

VIDEOKITSCH

a proposed book

by Jaime Davidovich and Diana Rico

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When television began making its way into American households after World War II, it was regarded as a miraculous box full of hazy, magical images that had never appeared in people's living rooms before—images of comedy and tragedy, of reality and fantasy, of cowboys and spaceships and buffoons and perfect families. After Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theater* became the first bona-fide TV hit in 1948, television sales jumped—and they never stopped growing. In 1950, when the average annual salary was \$3,800, Americans bought more than 6 million TV sets at about \$300 a pop—double the number of TVs sold in the entire seven years prior.

Within a short ten years television replaced radio and movies as the most influential medium of the 20th century, becoming the primary source of information, entertainment, and mythology for Americans and audiences in other industrialized countries around the globe. But as it took hold of the popular imagination, TV gradually became part of the backdrop of ordinary life—both increasingly unnoticed and increasingly central to our way of looking at the world. In 1978 Americans were watching an average of more than six hours of TV a day. By 1980, when the top-rated show in the United States was *Dallas*, nearly 80 million American households had TV sets—a penetration of virtually 100 percent. No longer an enshrined object, the magical picture box had become as necessary, and as taken for granted, as the telephone or the electric bulb.

This radical change in our relationship to TV can be visually traced through everyday objects made between the 1950s and the 1980s and mimicking or referencing the

television set as the quintessential 20th-century icon. Cookie jars and clocks, savings banks and snow domes, watches and radios, Christmas-tree lights and costume jewelry, salt-and-pepper shakers and picture frames, wind-up toys and pencil sharpeners—hundreds of items, all in the shape of television sets or designed to be used in conjunction with TV viewing—will be celebrated in **VIDEOKITSCH**. Envisioned as a cool, fun, sumptuously designed art/gift book aimed at a wide international audience, **VIDEOKITSCH** is based on the unique, world-renowned collection of objects amassed by Jaime Davidovich, a pioneering video artist whose own early artworks reference popular TV forms.

Davidovich began collecting TV-related products in the late 1970s, when he uncovered a cache of untouched Winky Dink Kits, artifacts from the 1950s interactive children's show *Winky Dink and You*, in a New York City flea market. These rare kits included a "magic screen" (a sheet of clear plastic), which viewers could stick on their TV screens, and a "magic crayon" with which they could draw life-saving devices to get their animated hero, Winky Dink, out of trouble. Artist friends began to give Davidovich everyday objects shaped like or depicting TV sets, such as flower vases and ashtrays. Interested in the way these objects reflected television's place in the American consciousness, Davidovich continued to collect TV-set memorabilia on his own.

Davidovich eventually amassed hundreds of objects, many preserved in their original packaging. Some of these items ended up on the "Video Shop" segment (a tongue-in-cheek precursor to the Home Shopping Network) of Davidovich's *The Live! Show*, an innovative, artist-produced variety/talk show Davidovich created for Manhattan Public Access Cable starting in 1979. These objects have also formed the foundation of an ongoing art piece, *The Museum of Television Culture*, curated by Davidovich's alter ego

Dr. Videovich, a deadpan “TV therapist.” *The Museum of Television Culture* has been exhibited at such prestigious venues as the American Museum of the Moving Image, the Queens Museum, New York’s New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Institute of American Studies in Barcelona. It will be part of a major international exhibition about the first 25 years of video art, which will open in October 2006 at Madrid’s renowned Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. The Reina Sofia also just purchased an installation of Davidovich’s *The Live! Show* for its permanent collection of contemporary art, including some 250 of his **VIDEOKITSCH** objects.

Davidovich’s investigation of television-set imagery continued in two other art projects that will be featured in **VIDEOKITSCH**. From 1974 to 1984, the artist systematically photographed TV sets in all the motel rooms in which he stayed. And during the explosion of graffiti art in downtown New York City in the 1980s, Davidovich went around the streets of SoHo photo-documenting public art that depicted or made reference to TV sets. These projects simultaneously conveyed and demystified the overwhelmingly pervasive power of the television set in American culture.

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In a delightful display of vintage objects, **VIDEOKITSCH** will trace how the television set went from an exotic item of reverence to an everyday part of the household, as necessary and as ubiquitous as the refrigerator or the couch. **VIDEOKITSCH** will open with an essay of between 2500 and 3500 words, followed by seven chapters. Each chapter will be organized around an object category and include a brief (150- to 250-word) introduction.

INTRODUCTION

A social, cultural, and design history of the television set and its evolving place in American life, from its enshrinement in the household in the 1950s to its almost unnoticed omnipresence in the 1980s. The Introduction will also discuss the background of Jaime Davidovich's **VIDEOKITSCH** collection and place it within the context of TV-related art of the 1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER ONE: HOME SWEET HOME

Household objects paying homage to the TV, including banks, clocks, jewelry boxes, Christmas ornaments, picture frames, planters, and even TV's competitor, the radio.

CHAPTER TWO: SOMEONE'S IN THE KITCHEN...

Everything from *Art Linkletter Show* salt-and-pepper shakers to *Dukes of Hazzard* TV trays to ceramic cookie jars decorated with TV scan lines.

CHAPTER THREE: FUN 'N' GAMES

For kids and adults, tv-referencing toys such as rubber stamps, tiny dollhouse furniture, Winky Dink Kits, home versions of *The Price Is Right*, and more.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WEARABLE TV SET

Backpacks, watches, costume jewelry, and of course T-shirts, T-shirts, T-shirts.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN PRINT

Postcards, greeting cards, advertisements, and other print items documenting changing American attitudes towards television.

CHAPTER SIX: MOTEL ROOM TVS

Davidovich's conceptual art project of 1970 to 1984, depicting the most ordinary of the ordinary: the American motel-room TV set.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TV GRAFFITI

The logical extension of TV's ubiquity: television-related SoHo street art from the golden graffiti age of the 1980s.

THE MARKET FOR VIDEOKITSCH

VIDEOKITSCH is envisioned as a captivating visual feast, with an artful, sophisticated, yet simple design intended to hook the widest possible audience in the shortest possible time. Like Davidovich's visual art, **VIDEOKITSCH** will be both fun and edgy, with a savvy attitude--an accessible yet sophisticated fusion of high and low culture. Most importantly, **VIDEOKITSCH** will be interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and international in its appeal.

In the past decade, the publishing industry has exploded with TV-related titles. There are countless fan-oriented books aimed at lovers of specific programs ranging from *I Love Lucy*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *Bewitched* to *Real World*, *The Sopranos*, and *Desperate Housewives*. In addition, publishers are constantly trying to come up with

fresh spins on traditional television culture. In 2005, for example, new titles included Beverly West and Jason Bergund's *TV Therapy: The Television Guide to Life* (Delta Trade Paperbacks), the latest in the *Cinematherapy* series of pop-cultural "advice" books aimed at hip females; Ken Kessler's *You Watch Too Much TV: But Did You Know...* (Taylor Trade Publishing), containing 250 pages of detailed TV-trivia quizzes; and Larry Brody's *Turning Points in Television: Great Moments on the Small Screen* (Citadel Press), a narrative history of TV organized by the medium's major highlights.

The most obvious audience for **VIDEOKITSCH** is the people who buy these types of TV-related books. **VIDEOKITSCH** will captivate several generations of TV watchers, as it begins in the 1950s and ends in the 1980s, when VCRs, home video cameras, and the multiple-channel world of cable TV changed the television landscape forever. And **VIDEOKITSCH** fits squarely within the trend—visible in fashion, interior design, graphic design, and Hollywood movies--of celebrating, examining, and revitalizing these four decades.

But **VIDEOKITSCH** also aims at a much more vast market: readers who are fascinated by vintage design or retro objects; lovers of popular culture; buyers of art books; people interested in media history or recent art history; people who are into collectible memorabilia, toys, and nostalgia-based ephemera; and anyone who is looking for affordable gift books that are hip, visually driven, and fun. As we rapidly hurtle into an age of new video delivery models—tiny mobile phone "Mobisodes," outsized flat-screen HD TVs, video-on-demand, webcasts, and more—cultural interest in a simpler television age will only grow.

VIDEOKITSCH has a unique crossover appeal, fitting easily into the current proven trend of cool, savvy gift books published by such houses as Taschen (such Icons titles as Teruhisa Kitahara's *Robots and Spaceships*, Sven A. Kirsten's *Tiki Style*, and Jim Heimann's *Kitchen Kitsch: Vintage Food Graphics*, *Future Perfect: Vintage Futuristic Graphics*, *Mexicana: Vintage Mexican Graphics*, and the *All American Ads* books), Chronicle Books (*Meet Mr. Product: The Art of the Advertising Character* by Warren Dotz and Masud Husain, *This Ain't No Disco: New Wave Album Covers* by Jennifer McKnight-Trontz, *Vixens of Vinyl* by Benjamin Darling), Harry N. Abrams (*Goth-Icky*, *Love Sick*, and *Happy Kitty Bunny Pony*, all Pop Ink books by the Charles S. Anderson Design Company), Melcher Media (*Season's Gleamings: The Art of the Aluminum Christmas Tree* by J. Shimon and J. Lindemann), and Princeton Architectural Press (*Cocinando!: 50 Years of Latin Album Cover Art* by Pablo Iglesias).

Two recent Chronicle Books titles, Steve Kosareff's *Window to the Future: The Golden Age of Television Marketing and Advertising* and Danny Biederman's *The Incredible World of Spy-Fi: Wild and Crazy Spy Gadgets, Props, and Artifacts from TV and the Movies*, are distant cousins to **VIDEOKITSCH**. (In fact, Davidovich's collection includes some of the ads that appear in Kosareff's book.) **VIDEOKITSCH** will entice many who would buy these titles, as well as those who gravitate towards the other books mentioned. But nothing else currently on the market delves deeply into the world of TV-set imagery in the way **VIDEOKITSCH** does. **VIDEOKITSCH** is unique in its subject matter, extremely marketable, and potentially enormous in its appeal. With its title and content it is also an easily brandable concept, holding great potential for spinning off such collateral **VIDEOKITSCH** items as calendars, postcards, notecards, journals, photo albums, and DVDs of Jaime Davidovich's original "Dr. Videovich" commercials.

THE AUTHORS OF **VIDEOKITSCH**

JAIME DAVIDOVICH is a pioneering video artist whose work plays with contemporary notions of popular television and its relationship to viewers. Davidovich was one of the first video artists to be invited to exhibit in the Whitney Museum of American Art's renowned "New Filmmaker Series," and his groundbreaking work has also been seen at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the American Center in Paris, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, and in other prestigious museums and galleries across the United States, Europe, and Latin America. He is the recipient of several National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowships and of grants from the New York State Council on the Arts.

A native of Argentina, Davidovich moved in the 1960s to New York City, where he worked as a book designer on such volumes as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Hunter S. Thompson's *Hell's Angels*, and the first English translations of Julio Cortazar's fiction. In the 1970s Davidovich helped to found the seminal New York-based Artists Television Network, which commissioned cutting-edge artists to create works for mainstream television. In 1976 Davidovich and a group of artists and cable-TV companies took the concept further and created Cable SoHo, with the intention of using early cablecast technology to broadcast arts programming to new audiences. Davidovich served as Cable SoHo's first programming director. From 1978 to 1983 he produced the program *SoHo Television*, a weekly hour of artist-created television that was broadcast on Manhattan Cable TV. Produced in Davidovich's SoHo loft, these unique programs included interviews and performances by such famous artists as Laurie Anderson and John Cage. Davidovich also became known as the deadpan "TV therapist" Dr.

Videovich, a satirical character he created for *The Live! Show*, a weekly variety/talk show he produced for Manhattan Public Access Cable in the 1980s.

During this period, Davidovich began collecting pop-cultural souvenirs and tchotchkes that either mimicked the shape of or referred to the television set. He eventually created a unique collection of hundreds of objects, most in pristine condition. They range from housewares (teapots, cookie jars, salt and pepper shakers, placemats, napkin holders) to furnishings (radios, mirrors, picture frames, lamps), from toys (dollhouse furniture, music boxes, snow domes, rubber stamps, coloring books) to games (*What's My Line?*, *Password*, *The Price Is Right*), as well as hundreds of postcards, ads, and other print ephemera. Among the unique items are *Howdy Doody* playing cards, *Sesame Street* costume jewelry, *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *Charley's Angels* TV trays, and a toy replica of the set of *Donny and Marie*. Some 250 pieces from Davidovich's collection were recently purchased for the permanent collection of Madrid's prestigious Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, where they will be featured as part of a major international exhibition due to open in October 2006.

DIANA RICO is a critically acclaimed author, magazine journalist and editor, and internationally broadcast TV producer, director, and writer. She specializes in covering popular culture and the visual arts. Her definitive biography of the pioneering 1950s TV comedian Ernie Kovacs, *Kovacsland* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), landed her interviews on such shows as *Larry King Live*, *CBS Nightwatch with Charlie Rose*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *Good Morning, America*. *Kovacsland* was favorably reviewed in the *New York Times*, *Kirkus Reviews*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *San Diego Union*, and many other periodicals. *Variety* praised Rico's study as "a full-bodied

portrait [that] points the way to the sort of serious treatment great television artists deserve.”

As a producer/director/writer, Rico is responsible for eighteen episodes of the Emmy-nominated primetime series *The E! True Hollywood Story*, which aired in 70 million homes nationally and 140 million homes internationally. Her subjects included pop-cultural phenomena such as *Dallas*, *Scream*, *Married...with Children*, *The Price Is Right*, and *Rod Serling's Twilight Zone*, as well as such entertainment icons as Steve McQueen, Marilyn Monroe, John Lennon, Sammy Davis Jr., the Beatles' wives, Natalie Wood, Alfred Hitchcock, Burt Reynolds, Jane Fonda, Michael Jackson, and Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. Her other primetime TV credits include *A&E Biography* episodes on *Get Smart's* Don Adams and on *Three's Company*; the international coproduction *Royalty A to Z*, a documentary miniseries on the British royal family; *How Do I Look?*, a hit makeover show for The Style Network; *It's Good to Be...*, the hip E! Entertainment Television celebrity lifestyles program; and *Urban Jungle*, a reality series for the groundbreaking Latino network SiTV. She has been nominated for two Prism Awards by the Entertainment Industries Council.

As a print journalist, Rico has covered pop culture and the arts for such major publications as *G.Q.*, *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Interview*, *ARTnews*, *Architectural Digest*, *Arts + Architecture*, *Elle Décor*, *Mother Jones*, *Movieline*, *American Film*, *City* (Paris), *Domus* (Milan), *The Manipulator* (Berlin), the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Daily News*, and *USA Today*. From 1979 to 1982, as the Associate Editor of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' *Emmy Magazine*, she interviewed and wrote about Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner, Edie Adams, and many other television pioneers. In the mid-1980s she was the

Art and Architecture Writer of the *Los Angeles Daily News* and the Art Critic for National Public Radio's Los Angeles flagship station, KCRW-FM. And as Editor-in-Chief of *International Documentary* magazine in the mid-1990s, she was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant. Her other honors have included recent writing fellowships from the National Association of Latino Independent Producers, the Harwood Museum of Art in New Mexico, and Hedgebrook, the prestigious women's writing colony in Washington. Rico has also worked as a freelance editor for the University of California Press, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Knapp Publishing, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and *California* magazine.