ART MARRIAGE: Video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka invite visitors to stroll around images of Icelandic seascapes or participate in an interactive work about violence and the military-industrial complex in their separate installations at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions. F1

Woody Vasulka with his “Brotherhood, Table III”: “I want to evoke the dilemma of using a killing machine.”
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is it an art?" asked video artist Woody Vasulka rhetorically. Vasulka and his wife Steina have been leaders in the field of electronic art for 15 years.

Vasulka threw himself back in his chair at the Hopkins Center snack bar, where he had just finished a cup of coffee. He still held the empty white styrofoam cup, which looked small in his hands.

"We decided, if they would accept it, then we'd just do it," he said with characteristic bluntness. The debate on the subject became mute for them because they received so many offers to buy their video art tapes.

Vasulka and his wife have been artists-in-residence in the Department of Film Studies at Dartmouth College this fall. They split the job. Steina, taking the first half of the semester and Woody the second half.

Vasulka, who is a likely recruit for Santa Claus, except that his goatee looks blue, speaks intensely about his art, as if he never stops living or thinking about it. His conversation, like some of his tapes, is not dramatic.

Vasulka concluded, on the issue of the value of video art, that it is the computer art, the art created by numbers, that will really stir up the question of artistic merit that haunts so many artists these days. Video art, at least, has a heritage in filmmaking, he said, that machine-generated art does not.

The ever-experimental Vasulka plans to turn his attention to computer art in the future. The Vasulkas' video art has little to do with the world of video tapes. Their tapes are shown on two of the monitors. The tapes are shown simultaneously and are accompanied by eerie music that resembles wind passing through a large, vacant building.

The effect to the sound of plugging a two-tape recorder into the video terminal, and is accompanied by eerie music that resembles wind passing through a large, void.

The Vasulkas' video art is not dramatic. It is not as if the viewer is looking at a film and the only thing that is happening is that the movie is being projected on a screen. It is more like an art piece that is being projected on a screen.

The effect of The West is hypnotic, mesmerizing in the way that many of the Vasulkas' work is. The effect of The West is hypnotic, mesmerizing in the way that many of the Vasulkas' work is.

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This TV Couple Takes Medium Very Seriously

*See, "Make Your Own Television Show" in Sunday's Upstate.

BY BETTY LUTERBACK
D&C Staff Writer

Woody Vasulka, plunged an old lamp in front of a blue backdorp.

"Ah, that's our actor," he said training a television camera on it.

Steina Vasulka wheeled another small camera around and came to rest on the brooding face of a young girl across the room.

One-by-one they superimposed images on a television screen.

"It can go up to six cameras," Woody said, little beads of perspiration popping on his brow.

He punched buttons on one of many black boxes, and the picture on the television screen moved and wavered. The face of the girl was still risible - masklike. She moved slightly, and the girl across the room.

"Do you have a coax?"

"Yeah, could you give me that feedback?"

Steina punched more buttons and sound waves are transmitted into sine waves on the screen. A low pulsing sound becomes a hum and evolves into a high pitched tone. It sounds like a television set that has gone on the blink.

Things are obviously building up to a climax when somebody comes in with pizzas and soda, and they all stop.

"We've been doing this for four years," Woody said, collapsing on a couch and dipping into the pizza. "I took us about three years to find out what the hell we were doing."

"The Vasulkas make electronic pictures and they are visiting Rochester to demonstrate this new art form. Yesterday they conducted a workshop at Portable Channel on Prince Street. Today they will produce, "The Electronic Image," to be shown on Channel 24's Homemade TV series at 10:30 tonight.

"We will show our ingredients, put them together in a recipe, then cook a while," Woody promised when asked what tonight's show is about.

Comparing their work to cooking goes back to the Vasulkas first efforts in experimental video. They founded "The Kitchen," an electronic theater in New York City.

WOODY VASULKA

Please turn page

TV COUPLE

From 1C

"There was no stage for such a scene," Woody said. "It provided an electronic stage."

They use cameras, oscillators, frequencies and timing to create their abstract art.

"It is a development in time," Woody explained. "We start with a simple object and build up a collage. We're trying to find the behavior patterns but we're only in the primitive ages."

The Vasulkas feel the audience reacts to the images first by trying to identify them. That is the "real" sequence, then comes the "dream" sequence of remembered images, and that is followed by the "hallucination" sequence.

"Sometimes people get names on our pieces," Woody said. "We never do - except as a joke."

Steina was born in Iceland, studied violin at the music school in Reykjavik and the Conservatory of Music in Prague. He played violin in the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra and reared in New York City.

Woody was born in Czechoslovakia, has a background in engineering and studied at the Film Academy in Prague. He produced short films for movie theaters in Czechoslovakia on "very mixed" subjects. He recalled that he did a film on alcoholism, one on changes of the suburbs, a travelogue on skiing.

"Television on Czechoslovakia was government-owned and everything had a political flavor," Woody said. "Here it was so different. It seemed so free."

"Of course, we had no commercials," he added. "I learned English from watching commercials here. The money they have presents the opportunity to provide the strongest message - a one-to-one confrontation with the viewer."

Woody hedges when asked if his work in television evolved to his interest in video art.

"Why don't you say your documentaries have nothing to do with whatever you're doing now?" Steina said finally.

"This work represents a revolution, not an evolution," he agreed.

Steina often works with the visuals and Woody with the soundtracks but they stress they are a team - trying to relate audio and video.

In the summer of 1972, the Vasulkas were artists in residence at the National Center for Experiments in Television in San Francisco. Before joining Media Studios, Inc. in Buffalo last fall, they were artists in residence at WNET's experimental laboratory in New York City.

"We're now working on tool development," Woody said.

"We'd like to put all these big boxes into little boxes. We don't believe in big studios and massive equipment. Everybody should have the tools and they should have them in their homes."

"Television means broadcasting but it's not going to be that way," he went on. "Television is 40 or 60 years old, already an old invention."

The Vasulkas envision a time when your television set will be older and the very walls of your home can be financed by three dimensional electronic images.

"People from Portable Channel workshops, students from the University of Rochester and St. John Fisher College commenced to arrive, curious to learn something about this new form."

"The Vasulkas drifted back to their cameras and boxes - becoming immersed in their myriad of buttons."