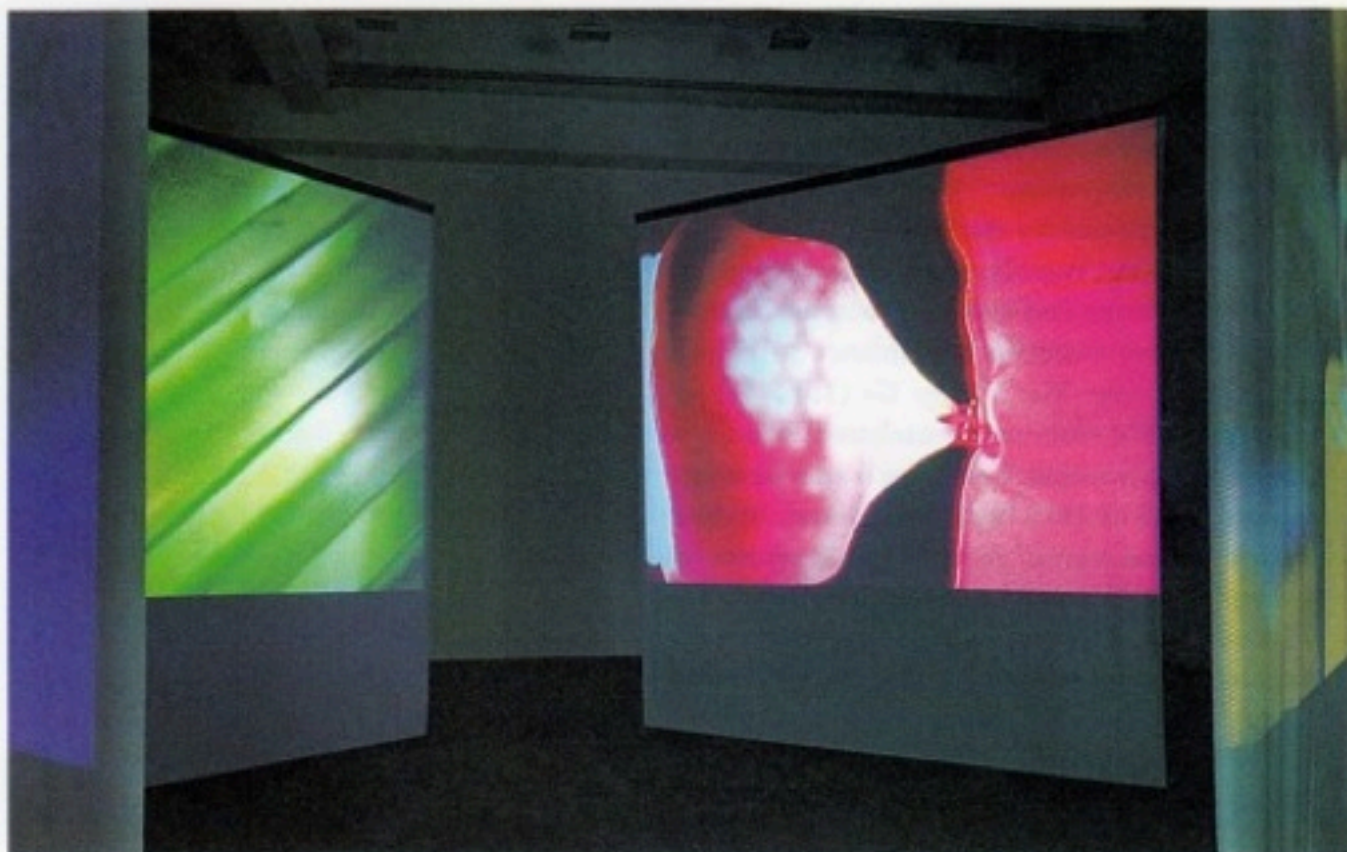


PHYLLIS BALDINO,  
"NANO-CADABRA,"  
INSTALLATION VIEW.



## Phyllis Baldino

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It is too little noted that historically, artists' wildest fictional premises have often become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, Masaccio's depictions of pictorial space inspired cosmology, Seurat's pointillist techniques facilitated mechanical reproduction, Popova's dimensionless renderings of co-existing dimensions anticipated cyberspace, Chesley Bonestell's 1940s extrapolations of moonscapes fashioned astronaut suits, and William Gibson's novels hastened the appeal of cyborgs inhabiting a computer-linked planet. Whether science consciously learns from art, though, is disputable. Both begin with imaginative theories, but while science waits out technological advances to test its hypotheses, or changes views to fund its testing, art sails blithely into uncharted waters.

Phyllis Baldino's exhibition "Nano-cadabra" builds on the desire to visualize ineffable concepts, to give form to a world that is virtually nonexistent. While the Museum of Jurassic Technology's 1993 exhibition, "Nanotechnology" required a leap of faith (on that occasion, one peered through microscopes to observe barely visible etched chips, whose

functional titles insinuated motors, neurosensors, gear-trains, springs, atomic points and pyramids), Baldino's installation of four laser-disc segments projected on 7-by-7-foot Thru-Vision scrims magnified microscopic factories such that they became at least somewhat comprehensible. Because images appear on both sides of Thru-Vision scrims, one could view multiple manufacturing processes simultaneously as the four screens loosely formed a square. Given "Nano-cadabra's" five syllables (and Baldino's sense of humor), the mother disc is 5-minutes-5-seconds long. Four discs present ten five-second abstract narratives extracted from the mother disc; thus this exhibit entailed a choreographic element. By employing the editing technique known as "peel," each frame slowly unveiled each new process, as if one were turning a book's pages.

It was difficult to discern what one experienced, let alone how Baldino created each frame. Yet one sensed manufacturing-related tools such as needles, suction cups, marshmallow-like products bouncing along conveyor belts, turbine engines, a glazed-over eye, geodesic domes, molecular structures, gear-teeth, a scrub brush, amorphous iridescent bubbles, a ribbed chute, microfibers and a breathing gill-like form, and manufacturing activities such as spinning gears, glaring circular lights,

static electricity, friction, injection molding, strobe lights, stacking, sliding, sticky stuff being pulled, glassblowing, sorting machines, flashing lights, opening/closing mechanisms, objects turning inside out, and vacuum-sealing.

Accompanied by the faint sounds of scratching, clipping, tumbling, gurgling, dragging, spinning, rotating and shaking processes, “Nano-cadabra” bears a certain resemblance to Fischli and Weiss’s *The Way Things Go* (1985-87) or *Koyaanisqatsi*’s 1983 urban maelstrom. Hardly a documentary, however, its footage is anti-representational. With the *force majeure* of the real, Baldino has penetrated unreal phenomena—a molecular factory largely balanced by van der Waals’ forces—without promising to wholly explicate their workings. Bound to inspire engineers for years to come, “Nano-cadabra” depicts the additive potential of intermediary building blocks, rather than forecasting their mind-boggling capabilities.