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Entertainment

Norton's budding video collection exhibition channels meditative harmony

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The Norton Museum is taking its first steps into collecting video-based art with the works featured in a small show currently on view.

It's a decision that's not lightly made. In addition to the usual quality, appropriateness and price considerations that factor into acquisitions, video requires institutions to commit to keeping up with new technology and maintaining pieces when the technology used to make them becomes obsolete.

But, as contemporary art curator Cheryl Brutvan says, "It's a form of expression we can't ignore."

The four works in the show constitute the bulk of the Norton's video collection. The museum also owns a video piece by William Kentridge, *What Will Come*, which is not on display.

Last year, the museum acquired Jaye Rhee's two works, *Tear* and *Seasaw*, and Hiraki Sawa's *Between*. Tony Oursler's *Crying* has been on loan from Palm Beach residents Sheila and Milton Fine for several years.

The show, which is displayed in the darkened 3,400-square-foot Jerome and Anne Fisher Gallery, is meant to be an immersive experience. Together, the pieces form what Brutvan describes as a meditation on the human condition.

Crying, from 1996, is a classic Oursler work. It's a globe resting on the floor that displays a projection of a woman's red-rimmed tearful eye accompanied by loud sobbing.

The two Rhee works were instrumental in the Norton's decision to move more aggressively into video. Brutvan discovered them at the Stephan Stoyanov Gallery in New York about a year and a half ago. "She was an artist who was new to me," the curator said. "I felt so strongly about these two pieces. The question was, could we pursue video? The answer was yes, and these are great works."

Brutvan liked the connection between *Seasaw* and the Norton. It linked with the museum's coastal location and its painting *The Beach at St. Tropez* by Pierre Bonnard.

The work is made up of five side-by-side monitors projecting images that look like a crayon drawing of a seascape. Above the horizon, the artist scurries back and forth carrying a ball of blue string. She's constructing the seascape, which appears to undulate as it's shown in various stages of completion. The sounds of surf murmur in the background.

The piece has its source in a childhood memory of her grandfather's death, the New York-based Korean-born artist said during a recent visit to the Norton. Her grandfather used to take her on trips to the beach. She was 5 when her parents left her home alone while they went to the funeral home. Too young to comprehend the realities of death, she amused herself by creating her own beach by drawing with a blue crayon on the wall and jumping on the bed.

Looking back on the creation of the piece, Rhee said, "I was thinking about what is playing, what is labor, what is tragedy. Everything is mixed up with this whole event."

In *Tear*, four monitors project black-and-white video of the artist plowing hip-deep through a barrier of fabric that rips loudly as she progresses. The work is a metaphor for struggle. "It can be from one state to another, like life and death," the artist said. "There's all this struggle. But I don't really want to use the word struggle. You just do it."

Between is a gift from Jupiter residents Becky and Jim Mayer. Like Rhee, who was born in 1973, Sawa is a young Asian artist. He was born in Japan in 1977 and lives in London.

The three monitors stacked vertically reverse the usual visual order. The top monitor slowly pans the floor of a nondescript interior space while the bottom screen inspects the ceiling. The center monitor displays a succession of surrealistic images, such as birds skidding across the floor or a light bulb rising like a moon over the treetops, to a soundtrack of creaking and dripping noises.

Michael Rush described Sawa's works as "intimate, often hermetic meditations on place and the wonderfully odd activities that can occur in imaginative dimensions" in *Art in America*.

The show signals the Norton's intention to move further into collecting art of our time. As for the technological challenges, "so far, we're OK," Brutvan said.