

A list of installations by Woody and Steina Vasulka:

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INSTALLATIONS & MATRIXES

Pyroglyphs _ 1994

Videotaped in a blacksmith Tom Joyces' shop in Santa Fe, Pyroglyphs is a two-channel installation where 12 monitors are arranged in a circle on the floor facing up at a 45 degree angle. The viewer stands outside this circle looking in. The initial inspiration for Pyroglyphs was the ancient art of blacksmithing, but soon became a musical treatise of hammering and welding, blowtorches and metal saws.

Pyroglyphs _ 1994

Last year I spent a few hours with blacksmith Tom Joyce taping the process of building an iron gate. I found iron gates a little too concrete, so I closed in on the intense and violent nature of materials being manipulated by fire. Those images and the sounds they made in turn inspired Tom to torch wood, paper liquids and metal specifically for the camera. The images are often slowed down, backwards or upside down.

Borealis _ 1993

"Steina's means are simple. She takes stunningly beautiful yet turbulent clips of nature in her native Iceland, en-larges them, then turns them on end, literally and figura-tively, so that they may be experienced as living abstract-ions on a scale equal to that of the human body. The effect is to tear them from their entrenchment in the cliché so they may be perceived free from the drag of representational history. Nature, having somehow survived the twentieth century onslaught of archaic industrial insults, speaks in the only way it can, through stormy electronic images made by an

artist with roots both in urban culture and in a remote land still precariously preserved in ice." _ Lane Barden

Tokyo Four _ 1991

"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, each functioning like a voice 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 audio-visual equivalent of a string quartet. In one compositional strategy, Steina begins by assembling a long single channel segment which represents the 'melody,' or what she calls the 'ground track.' Sometimes one screen is the melody and the others are accompaniment, then another screen takes the lead. A musical syntax emerges from this visual point/counterpoint organized around duration, interval, rhythm, repetition, and series. Tokyo Four is organized around categories of imagery: Shinto priests meticulously grooming their Zen garden on New Year's Eve; train conductors monitoring rush hour crowds; 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 to not forget their children; a segment 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.... Her compositional devices include flipping or reversing an image and playing it at imperceptibly different speeds on different screens, which gradually all synchronize at the same speed. These strategies are especially effective in the final movement when the female dancer is bowing. The Lehar's waltz the dancers use would be banal without the manipulations of Steina's spectacular visual

matrix, which transforms it into something at once exotic and poignant." _ Gene Youngblood

Ptolemy _ 1990

"In Ptolemy, Steina circles inside a space, delineating its boundaries with a mechanized choreography of camera movement. This is a world of circular movements, a vertiginous dance of machine and ordinary objects. The installation of Ptolemy, a four-channel piece in a multi-monitor matrix, further compounds the action; a disjunctive world circles to sudden but inevitable conjunctions. Light and shadow, reflections in a mirror ball and the camera lens itself trace an optical trajectory to a sound track of machine music. This installation premiered at Ars Electronica (Linz, Austria) in 1990." _ Woody Vasulka

Vocalizations _ 1990 (with Joan La Barbara)

"Vocalizations comes from a series of live performances for video images and voice. Vocalist Joan La Barbara's voice patterns are visualized here as video and provide an active syntactic element, combining a foreground/background of moving video images. Additional strategies are brought into this process including forward/reverse motion and speed changes in tape transport and digital sound processing. The final work plays together on four separate video channels." _ Woody Vasulka.

"There is an integration of sound and image in which the singing voice of Joan La Barbara produces energetic permutations in a grid of lines reminiscent of the musical staff of traditional music notation, forming a window onto images of a moving landscape. The rifts, chants and scat singing of La Barbara's voice become a visual dance in this electronic scape." _ Marita Sturken.

Geomania _ 1986

Geomania is a continuous two-channel sound and video environment presented on a circle of monitors. Site recorded images and sounds are electronically layered so that the North Atlantic surf washes through Arches National Park, and a bubbling Icelandic hot spring percolates through the desert clouds - a sensuous display of electronically generated color and texture. There are many paradoxes in this piece, not only the paradox between free-form image gathering and very rigorous presentation requirements, and the paradox between the land and the sea, but the real obvious one between an emphasis on technology and romantic beauty. In a way, this work seems to be a sweet autobiographical romance." _ MaLin Wilson

"To me, living in the 20th century, nature not altered by man is romantic. Landscape can never be ugly. I have spent a lot of time thinking about what is beautiful art and what is ugly art, and why people engineer certain ugliness into their images, often very successfully. If you are working with the landscape you basically eliminate ugliness, which is, in a certain way, intimidating.... I moved to Santa Fe in 1980 from Buffalo, New York because I wanted to experience what it is to live in the beauty. I did not want to think that it was going to affect my images as much as it did. For

the first two years I resisted it. First of all because the beauty of the West is too seductive, and secondly, I did not feel up to it. I mean, are you going to take on God?" _ Steina

"In Geomania, images wash through the dry desert in waves, the steam and gases of the volatile Icelandic landscape and viscous lava rock unfold on the screen. Steina sets up dichotomies and then dismisses them. One is encouraged to see the global interplay of the earth. The ancient land of the Southwest represents the accumulated time of the earth—a slowly eroding land, etched with the refuse of time; the bubbling energy of the Icelandic terrain is the formation of solid from liquid, the birth of the land from sea and the beginning of the earth...both are fused to present the earth as a regenerating force, as a living organism. Here, the landscape is not rooted in gravity, it is amorphous, malleable, and changeable. Embedded with layers of geological time, it is simultaneously death and birth; it transcends time." _ Marita Sturken

The West _ 1983

(audio by Woody Vasulka)

"The West is a two-channel, multi-monitor study (on a 30 minute cycle) of the marking of the landscape of the American Southwest. This work traces the efforts of humankind to alter and map the land, from the ancient cliff dwellings of the Anasazi Indians to the more recent Very Large Array (VLA) radio-telescope systems that eerily rotate toward the sky. The desert landscape, in which human imprints become etched into the earth for eternity, is woven into complex movement across multiple screens and symbolizes the spectrum of human technologies. For Steina, history is inscribed not in fragments of archival footage but within nature; it is not the

history of human beings, but the history of the land, of geological processes, of fire, water, and earth." _ Marita Sturken

"The West revels in the vastness of the western spaces, the primeval quality of the landscape and ancient architecture, the rich colors of the earth and sky, and the all-encompassing light and warmth of the sun. The complex layering of spaces and the electronic manipulation of image, color and form so central in Steina's earlier work is still an important aspect of this installation. But The West is emphatically a tribute to the grandeur of nature." _ William D. Judson

"Metaphors are engaged in The West that do not simply rest on obvious or singular interpretations. Surely one could read it as a poetic indictment of the contemporary reconstruction of this space for industrial and military purposes, or conversely, as a fascination with the forms that obliterate such a reading by an equally poetic vision of both." _ Maureen Turim and Scott Nygren

Machine Vision _ 1976

"Machine Vision is a series of installations with a mirror sphere, two cameras and two monitors, signifying the awareness of an intelligent, yet not human vision. Machine Vision does not involve video tape, but rather uses real-time space surveillance. My Machine Vision installations are performing systems, they occur in the studio, out in the landscape, or in an exhibition. The act of seeing, the image source and the kinetic resources come from the installation itself, choreographed and programmed by the cyclical nature of its mechanized performance." _ Steina

"Machine Vision is a group of videotapes and installations concerned with creating a camera view that moves beyond the restrictions of the human eye. One of the first works of Steina's Machine Vision project, and central to it, Allvision is a rotating spherical device that mediates the viewer's experience of the viewing space. Steina's concept of "allvision" involves exploring a way of seeing that is an all-encompassing, machine-derived vision. In Allvision, the all-seeing mirror sphere transcends spatial limits such as up/down, and inner/outer by situating the viewer within abstract electronic space. Allvision restructures the space of a room so that the viewer's position within that space is always mediated through the machine. Through the reflective sphere, the cameras scan the space and re-map it. The image of the viewer entering the space of the installation is thus transposed via the mirrored sphere into the abstract image space of the monitors, a space in which they are seen in a rotating cycle by the camera mechanism." _ Marita Sturken