In Western culture, we commonly think of machines as antithetical to the spontaneity and originality of the creative process. With a deep ambivalence about technology, we perceive machines as either versatile, problem-solving entities and panaceas for global problems, or as potentially tyrannical systems over which we have no control. While the machine has increasingly constituted an important subject for artists since the Industrial Revolution, the rise of technological art forms has raised new questions about the act of collaboration with the machine. The mechanical machine was modelled after the human body, its various components assigned roles as specific organs and limbs in an effort to mimic the efficiency of the human model. Yet the electronic machine, specifically the computer, is modelled on the human thought process.

Video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka have been working at the cutting edge of electronic imaging for twenty years. This comprehensive exhibition of their multimonitor installations and single-channel videotapes presents a set of unique sensibilities in conceptualizing the electronic image and the means by which it can expand our perceptions of the world. For the Vasulkas, the creative process represents a "dialogue with the machine," in which they are not masters of a tool but receptors of its capabilities. Woody has said, "I have to share the creative process with the machine. It is responsible for too many elements in this work." It is at the rupture between the mechanical and the electronic in the evolution of the machine where the importance of the Vasulka's work can be positioned.

The Vasulkas came to the United States in 1965 with diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds. Woody, who was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, had studied engineering and film. Steina was a classical violinist from Reykjavik, Iceland. Their backgrounds have influenced how each has proceeded to examine different aspects of video as a moving image medium. Woody has been concerned primarily with the construction of a new visual code that is distinct from the cinematic code of representing the "real." Like semioticians of the cinematic image before him, Woody is concerned with mapping the intrinsic meanings embedded in specific image forms, yet he is interested in applying those codes as a means of reinventing narrative and anti-narrative structures. Steina has concentrated on the mechanisms of the camera itself, systematically setting up complex mechanical systems which, in effect, imitate the basic movements of the camera—pan, tilt, zoom—in order to redefine space.

In the work that they have produced collaboratively and as individual artists over twenty years, the Vasulkas have systematically pursued a phenomenological project of deconstructing the properties of the video medium. Their work reveals an ongoing questioning of what constitutes the process of electronic imaging. As such it

An Exhibition
April 7
September 7, 1989

Single-Channel Videotapes
Warner Communications Screening Room.
Programs will be screened regularly during the course of the exhibition.

51 Early Documentary
Participation (1969, 30 mins.)
Early experiments of the 1960s counterculture in New York. The video displays the theatre of Jimi Hendrix at the Fillmore East, and Andy Warhol's gang arguing on the David Susskind Show.

53 Time/Journey
Evolution (1970, 12 mins.)
Golden Voyage (1972, 28 mins.)
In Search of the Castle (1981, 12 mins.)
For the Vasulkas, the electronic machine where the importance of the Vasulkas' work can be positioned.

55 Sound/Image
Spectral Images (1974, 10 mins.)
Reconstruction (1976, 13 mins.)
Vocal Power By Steina (1970-79, 10 mins.)
Audio (1976, 8 mins.)
Voice Windows in collaboration with Joan La Barbara (1986, 8 mins.)
Total: 43 mins.

57 Machine Vision
Signifying Nothing By Steina (1975, 15 mins.)
Digitized Tapes By Steina (1977, 10 mins.)
Urban Episodes By Steina (1985, 9 mins.)
Total: 39 mins.

59 Space/Landscape
Machine Vision
Videobay (1973, 6 mins.)
Centripetal (1976, 20 mins.)
Stacks By Steina (1989, 20 mins.)
Seduced Tapes By Woody (1986, 8 mins.)
Summer Suit By Steina (1989, 10 mins.)
Lilith With Dane Cruz By Steina (1989, 10 mins.)
Total: 50 mins.
Four multimonitor installations will present the spectrum of the Vasulkas’ image/sound environments. *Matrix* (1970—72) is a series of multimonitor grids on which abstract electronic forms and sounds create escalating movement across multiple screens. *Allvision* (1975) is a central work in Steina’s project of Machine Vision, in which she examines an all-encompassing machine-derived vision which is not restricted to the human eye. Here, two cameras facing each other create imagery which mediates the camera movement with the gallery space. *Allvision* is a playful participatory work that redefines the viewer’s relationship to physical and electronic space. *The West* (1983) is Steina’s stunning portrait of the landscape of the American Southwest. Set across a broad array of video monitors, processed and layered images of the desert landscape examine the effects of man’s imprint and mapping of the land, from ancient Indian dwellings to complex radio-telephone systems. In Woody’s elaborate and deeply evocative work, *Art of Memory* (1988), the key events in the history of the 20th century are reorchestrated across an array of video screens in a meditation on personal and cultural memory and the role of the camera in defining history. Through technical innovations, Woody creates complex image objects from archival photographs and newsreel footage to examine the violent events (World War II, the Spanish Civil War, the Russian Revolution) that ushered in the atomic age.

A program of 24 single-channel works completes this comprehensive exhibition. Organized through such diverse themes as Sound/Image, Memory/Narrative, Machine Vision, and Digital Language, and spanning 20 years of production, this program includes important works such as Woody’s *The Commission* (1983), an electronic opera about two tragic art figures—Hector Berlioz and Niccolo Paganini; Steina’s playful *Violin Power* (1970—78), a tape which traces Steina’s replacement of the violin as an instrument in which she uses newsreel footage to examine the violent events (World War II, the Spanish Civil War, the Russian Revolution) that ushered in the atomic age.

In presenting this retrospective of the work of Steina and Woody Vasulka at a time when the Vasulkas have extended their technical experimentation and manipulation in video; indeed, their work is often read as merely systematic and didactic, yet any strictly formalist reading of this work offers a reduction of its complexity. Each reveals a journey into the phenomenon of electronic imaging, one in which we as viewers follow the Vasulkas as makers.