The 1990 conference of the International Committee for Museums of Modern Art (CIMAM) convened in Los Angeles September 10 through 14, in a meeting hosted and organized by the California/International Arts Foundation. Eighty-two delegates from 26 countries attended the sessions.

CIMAM President MARGIT ROWELL opened the conference by noting that for the first time speakers from outside CIMAM had been invited, and that the CIMAM group has never met in the United States. She introduced the overall theme of the congress, "Modern Art Museums: Definition Between Past and Future".

GIANNI VATTIMO, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Turin and author of The End of Modernism, began the session, asserting that "the old logic of the individual taste is not a stable, and feasible, solution" for the museum. ROSALIND KRAUSS, Editor of October and author of The Originality of the Avant-garde, discussed the shift in attitude among American museums towards the notion of "museums as corporate entities." DAVID ELLIOTT, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, maintained that "the art professional of the future will need the skill of the anthropologist to make sense out of what will almost certainly be a cacophony of voices."

The second day of the conference focused on "Realities of the California Scene," with talks by art consultant TAMARA THOMAS, video artist BILL VIOLA, architectural historian THOMAS HINES, and CONSTANCE GLENN, Director of the University Art Museum at Cal State Long Beach.

The topic on day three was "Enlightened Sponsorship", with JENNIFER VORBACH and KEVIN BUCHANAN of Citibank's Art Advisory Service, and ALBERTA ARTHURS of the Rockefeller Foundation. Speakers from the J. Paul Getty Trust were: MARILYN SCHMITT, The Getty Art History Information Program; DR. THOMAS REESE, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; CHARLES J. MEYERS, The Getty Grant Program; MARY ANN STANKIEWICZ, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts; and DR. FRANK PREUSSER, The Getty Conservation Institute.

The final day’s program centered on "Present Day Developments", and included presentations from MICHELE DE ANGELUS, Curator of the Eli Broad Family Foundation and LEOPOLOD MALER, Director of the Donald Hess Foundation. SAVELI YAMSCHIKOV, President of the

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Steina and Woody Vasulka are artists based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, who have participated in the development of the electronic arts since the 1960’s. In 1971, they founded The Kitchen in New York City as a place to exhibit all performing arts media, including video and electronic music. Their videotapes and installations have been exhibited and broadcast extensively in the United States and Europe, and they each have been Guggenheim Fellows. Steina and Woody spoke with Sarah Tamor in November 1990, just after their first visit to Woody’s native Czechoslovakia since the downfall of the Communist regime.

SV: We met in Prague in 1964, and decided to marry so that Woody could get out of Czechoslovakia painlessly. We went to New York: I didn’t want to live in Czechoslovakia, and he didn’t want to live in Iceland, where I’m from.

WV: I started to work in film, experimenting with multi-screen projects. In 1969 I got my hands on video, and it just took my heart away. It was all black and white, reel to reel.

SV: We would go late at night and watch the video feedback, you know, like you watch your fire, and see how it changed and didn’t change. There were a lot of people exploring this new medium: Ira Schneider, Frank Gillette, Juan Downey, Nam June Paik.

WV: There was an exhibit at Howard Wise’s gallery, Electronic Arts Intermix, called “Television as a Creative Medium.” It had all the basic components of video, as far as genre and form of exhibiting.

SV: And there were the “Nine Evenings”, a big art and technology exhibit, put on by “EAT”: “Experiments in Art and Technology”, with Billy Kluger. In retrospect, I realize the ground was very fertile. We just took it for granted. For us, this was just America. We didn’t know that for the Americans, this was also quite miraculous! That it wouldn’t continue like that never occurred to anybody!

SV: Then, in 1971, we started the Kitchen.

WV: It was very natural. There were several places that exhibited video art, but we were open to all media, electronic music, performance,
We invited Rhy Chatham to invent a music program, Shirley Clark invented the Wednesday Open Screenings. Even Nam June Paik showed up with his upcrown glasses.

You had not been to Czechoslovakia since the revolution. Was it different?

ST: I returned only a few times since then.

ST: You mean they don’t have your names on that list? We are not even remembered there, that is run by artists anyway.

ST: During all those years, did you go back to Prague, but you could live blissfully unaware of the inner pain of self-denunciation.

ST: What was the mood of the people in Prague in that sense is different, it’s not Euro-

WV: It was strange, from the intellectuals, my friends, the artists that lived in this paradise of West Berlin, it was proper, it fit. Maybe I would have said the same thing if I was living there.

WV: I didn’t have one because there actually for 3-4 years. It was a completely different atmosphere, a break through. I was so grateful for it. I saw this glimpse of how Berlin might have looked in the ’20s. West Berlin is com-

WV: But actually, as a teenager in the ’50s and ’60s, I was brought up in a purely spiritual environment. It was all about religion or maybe it was called Communism. It had no stain of commercial interests. It is still astonishing to me how they did not sell very much at a time. It dealt only with aesthetic and political or ideological con-

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And eventually become despised. You should start over again, from the bottom. I'm managed to never turn anybody down. We had Paik show up there with his uptown crowd.

WV: Yes, actually, I happened to be there to witness the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the German troops in 1968. I was in the group of friends who, if I could believe it could have lasting consequences, but then it plunged into this deep depressed period of what they called “normalization.” I could never share that fully, because it was very far from my state of mind. When I stopped visiting, I returned only a few times since then.

ST: I was your family still there?

ST: What was the mood of the people in Berlin?

WV: Yes, but my niece deserted, so the family wasn’t unified. We talked casually on the phone all the time about these two worlds. But so far an artistic tradition, I lost that in the ‘90s because of completely different interests in cultural direction. Going from this socialist regime which in a way played an indirect metaphorical language something that was subdued by a ritual, to the situation of New York in the ‘90s, when everyone was talking about the materials, and structure, and organization: this kind of a new materialism and energy world. The reality of the media completely took over and dropped this cultural heritage. Willingly, of course, gladly.

ST: You mean they don’t have your names on a gold plaque somewhere?

ST: Tell me about your visit in October 1990.

ST: Yes, but my niece deserted, so the family wasn’t unified. We talked casually on the phone all the time about these two worlds. But so far an artistic tradition, I lost that in the ‘90s because of completely different interests in cultural direction. Going from this socialist regime which in a way played an indirect metaphorical language something that was subdued by a ritual, to the situation of New York in the ‘90s, when everyone was talking about the materials, and structure, and organization: this kind of a new materialism and energy world. The reality of the media completely took over and dropped this cultural heritage. Willingly, of course, gladly.

SV: I am sure this Kitchen is in nicely, but it’s a very different place from the one we started. It’s a different era. We have not been involved with any of the Kitchen’s activities whatever. We are not even remembered there which is fine with us.

SV: We talked about the city, with gypsies entertaining on street corners, these cliches become absolutely real, and you could see Europe as it was before the war. I see this moment as a metaphor, somewhere between the personal and the political, the pause which decided in a way about all of us.