Art must never be anything other than fantastic or it is not art.
—Raoul Hausmann

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of curator JoAnn Hanley, the new Hollywood LACE has solidified its credibility in Hollywood by exhibiting the American premier of video installations by Steina and Woody Vasulka. They do not disappoint. Surrounded by a steady white noise in a large dark space, the two installations distinguish themselves with their efficiency of conceptual means. There is a simpering presence about the work that has something to do with the way in which it focuses upon its subject and then sticks with it, allowing all attendant issues and questions to emerge as tangents to visual specificity.

This also is an extremely mature project tempered with a depth of knowledge and instinct about what works and what doesn't work in the incipient realm of manipulated experimental video. Having used video for more than a decade before it entered consumer culture, the Vasulkas are pioneers from the medium's nascent period. They have seen video emerge from its position as a limited narrative trapped in a small box, into a fully realized projected environment capable of producing a single-minded interrogation into the predicaments of culture at the close of the century.

Woody grew up in Prague, playing in the refuse of World War II. By that time, however, the horrific image of a mutant machine-man conceived by Berlin Dada already was several decades old, and the prescient threat of the war machine had been reiterated in a conflict more devastating than Dada players Raoul Hausmann or Hannah Höch could have imagined. Woody's piece at LACE centers around the Table, an engineered variant of a device previously used at Los Alamos for the navigation of bombs. In its mid-twentieth century clumsiness, it has the look of a mechanical contraption. On six monitors and still screens, images of war and industry rush out of a moving vanishing point which serves as a metaphorical time line that seems to move backward and forward simultaneously.

This image medusa may be modulated by speaking into a microphone or tapping an electronic drum, but "interaction" with the video is inconsequential. The piece speaks more clearly when left to its own devices. This is the fin de siècle