arrived with a bang in 2007, when Sotheby's**sold** Shaun Gladwell's Storm Sequence for $84,000, but seven years later that remains the high-water mark for an Australian video work **sold** at auction. Gladwell, Australia's most celebrated video artist, is also about the only one whose works change hands on the Australian secondary market, where video barely registers a heartbeat. It does better on the primary market, where it is **sold** through cutting edge **commercial** galleries to diehards like Ng, and internationally, where the pool of contemporary art aficionados is so much bigger. But it is still an acquired taste.

The first hurdle to overcome is resistance to a medium that resembles everything from the most abstruse of arthouse cinema to dead-boring computer screen savers. "What's good video art?" goes the joke. Answer: "cinema". Simon Mordant, the managing director of corporate advisory Greenhill & Co, chairman of the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Renaissance-man philanthropist, says he and his wife Catriona spent years feeling uninspired. "We used to look at video and think 'this is garbage'. We'd go to a biennale and there would be a tonne of video. We'd stick our heads in and stick them out and we just wouldn't get it. And then one day we went in to [the then Sherman Galleries] and there was an exhibition by Turkish artist Kutlug Ataman. We saw two works that blew our minds. We thought they were so fantastic we couldn't decide which one we liked best, so we bought both of them."

That was seven years ago and the works – shifting images on pieces of rotating paper – were the Mordants' moment of epiphany. Those two small artworks were followed by a much larger work by Britain's Sam Taylor-Wood. Collectors such as space-constrained Ng are happy to show their collection on a TV screen, iPad or computer. But the Mordants like to do things as the artist intended. With Taylor-Wood that involved projecting the work onto a large blank wall. "Not many people have five-metre walls," says Mordant. "We actually did." From there the couple went on a binge. They pulled out walls and ceilings, bought flat screen TVs and museum-standard film projectors, all to accommodate their collection. "Having been complete cynics about it we became quite obsessed," he says. "In fact we had to put a new power **board** in because we were consuming so much energy."

As the Mordants turned up their demand for electricity, they pulled down the blinds. TV screens and projections look sharper under subdued lighting so accommodating their new passion meant dimming the lights. "We've made it part of our life because we love it. But it isn't the easiest thing to have in the home," Mordant says. And yet video art has the potential to be perfectly suited to how we live today.Found in translation

Pink and purple disco lights pulse and quiver inside Anna Schwartz's office above her gallery in Melbourne's Flinders Lane. The decor is cool bordering on cold; surfaces are built of polished concrete or stainless steel. The sole bit of colour radiates from a large, flat-screen TV mounted on the wall. The disco lights are the backdrop to a man on a stage singing in Arabic and playing an electric keyboard propped up against his shoulder. It takes a few moments to register that he is blind; it takes many more to put your finger on what he is singing. Twisted through a foreign tongue and an instrument held together with sticky tape, eventually the penny drops that the song is **Hotel** California by the Eagles. The musician is a Parisian busker brought to a karaoke bar by artist Angelica Mesiti and filmed and edited into an endless five minute loop. Titled Some Dance to Remember, Some Dance to Forget, the work is intriguing and mournfully beautiful.

And if you lived with it, its never-ending soundtrack would probably become very tiresome. Is it okay to turn the sound off? Would that be like hanging a Rothko upside down? Schwartz thinks people should relax and open their minds to video art. Artists are very flexible about how their video works are displayed in people's homes, she says. Indeed the medium, which has its origins in experimental 1960s New York, has come into its own now that everyone has a large flat screen television, a canvas ready-made for video art. "You have a blank dead object in your sitting room doing nothing. You could activate that and it's a **site** for a work of art," says Schwartz. "What a lot of people enjoy is being able to have this as a **site** for changing artworks. We can program them all on a hard-drive so they just use their remote and select the work they want to have on. And it's so much better than having the TV playing nothing. It induces a better quality of living experience so people don't have television as a constant background to their lives. They have an artwork and even if it seems to be non-narrative, it does provoke thought."

Works come with a certificate signed by the artist and an edition number to prevent unauthorised copies being made, says Schwartz. The collector typically gets two copies – one to play and the other to keep as a master – on either Blu-Ray discs or USB sticks. If that all seems a little unrefined, more like downloading a song on iTunes than buying a gorgeous painting in a handsome frame, there is an upside. "One of the things that makes video art attractive is it's not expensive," Schwartz says. "People are in a position of being able to **buy** the very best art for not a lot of money. It's a bit analogous to the way photography used to be. The artist might be of equivalent importance to someone who's making paintings but with paintings there is only one of them and they tend to be more expensive. [Video art] represents incredible value. People understand they can get a really important work by a major artist and it may not cost more than $15,000, whereas a painting by an artist of that equivalent stature might be $80,000.'"Not a single drop of paint'

Few Australian video artists have a higher stature than Daniel Crooks. His works are plugged into power boards at the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of NSW, the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart and Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. He was the inaugural winner of the $100,000 Basil Sellers Art Prize in 2008 – a prize for artworks depicting sport that was open to any medium – and has been commissioned to create works for the headquarters of the ANZ Banking **Group** and Bovis Lend Lease.

His studio in Melbourne's inner-northern suburbs feels like a film **company**'s storeroom; floor-to-ceiling shelves are filled with boxes and containers neatly marked with labels like "photos and polaroids" and "slides and mini projectors". There's not a single drop of paint. Two large computer screens are propped up on piles of Encyclopedia Britannica and, with his mouse and keyboard, Crooks is manipulating footage taken in a New York subway station. The trains and ceiling stretch as if bent by the forces of astrophysics. Commuters shift positions, dissolving and reconstituting themselves from creeping dots.

Crooks has been working for over a decade with a motif he calls time-slicing. Grabbing pen and paper, he gives a mini-geometry lesson to explain how it works: a screen has an axis for width and height but if you imagine all the frames stacked up against each other, like a brick, there is an axis for depth that is effectively time. Time-slicing involves popping one of those traditional axes out of the frame and replacing it with time, rendering visible an invisible dimension.

"That was a bit of a mathematical triumph, even if I do say so myself," he says of the computer script he has written to make the editing program do what he wants it to do. "You can't get four dimensions into three, nor three into two. So I swap one out for the other. It's a cunning way to get more time in there. What I love about it is topologically it's still perfectly sound. I haven't broken or cut anything."

Korean-American Nam June Paik, the founder of video art in the 1960s, was the first artist to get his hands on a Sony Portapak, a battery-operated video camera that allowed audio-visual-minded technology buffs to film outside. Crooks, born in 1973 in New Zealand, was part of the generation who were kids when Video8 first entered the home in the form of the Sony Handycam. The first video he ever made was of his teenage friends skateboarding.

Crooks' life and career have followed the contours of advancements in screen technology. When he started his university studies in the early 1990s, video was on analogue tapes and computers were only just starting to sneak in. By the time he had graduated, digital was taking over and magnetic tape cassettes were being replaced by DVDs. As his artistic career began, heavy cathode ray television sets were being replaced by flat screen plasmas. A taste of VietnamNow flat screen plasmas are everywhere. Crooks does not want for recognition or space in public art galleries, but the best viewing he ever had of his own work was while slurping his dinner in a favoured Vietnamese noodle soup restaurant in Melbourne. "I went on a trip to Vietnam for the Tet festival and everyone was driving around Hanoi with kumquat trees on mopeds," he recalls. "I got home and edited this montage of kumquat trees together and gave it to the restaurant owners for Tet the next year. They put it up on the screens in the restaurant where there's normally **Chinese** karaoke going. I was suddenly immersed in a sea of kumquat trees while having my noodle soup. It was awesome."

Awesome is how many describe the video work that was the centrepiece of Jeremy Deller's English Magic installation in the British pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale. A hen harrier, caught in full flight with its feather shot through with sunlight, flies across a field accompanied by a soundtrack of a steel orchestra playing music by Ralph Vaughan Williams. It then jumps to footage of two Range Rovers being lifted up by giant mechanical claws and crushed into compact boxes, before jumping again to a street parade in London, the same steel orchestra now playing David Bowie's The Man who **Sold** the World.

It took just half a minute for Simon Mordant to decide that he wanted one of the six editions of the 15-minute video. Thirty seconds were all he could see through the crowds during the show's opening vernissage. (Mordant was leading the Aussie contingent in Venice as commissioner to Australia's exhibition). He loves it so much that when he travels for work he takes a copy with him. "It's so magnetic, I'm playing it all the time," he says. "With the sound down because the music is driving my wife bonkers." Fans like Mordant and Ng say they find video artworks especially absorbing and meditative. In a world saturated with TV and computer screens, tablets, smart phones and digital billboards, the moving picture is arguably the most contemporary of contemporary art mediums.

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