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WASHINGTON SQUARE FILMS

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Woody Vasulka  
RT 6 Box 100  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

May 18, 1993

Dear Mr. Vasulka,

It was a pleasure speaking with you today. As I explained, Washington Square Films is producing a television series for PBS titled **THE UNITED STATES OF POETRY**, presenting a cross section of some of the most exciting poets and spoken word artists nationwide.

The series' predecessor, **WORDS IN YOUR FACE**, also produced by Washington Square Films for PBS, was the 1991 premiere of "Alive From Off Center." **WORDS** was one of the first television programs to reveal the New Poetry now being heard around the country. The New York Times ran a feature article on the show, The Chicago Tribune called it "stunning and stirring...funny, angry, and intense...embellished by a visual wallop", and the Associated Press called it "unpretentious, articulate, and tremendous fun."

While **WORDS** presented essentially urban poetics and sensibilities, this project expands that scope, presenting poetry and spoken word performances from around the country, creating a portrait of America as revealed through ideas, words, accents, rhythms, and images. Work ranging from that of Nobel Prize-winner Czeslaw Milosz to cowboy poet Baxter Black to 14-year old Brooklynite Laura Ciporen to a Middle American housewife will come together to define a New Word Order: the uniting, via poetry and television, of the cultures of America.

Each show has a guiding title and theme. The topics are subject to change, but our intention is to make them broad enough to find room for all kinds of material. The working themes are: *1) Families And Values 2) Politics And War 3) Work And Play 4) The Land And The People 5) Love And Sex 6) Ethnicity And Religion.*

We are currently looking for filmmakers who can bring style and sensitivity to the work. Directors will be asked to work collaboratively with one or more poet in their area. I look forward to receiving a sample reel of your work, and will be in touch as we grow closer to final decisions/details.

As of now, we are looking at an August start date, but it is still tentative. If you could send a tape this week, it would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call.

Thanks.

Sincerely,

Colette M. Coyne  
Washington Square Films

THE VASULKAS

May 26, 1993


To: Colette M Coyne  
Washington Square Films  
Fax: 212 529-0107

Dear Colette,

I am writing to let you know that we are preparing a sample reel of our work and you will receive it and information related to our concept of the project within ten days.

Thank you for contacting us.

Regards,

  
Woody Vasulka  
for The Vasulkas

Hi You Two.  
These were  
sent  
- M.

THE VASULKAS

July 1993

Dear Doris Cross,

Woody & Steina Vasulka are proposing a film about your art. Please read the attached material which describes a proposal sent to Washington Square Films.

IF you have any reservations or do not wish to be involved at all, please let us know.

With warm regards,

Melody Summer  
for The Vasulkas

# THE VASULKAS

June 20, 1993

Colette M. Coyne  
Washington Square Films  
FAX: 212-529-0107

Dear Colette,

Thank you for your interest in my participation in your project, "The United States of Poetry." I feel you should know a little more about my method and style of work, so I am including some information about my videotapes. To produce documentary-style pieces, I have often worked with my wife, Steina. I would like to work with her on this project as well.

Our sample includes material on the work of well-known painter and poet Doris Cross, who has lived in Santa Fe since the early seventies. Her highly-acclaimed book, *Columns* was published by Trike Press, San Francisco, 1982, based on her innovative visual poetry. Her process in this work consists of "leaving found words precisely where they exist in the dictionary — even as a column is built of mortar and stone." This process provides the direction for the tape work we propose to create: a follow-up on Cross's life, which would also involve a remarkable young poet Liz Rymland, a student of applied alchemy and shamanic practices, who is by now a rare interpreter of Cross's artistic personality since Cross has lost the ability to clearly communicate due to a stroke. Cross's "columns" technique for retrieving words would be used in live interaction between Cross and Rymland. Excerpts from Cross's visual poetry would also be featured.

Attached you will find summary material describing each of the participants, and their work.

Thank you again,

✓ 7/93 letter  
sent to  
Doris re: this  
project

Woody Vasulka

Woody & Steina:

thursday noon

I found a good bio of Doris Cross yesterday in her book at the St. John's library. I think now that if we did the video, that it would be interesting to refer to the columns technique of retrieving words for the live interaction between Doris and Liz. Liz would retrieve and highlight and formalize what she hears Doris say. Also, might some of Doris' Columns paintings be featured? It's the best visual poetry I've ever seen.

I've read the Rymland you gave me. Here's my take on it: She is an ecstatic trance poet. Blakean, but not as distilled. Kafkaesque, but she's not in society. Ginsberg did it, Patty Smith. Liz's poetry is an excellent push in that same direction but to me the emphasis on grotesquery makes it seem adolescent and a bit insincere, coming from such a sensually astute person as she seems to be. (The world is not entirely shit and rotting corpses.) I like the psychedelic buildup, the on-rushing energy. The originality of her impulse, straight out of the unedited self. The provoking rebelliousness underlying everything bothers me. A ranting tone gets tiresome. There is no let up, no variety. But I can well imagine her words spoken with music at a Rave. Get her together with Terrence M? Her language is magnificent, generally. Other times trite, weak. I feel as if understand *where* it comes from. (I have in the past written in that style, not as courageously -- see my first book.) It's an apocalyptic post-modern fragmentation and recombination of all the cultural biases and inventions, tending toward the final immolation, the ecstatic annihilation in an instant, the St. Elmos Fire of the time. what our minds do with info overload, the end-time where everything returns in a rush. Do we face that fear then revell in it? She's got a direct line from the personal *and* the universal unconscious. Like dream, but more consciously inflated. Incredible energy. It seems as if there may be a deeper message but there isn't. The surface message is no trust, no stability, no connection between people. The narrator is on a lonely mission, she is completely isolated, and what she is after is impossible to articulate, and in that way ultimately, though poetically stunning, it is not entirely engaging. It rejects us.

I'd like to work as a co-director if this project works out. I'd like to be involved more than as a secretary. Otherwise it will be too consuming and take me away from my own work and I won't get paid for spending time thinking about it, as I am doing already. I think it could be quite interesting. Here's a revised letter. Let me know if you don't like the direction I've taken. I spoke to Guy again. Told him we're sending his Mom a copy.

We're onto the SFMMA proposal now. I need the tape for wash sq films and their address. It didn't come through on the fax.

Love from M.

letter to  
follow

**Liz Rymland** is an epic poet who has traveled extensively in India and South America. A student of applied alchemy and botanical practices in the new and old worlds, she has worked in environmental toxic clean-up and biodiversity conservation. She has collaborated with many artists and spiritual seekers at home and abroad. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico where she has worked with the artists Doris Cross, David Dunn, and Steina and Woody Vasulka. Her books include: *Fugue States and Other Poems*, *Roots and Lightning*, *Blind Stagers and Upthrust*.

about poetry, from *Fugue States*:

"It's like some sort of oxygen deprivation but the entities are so gentle that they help me up for air . . . I feel awestruck and humble and my breath lowers in my chest opening a door that makes me hum . . . I know that my deepest desire is to be lifted and lit like a human glowworm."

**Doris Cross** is an internationally-known painter, visual poet, and filmmaker. She studied art with Hans Hoffman at Pratt Institute. A native of New York City, she has lived in Santa Fe New Mexico since 1972. She has had numerous solo exhibitions worldwide. Her works have been published in *Art in America*, *Artnews*, *Kaldron*, *North American Review*, and elsewhere. In 1968 she conceived, produced and directed the award-winning film, *The Black Grocery Store*. A book of her visual poetry was published by Trike Press in 1982, titled *Columns*. Cross has performed her poetry live and has been featured in videotapes conceived and directed by Steina and Woody Vasulka.

from *Columns* by Doris Cross:

"To read aloud each line singing of life . . . sure as death . . . a dead shot, dead center, connecting the two at the end so that neither wins . . . anything."

"Emergence . . . take to the bosom a hunted animal. Put to the mouth music as in a bower. Embrace free from faults, like that of the emerald. Come out into view."

Doris Cross on poetry:

"The word itself is the mark. It is the image. Words are organic life-designs. To begin to understand this life, one must have recourse to form. Specific to art, form acquires and gives rise to new systems."



Dear Colette,

Thanks for the letter of interest in my possible participation in your project THE UNITED STATES OF POETRY. But I feel, you should know more about the method and style of my work. I seldom work on projects which focus on other crafts than video or computer or media in general. There are some exceptions. In a collaborative more documentary style. Steina (see profile) and I have produced work <sup>with my wife Steina</sup> on video and audio involving poets.

from

Our sample contains ~~various~~ work of Doris Cross, an artist/poet living in Santa Fe. If our involvement in your project should take place, it would deal with a ~~quite complex~~ follow up on Crosse's life, which also ~~would~~ involved "story" of another poet Elizabeth Rymland. But ~~it~~ all is much ahead our conversations.

OK

Thanks again  
Woody

the

Included: tapes, ~~article~~ vitae etc

- bios:
- Liz
- Doris
- Vasullas

who will act as an interpreter of Doris work.

Since I am interested in clear communication.

Agree with this

THE VASULKAS

May 26, 1993

To: Colette M Coyne  
Washington Square Films  
Fax: 212 529-0107

I need  
↓ to  
unavailable  
S.F. X

Dear Colette,

I am writing to let you know that we are preparing a sample reel of our work and you will receive it and information related to our concept of the project within ten days.

Thank you for contacting us.

Regards,

W.V.  
Woody Vasulka  
for The Vasulkas

Hi You Two.  
These were  
sent  
- M.

From

PHONE No. : 529 9370

May. 19 1993 9:59 AM -03

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Thanks.

Sincerely,

Colette M. Coyne  
Washington Square Films

*M.D. Dwyer*

*WE ARE THE FILMMAKERS  
OF THE MOVIE  
DONS CAOS  
LIZ NYLAND*

*you're  
welcome  
to  
call  
me  
at  
any  
time  
I'll  
be  
happy  
to  
help  
you  
out*

*Mr. Colette  
Washington  
Square  
Films*

S:  
Here's what  
I sent.  
-M.

✓ marked  
2 folders  
pkgs  
7/21

July 22, 1993

Cynthia Goodman, Chief Curator  
The Contemporary Arts Center  
115 East Fifth Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-3998

Dear Cynthia Goodman,

I am sorry for the delay in sending you the materials you requested. I have been helping the Vasulka's organize their material, but I was out of town for a week. Consequently, we are only now sending you a package of explanatory materials and background information. I hope this will help you to decide what to feature in your "masterworks of video exhibition." The Vasulkas will send separately video tapes for preview. If you would like any photographs, please let me know.

The two folders I am sending should give you some idea about what Steina and Woody's newer installations involve: Steina's newer work utilizes multi-channel matrixes of monitors, including "Tokyo Four" and "Ptolemy," the most recent being "Borealis" which premiered in Reykjavik, Iceland this spring. Woody's latest work, "The Theater of Hybrid Automata," premiered at St. Denis in Paris last year as part of *Artifices 2*. Woody is currently designing a new installation involving interactive tables of instruments, which features "intelligent machine responses." It is called "The Brotherhood."

Attached you find the Vasulkas' videotape price list. Woody and Steina want me to assure you they will be happy to arrange a package price, particularly if you are interested in purchasing a number of tapes. I have included "tapes description" sheets for Woody's recent tapes and Steina's compilation. Also, you will find a back list of tapes, which should be fairly comprehensive. Please specify which format you require.