Maelstrom: Max Laugha, 1988
The video itself, a densely packed two-minute loop, provides an absorbently condensed history of communication and information media. Beginning with an astralistic reference to the Biblical logos that touches on the storage and dissemination of written language, the birth of the novel, the function of computers and their creation of a uniquely technological space ("computers can go places you can't go"), and concludes with speculation on future cybernetic developments. In the video's culminating segment, the well-known cybernetic television character Max Headroom appears to escape from the physical and electronic restraints of his microchips and circuitry. As Max disappears from the screen, all that remains is the disembodied sound of his robotic, quasi-human laugh.

The two wall texts provide insight into the didactic aim of Barry's installation. On one side, the text asks, "IF COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING ARE JUST AN EFFECT OF INFORMATION TECH...ARE THERE STILL MEN OR ARE THERE JUST COMPUTING, WRITING, AND THINKING MACHINES?" While referring to the potential for self-governing machines such as Max Headroom, this question might also be taken to imply that it has become difficult to discern whether humanity itself remains distinct from the all-encapsulating electronic media. Maelstrom may provide one answer to this question in its juxtaposition of the sheer corporeality of the viewer's body with the ethereal lights of the video projection that play across his or her skin and clothing.

Judith Barry was born in Columbus, Ohio. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, and the San Francisco Art Institute, and holds degrees from the University of Florida (B.S.) and the New York Institute of Technology (M.A.). Among the awards she has received are fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, both in 1986.

Lawrence Rinder
Work in MATRIX:


Selected one-person exhibitions:

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Kaleidoscope (performance) '78; Whitney Museum, NYC, Ideology/Praxis (screening) '82; Museum of Modern Art, NYC, Echo (installation) '86; Seattle, WA, COCA Natural Foods Pavilion (public sculpture) '87; Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland, Echo/In the shadow of the city...vampyri (installation) '88.

Selected group exhibitions:

Artists Space, NYC, Dark Rooms (installation) '85; The New Museum, NYC, Damaged Goods (installation) '86; Galleria Pieroni/American Academy, Rome, Italy, Non in Codice (installation) '87; Whitney Biennale, NYC, First and Third (installation) '87; Riverside Studios, London, C.B., Between Echo and Silence (installation) '87; Venice Biennale, Italy, Aperto (installation) '88; Whitney Museum at Equitable, NYC, Expanded Forms (installation) '88; Museum of Contemporary Art, L.A., A Forest of Signs (installation) '89.

Selected bibliography by the artist:


Selected bibliography about the artist:


MATRIX is supported in part by grants from the Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Foundation, the California Tamarack Foundation, Art Matters Inc., and the Alameda County Art Commission County Supervisors' Art Support Program.