



INTERNATIONAL  
VIDEOART  
FESTIVAL

magnat  
video under volcano



The artist behind the video

## Interview with Alysse Stepanian

**As part of your artistic path, what brought you to video art, and what type of role does it play for you now?**

After working for seven years as a painter in Los Angeles, in 1997 I moved to New York City and left my paintings behind. This afforded me the mental space to work with other media. In contrast to the isolated activity of painting, video art presented possibilities for collaboration and for combining video projects with real life experiences, multimedia installations and performances. This led to a wider range of collaborative work, most notably with my life partner, composer and artist Philip Mantione. We work as the BOX 1035 duo, the name derived from our post office box address in New York, which reflects our interest in transience, change and movement.



**How much influence do you believe your cultural background, and the *foreground* of globalized culture have had in your artistic expression?**

I have come from a colorful mix of cultural backgrounds, have lived in five countries, and have moved to a new home on average once every two years. Of Armenian descent, born and raised in Iran, I have lived through a revolution, and was educated in the US. I had to learn to adapt to drastically contrasting social and cultural settings. This has resulted in varied interests and circles of friendship, and the acceptance of working outside the mainstream culture. I do not constrain myself to any single medium and am interested in art as creative problem solving and figuring out the relationships between concepts and events. I think that all things are interconnected, as are the people around the globe, and I don't mean this in terms of the homogenization or Westernization of globalized consumer culture. Similarly, I think that my creative life cannot be separated from other pursuits such as teaching, curating, or advocating for the rights of humans and other animals.

**Your relationship with digital tools: how much do you think they changed your artistic expression, and in what way?**

The fluidity and flexibility of digital media and its potential for immediate worldwide dissemination has provided a platform for making global relationships and has exposed me to a wide array of information. While staying focused demands more discipline, digital tools have afforded me greater variety of experiences and experimentations and have freed me from the burdens of object making. Having moved around a lot, I value this sort of freedom. A project that I am currently working on has to do with the idea of global collective consciousness, and this would not have been possible without the huge amount of information

that is provided by the web and digital technology. I feel that we are moving toward a unified voice for permanent peace throughout the world, empathy for nonhuman animals and care for the planet. Interestingly, there is even a Collective Consciousness App that measures the influence of the mind on one's phone!

**Which are, if any, the artists (and not only videoartists) who have influenced your path, and for what reasons?**

Currently I feel more influenced by world events than any particular artists or approaches. I am exposed to too much information to be able to single out any specific influences.

**If you look back, what are the moments, the experiences that, as a videoartist, have marked your personal artistic history?**

In one of my earliest endurance pieces, I kept awake for 72 hours, performing absurd physical tasks for the camera during regular intervals. I was nude with the exception of a black censorship strip taped to my breasts. The absurdity of this nudity and my actions were my way of confronting and making a mockery of patriarchal prejudices and reclaiming control over my own body. Another drastically different work is a 2011 video, "What Is My Name, Sister?" based on the dream journals that I kept after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This work does not have the immediacy of the prior videos and it hovers somewhere between videoart and experimental cinema. Rather than working alone, I worked with a cast and crew of volunteers and professionals from the film industry.



**Beyond your personal experience, do you think there have been significant steps in the history of videoart, and if so what?**

There have been many significant steps in parallel with changes in technology and society, all of which are now part of videoart history. Two most important ones that come to mind immediately are the invention of the portable video camera, followed by digital technology.

**If you look forward, what are your expectations as a videoartist?**

I am interested in work that in some way helps expand human consciousness, whether it is via teaching, writing, lectures, or the use of art and technology.

**Looking at the scenario of international videoart, what are the *nodes* on which you feel should be working, to give it more breathing?**

I think that if I remain focused on my priorities as an individual, any nodes will automatically find their new connection points and spread organically.

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