

## VIDEO BY STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA

For nearly a quarter of a century Steina and Woody Vasulka have remained at the forefront of exploration into the formal and interactive possibilities of the electronic moving image. Founders of The Kitchen in New York in 1971, they were among the first to establish multiscreen video as an art form. Steina, a concert violinist, was the first to integrate live interactive video into musical performances, inspiring a generation of high-tech performance artists ~~including Steina and Woody~~. Woody is world renowned as a visionary pioneer of electronic image processing, and he remains on the leading edge today, having moved into digital image synthesis and interactive multimedia.

### *Tokyo Four*

Steina lived in Japan from November 1987 to May 1988 on a fellowship from the US/Japan Friendship Commission. There she recorded sixty hours of video with a ~~video~~ camcorder. She let the tapes sit for a year, then began working on them in May 1989. Now, more than two years later, there is *Tokyo Four*, her sixth multiscreen composition. It is organized around five categories of imagery: <sup>SHINTO</sup>~~Buddhist~~ priests meticulously grooming their Zen garden on New Year's Eve; train conductors monitoring rush hour crowds, ~~and~~ elevator girls bringing a superfluous but charming High Touch to the high tech world of the shopping malls; reminding *SHOPPERS* to watch their umbrellas and not to forget their children; ~~a~~ section about food, beginning with the vertiginous fisheye lens in a supermarket; and an emotionally charged meta-choreography of a dance troupe's performance and curtain call.

No form of moving-image art comes as close to musical composition as multiscreen video, where the different channels of image and sound are equivalent to musical polyphony, functioning like voices (instruments) in a musical ensemble. And no multiscreen work is as spectacularly musical as Steina's. She works as a composer would, playing on the visual equivalents of timbre, texture and tone. *Tokyo Four* is the audiovisual equivalent of a string quartet. Sometimes one screen is the melody and the others are accompaniment, then it changes. A musical syntax emerges from this visual point/counterpoint organized around duration, interval, rhythm, repetition and series.

In one compositional strategy Steina begins by assembling a long single-channel segment which represents the "melody" or what she calls the ground track. She makes three copies of it and inserts new images into each channel as accompaniment. Sometimes she records the ground track in reverse motion, which, in her musical terminology, "breaks the line" (the linear progression) making it easier to start inserting other images. She often works on all four channels simultaneously, using time code to bring them forward synchronously. They don't always have the same edit at the same point but they progress simultaneously toward a unified conclusion, like a musical canon.

Her compositional devices include flipping or reversing an image (right becomes left) and controlling its speed so that the same action begins at different times on different screens, playing at imperceptibly different speeds, then gradually they all synchronize at the same speed. These strategies are especially effective in the final movement when the female dancer is bowing. The Strauss waltz (the music the dancers were using) would be banal without the manipulations of Steina's spectacular visual matrix,

which transforms it into something at once exotic and poignant.

### *Art of Memory*

*Art of Memory* is not only Woody Vasulka's most famous work but must be counted among the most acclaimed and widely exhibited works in the history of video art. Three and a half years in the making, *Art of Memory* has won numerous awards and has been exhibited countless times around the world since its premiere in November 1987. There were three major sources of inspiration for the tape -- Vasulka's childhood memories of newsreels of world conflict; historian Frances Yates' book *The Art of Memory*; and the engravings of the 19th century Romantic illustrator Gustave Dore. Vasulka took from Yates not only the title of his videotape but also one of the tape's two organizing principles, that of "putting thoughts into a landscape." Yates writes in *The Art of Memory* about mnemonic devices used by classical Greeks and Romans. In preparation for his long orations Cicero would walk through a temple noting the number and positions of the columns, assigning to each column one of the topics of his speech. When debating he would visualize his temple walk, recalling the points of his speech with a perfection that would leave his opponents defenseless. The mnemonic architectures in Vasulka's tape are newsreels, photographs and texts as "memories" of major conflicts of the 20th Century -- World War II primarily, but also the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War. The movies, photos and book pages ("leafing through history") do not fill the screen but instead are mapped onto shapes or objects that either float above the landscape of the American Southwest or are continuations of it.

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### *Tokyo Four*

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November 29, 1991

Woody Vasulka  
Route 6, Box 100  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Woody:

It was good to talk to you regarding your upcoming show.

The dates for the exhibition are January 25 - March 22,  
1992.

Enclosed please find a xerox of the floor plan of the  
gallery. After you have had a chance to look at it, please  
give me a call so we can start mapping it out. The best  
number to reach me is 303/640-2252. I look forward to  
speaking with you.

Sincerely yours,



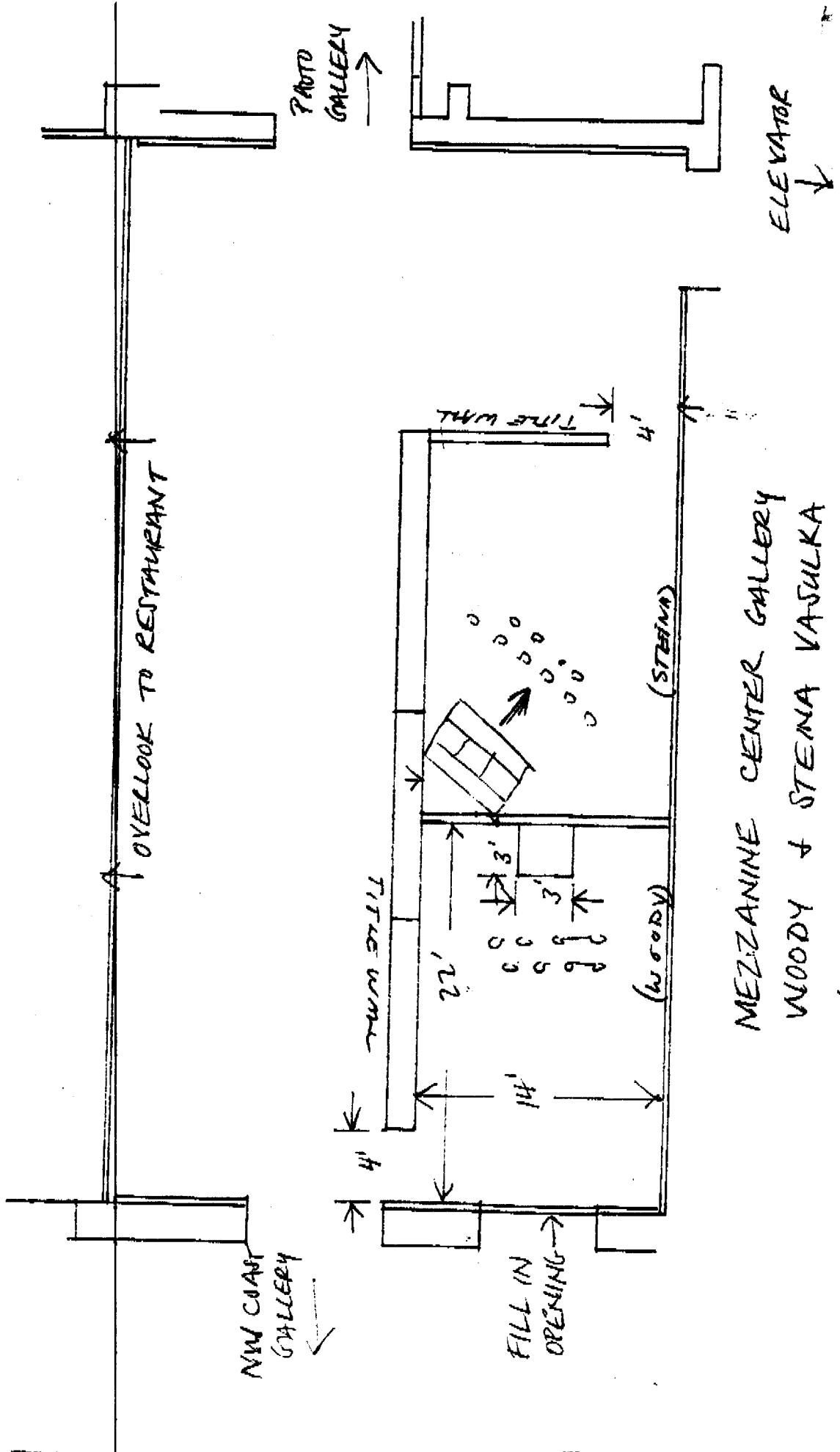
Deborah C. Jordy  
Associate Curator  
Modern and Contemporary Art

enclosure

DCJ/jf

THE DENVER ART MUSEUM

100 West 14th Avenue Parkway  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
Telephone 303/640-2295



Denver Museum  
att: D. JORDI

12-30-91

LIST OF DINNER INVITEES

---

MR+MRS DON YANNALITO  
703 Dellwood Ave  
Boulder, Co. 80304

Virgil & Joanne Grillo  
921 Spruce St  
Boulder, Co. 80302

MR+MRS BOB COGGESHAW  
I'LL HAVE THE ADDRESS SHORTLY



A Mailing list for the opening  
Forthcoming.

best, Steven



FAX TRANSMITTAL

Date: 12-18-91  
 To: STENO VASVICA  
 Firm: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fax Number: 505. 473. 0614  
 From: DEBORAH JORDY  
 Department: M.L.C. DEPT.  
 Phone: 303-640-2252 Fax: 303) 640-5627  
 (Please call if you do not receive all pages)  
 Number of pages, including this sheet: 3

\*\*\*\*\*

~~STENO~~

Here is very rough floor plan  
of space for you & Woody.

Thanks  
Debbie

cc: Jay Hillman  
John Cameron





FAX TRANSMITTAL

Date: 12.23.91

To: WOODY & STENA VASULKA

Firm: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number: 505.473.4614

From: D. Inay

Department: M&E Dept

Phone: 303.646.2252 Fax: 303) 640-5627

(Please call if you do not receive all pages)

Number of pages, including this sheet: 3

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*Woody & Stena*

*I'd talk to you today,  
I will be in the office  
after 2:30 today*

*Best  
D*

Denver Art Museum

FAX 640 2030

Dione Vandertop, Curator  
Deborah Jordis, (303) 640-2252

(red photographs  
book returned)

NEA grant, no money found

Gene Youngblood ~ writing?

Budget \$ brochure.

The money 12,000 - combined fee & rental

Need 9 monitors (Have 7)

US & hardware

Shipping extra

Writing extra

Installation ..... Opens January 24 - March 22, 1991

Woody

~ Art of Memory, single channel

cube w/ sides

projected on 26 monitor

isolated w/ seats

+ photographs.

Sound

Stena

~ Tokyo Four, four channels.

26 min continuous

Woody -  
packing

Stena  
/ unpacking onto multiple

1) woody: width = same as the Mitsubishi CK 3502 R  
height = 3'5" 42"  
depth = deep enough for the VCR  
The pedestal should ~~have~~ a shelf open  
in the back with a shelf for the  
videotape recorder

2) NO

PHOTOS WILL BE FEDEXED wed.

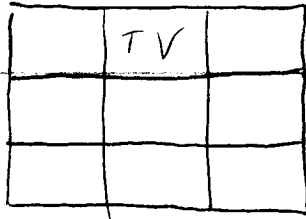
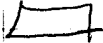
3) MAILING LIST FAXED Tuesday

4) We Need to be involved with the installation  
Fly out: 24 morning ~~to~~ <sup>Arr</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>noon</sup>  
Return: 25 evening (last flight)

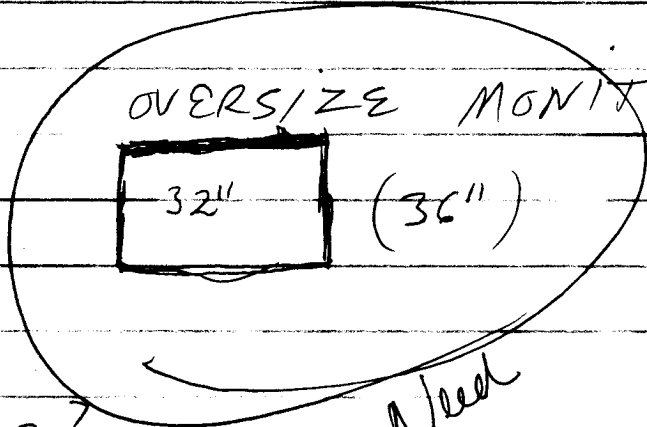
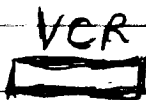
5) Steina will talk to John Emerson

6) Virgil Gilroy + spouse  
Don Yanowitz + "  
Bob Coggeshall + "

SYNCHRONIZER



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Denver Art Museum  
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\*\*Call for delivery schedule

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MUSEUM

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