Video art pioneers stuck on pause

SFMOMA exhibit long on pretension, short on potential

By David Bonetti

THE OLD PEAR THAT video art is a new, barely recognizable, intellectually absorbing, slow-witted and slow-moving, even barely breathing art form born in recent years. Such artists as Bill Viola, Thierry Kunstler, Chantal Akeroyd, Mary Lucier, Gary Hill and Doug Hall, among others, have demonstrated that video art can be as beautiful, in its own way, emotionally and intellectually satisfying as painting, sculpture and photography. Yet, its premise that the traditional arts are obsolete.

The purveyor of one of the best performances of the night was a devoted family member. Performing on McGee's own piano, a replica of a Schubert Vienna fortepiano built by Thomas and Barbara Wolf (and probably the finest such instrument in the area), Carol approaches the piano and his fellow musicians with equal parts darse, accompanying and musical imagination.

The purveyor of one of the best keyboard trills since the late Rudolf Serkin, Carol more importantly evidenced interpretive productivity ideal for this still-undervalued concert. His study sense of the music's underlying pulse afforded him appreciable rhythmic elasticity, and his shrewd sense of tempo relationships -- the concluding Presto was fleet but also exact in the right manner -- permitted a persuasive formulation of the music's rhetoric.

The wonder of the performance was the concert's entire Andante, where orchestra and soloist conspired to create some underlying thematic core; McGee brought out the clashing qualities of the string sonorities in the instrumental opening to spellbinding effect, and Carol pursued the keyboard's sinuous line with a sure yet adventurous sense of its outcome. Throughout the performance, but particularly in this movement, Carol achieved a "big sound" -- of 28 double-stacked television monitors, "The West" is a recreation of the Southwestern landscape, washed across the screens. The imagery, which ranges from ruins of the Anasazi Indians to radio telescope towers, stresses that as long as humans have inhabited the landscape, they have made interveions in it.

Stina's images, however, have little inherent appeal, and you are reminded of other video artists like Luchino Visconti, Michael Snow or David Rabinowitch. Richard Misrach or John Pfahl, Richard Auerbacher demonstrate that video art can be as beautiful, in its own way, emotionally and intellectually satisfying as painting, sculpture and photography.

But Steina's work is at least something about other than video techniques. To reiterate, it is meant to be in love with technology for its own sake. In his two room-sized "Machine Vision" series (1994-96), he has made beautiful, useless machines that functionally replicate the aesthetics of ancient technological patterns.

It seems to be the boy's love of gadgets, with no apologies given. If that's what video art is about then I'm not surprised that it is the machines that you love and not humanity.

Philharmonia's brilliant concert

No. 3, "Jewelstone," with the palm of a visiting virtuoso and the aura of a devoted family member. Performing on McGee's own piano, a replica of a Schubert Vienna fortepiano built by Thomas and Barbara Wolf (and probably the finest such instrument in the area), Carol approached the piano and his fellow musicians with equal parts darse, accompanying and musical imagination.

The purveyor of one of the best keyboard trills since the late Rudolf Serkin, Carol more importantly evidenced interpretive productivity ideal for this still-undervalued concert. His study sense of the music's underlying pulse afforded him appreciable rhythmic elasticity, and his shrewd sense of tempo relationships -- the concluding Presto was fleet but also equal in the right manner -- permitted a persuasive formulation of the music's rhetoric.

The wonder of the performance was the concert's entire Andante, where orchestra and soloist conspired to create some underlying thematic core; McGee brought out the clashing qualities of the string sonorities in the instrumental opening to spellbinding effect, and Carol pursued the keyboard's sinuous line with a sure yet adventurous sense of its outcome. Throughout the performance, but particularly in this movement, Carol achieved a "big sound" -- of 28 double-stacked television monitors, "The West" is a recreation of the Southwestern landscape, washed across the screens. The imagery, which ranges from ruins of the Anasazi Indians to radio telescope towers, stresses that as long as humans have inhabited the landscape, they have made interventions in it.

Stina's images, however, have little inherent appeal, and you are reminded of other video artists like Luchino Visconti, Michael Snow or David Rabinowitch. Richard Misrach or John Pfahl, Richard Auerbacher demonstrate that video art can be as beautiful, in its own way, emotionally and intellectually satisfying as painting, sculpture and photography.

But Steina's work is at least something about other than video techniques. To reiterate, it is meant to be in love with technology for its own sake. In his two room-sized "Machine Vision" series (1994-96), he has made beautiful, useless machines that functionally replicate the aesthetics of ancient technological patterns.

It seems to be the boy's love of gadgets, with no apologies given. If that's what video art is about then I'm not surprised that it is the machines that you love and not humanity.