Out of sync

Electronic Visions
at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, N.Y.
July 24-Sept. 4

MARITA STURKEN

The exhibition of video in museums has been the subject of some debate since the demands of video works are often incompatible with traditional viewing habits. Many curators argue that we should treat video with the same care and installation concerns as painting and sculpture, yet the exhibition problems of video, especially in incompatible with traditional viewing habits.

It is ironic that in a show which featured new technologies in video art, the most successful work involved a mechanical, rather than computerized, system. Steina's Machine Vision, which has been shown in different versions for several years, is a viewer-activated installation which explores contained space and perspective. The piece consists of a large mirrored ball which rotates on top of four monitors, arranged in a square with one on each side. Two rotating cameras point at opposite sides of the ball, and their images alternate on the monitor screens. From any given angle, one sees several simultaneous views of the gallery space, oneself, and other viewers—the reflection in the mirrored ball and the two conversely rotating scenes on the video screen. The effect is a graceful, choreographed motion which contains and recontextualizes the surrounding structure, controlled yet self-propelled. The advantage of Machine Vision over other works in this show was largely due to its involvement of viewers as well as its compatibility with other works. It was situated in the most crowded room of the exhibition, sharing space with prints and videotapes by Woody Vasulka, Ralph Hocking, and Sherry Miller, as well as a small viewing area for single-channel tapes. While other works seemed to compete with one another, Machine Vision responded to and absorbed them all.

The translation of electronic imagery into still pictures was an integral part of the work exhibited by Woody Vasulka and Hocking and Miller. Vasulka presented a series of wall panels, sequences of images describing his "Syntax of Binary Images," along with stills of multiple images derived from the footage used in The Commission, his most recent videotape. The didactic nature of Vasulka's binary images—progressions from a simple image of a hand to complex digitized renditions—made this temporal treatment appropriate. Similarly, the geometric shapes composed of groups of images from The Commission, layered and superimposed so that they appear like mysterious configurations, created a tension between abstraction and a recognizable figure. In addition, Vasulka screened excerpts from The Commission at a panel discussion at Hudson River.

The tape represents a turning point, as it is the first major piece he has done shaping his earlier technical explorations into narrative form.

Hocking and Miller take a female nude as their point of departure for studies in color, form, and sensuality. According to Minkowsky's notes, they use a computer system "for drawing on paper images initially recorded on videotape." This might be an interesting technical feat, but the still images in this installation did not indicate the advantage of their process. The images are small, faintly blurred, sepia-toned nudes—many reminiscent of early pictorial photographs. Multiple imagery is certainly the application of this technique with the greatest potential, combining a still format with the myriad possibilities of computer effects. Hocking and Miller create dense superimpositions which become abstract as the delineations between figures are obscured, but, compared with Vasulka's stills, these pictures look timid because of the lack of definition and miniature size. Hocking and Miller's accompanying videotape, The Tub (and, I assume, the source for their images), contains some very fine moments of exquisitely rendered sensuality. It is a very gentle study of a woman in a pool of water, which moves from very simple black and white to increasingly manipulated color images that become digitally fragmented and totally abstract. The color in Hocking and Miller's work is exceptional, especially in image-processed video; they create very subtle hues suited to their delicate subject matter. It would be more challenging, however, if they employed their electronic devices for making something beyond pretty pictures.

The exhibition of videotapes together with video-derived still pictures can provide a kind of visual relief, not unlike the effect of stop-action, allowing contemplation of a particular frame. Both Woody Vasulka—who situated a monitor continuously playing several of his and Steina's tapes in front of his stills—and Hocking and Miller thus encouraged a comparison between their still and moving images, but in both cases the placement of the monitors hindered the dialogue. The monitors sat on stands which intruded on the photographs, so that one had to walk around them to look at the pictures. Both monitors were significantly larger than the still images—an important consideration which seems to have been ignored. Had the dimensions of Hocking and Miller's pictures been the same, or at least close to the size of the monitor, the correlation between the two would have been strengthened. In Vasulka's case, his monitor was less obtrusive—in a

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The contributors to this column are: Lisa Baker, who does teaching studios at the Visual Studies Workshop and the Rochester Institute of Technology; Ruth Cowing, Martha McEwen, and Warren Adelson and Ira Spanierman-in a study of America and the Department of Cultural Resources; they entail the "lack of informa- tion, expertise, and experience of the people involved in showing the work." The technological display in "Electronic Visions" is ad- dramatized, and represent some important video artists. The exhibition problem in this show was not the result of curatorial intent or the quality of work pre- sented, but the way in which it was arranged. Many of the premises presented in "Electro- nic Visions" deserve further investigation.

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