



By slowing everything down, every breath, gesture, or eye movement has the effect of an earthquake.

BILL VIOLA

Bill Viola

The Greeting, 1995

Video and sound installation: Color video projection on large vertical screen mounted on wall in darkened space, amplified stereo sound

168 x 258 x 306 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Museum purchase

Acquired in 1995

Bill Viola's video *The Greeting* takes roughly forty-five seconds of action and slows it down to ten minutes. The action in the film shows a simple conversation taking place between two women on the street (actually a stage set built by Viola) and a woman who enters and greets the two who have been talking. Before the third woman enters, a vague interaction takes place between two figures in a doorway in the background. Viola was a pioneer of early video art and video installation, and *The Greeting* is an excellent example of his skills and sensibility. Viola has taken a simple, everyday exchange and transformed it into something intriguing that is loaded with meaning and questions. *The Greeting* is a translation of *The Visitation* by the Florentine Mannerist painter Pontormo, which depicts the biblical story of Mary's visit to her older cousin Elizabeth, just after both have become pregnant. Viola uses much of Pontormo's setting, treatment of clothing, and placement of characters, and transforms it into a secular story. Watching the meeting of these women on the street in slow motion, we see the many subtle elements that take place during the exchanges. The piece reveals all of the happiness, nervousness, closeness, intimacy, and suspicion that takes place when familiar and unfamiliar people meet. As the action progresses, it moves from moments of emotional intensity to moments of low-key conversation, with the movement of the women's clothing highlighting the activity. What the women are saying is left unheard, and in this way Viola leaves the meaning open to interpretation. Viola has also left the center of the video open, implying that we are the fourth person in the group, and asking us to examine our own feelings during day-to-day social situations.