

November 6

Steina Vasulka in Person

Adventures in multitrack video composing

Steina was born Steinunn Briem Bjarnadottir in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1940. She studied violin and music theory and in 1959 attended the State Music Conservatory in Prague. Woody and Steina married in Prague in 1964, and shortly thereafter she joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. After moving to the United States in 1965 the Vasulkas began working with video in 1969. In 1971, with Andres Mannik, they founded The Kitchen, an electronic media theater. Since 1980 they have lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The exhibition of works originally in multiscreen video, an artform Steina pioneered a quarter of a century ago, is informed by her attraction to the fevered landscape, her fascination with the fearsome majesty of fire and water.

For Steina, a concert violinist, the images and sounds of a multiscreen composition are equivalent to musical polyphony, functioning like voices and instruments in an ensemble. The multiscreen works are audiovisual equivalents of the trio, the quartet, the sextet. Steina proceeds as would a composer, playing on the visual equivalents of timbre, texture and tone. Her compositional strategies include recording scenes with her camera upside down, slowing their motion, reversing their direction, flipping them right-left, or combinations of these possibilities.

Pyroglyphs (1995) was recorded at the Santa Fe foundry of metalsmith Tom Joyce, with whom Steina shares "a fascination with fire—as phenomenon and as a medium that transforms other materials. Tom and I understand fire in an alchemical way," she told me, "as a medium of transmutation."

Steina has produced many video waterscapes, and **Borealis** (1994), which means "northern," is one of the most spectacular. Steina defamiliarizes the coastlines and rivers of Iceland through upside-down closeups that are slowed, reversed, flipped, and displayed on upended screens.



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Allvision (1974), reflects Steina's interest in robotics, or what she calls Machine Vision. Cameras are mounted on opposite ends of a rotating arm, focused on a mirrored sphere between them. Nearby monitors display what the cameras see. The sphere reflects circumambient space while each camera surveys a nearly 180-degree field of view.

The images in **Matrix** drift horizontally, appearing to enter and exit the frames of adjacent monitors arranged in an arch, as though the images are independent of the display devices. This illusion is achieved by altering the built-in control frequency that usually prevents a TV picture from "rolling" horizontally.

Notes written by Gene Youngblood

November 20

In Praise of Light

Star Garden, Stan Brakhage, 1974, color/silent, 22 min., 16mm

The "star," as it is singular, is the sun; and it is metaphored, at the beginning of this film, by the projector anyone uses to show forth. Then the imaginary sun begins its course throughout whatever darkened room this film is seen within. At "high noon" (of the narrative) it can be imagined as if in back of the screen, and then to shift its imagined light source gradually back through aftertones and imaginings of the "stars" of the film till it achieves a one-to-one relationship with the moon again. This "sun" of the mind's eye of every view does not necessarily correspond with the off-screen "pictured sun" of the film; but anyone who plays this game of illumination will surely see the film in its most completely conscious light. Otherwise, it simply depicts (as Brancusi put it) "One of those days I would not trade for anything under heaven."

Imaginary Light, Andrew Noren, black & white, sound, 31 min., 16mm

Imaginary Light is a "documentary" (aren't they all): my backyard Buddha-impersonation, watching "it" flow...light, both wave and particle, alive and moving, making shadow, and therefore, time. The "trees" and "house," and the "water" behind them, impersonate themselves, actors all, documented by my own impersonation...laborious, frame by frame, by hand.

The sound is the striking of the hallway clock, seen mid-picture, transformed into dirge and then reverse of dirge.

Re: title...we see by imagining that we see, and as a result, we dream of "time."

Lao Tse: "This is called 'practicing eternity.'"

December 4

Absolut Animation

Altair, Lewis Klahr, 1994, 8 min., 16mm

"**Altair** offers a cutout animation version of color noir. The images were culled from six late 40's issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and set to an almost 4 minute section of Stravinsky's *Firebird* (looped twice) to create a sinister, perfumed world. As in my 1988 visit to this genre *In the Month of Crickets* the narrative is highly smudged leaving legible only the larger signposts of the female details of the woman's battle with large, malevolent societal forces and her descent into an alcoholic swoon. However, I feel it is important to add that what interested me in making this film was very little of what is described above but instead a fascination with the color blue and some intangible association it has for me with California and the later 1940's." — statement by Lewis Klahr

The Red Book by Janie Geiser, 1994, color, sound, 11 min., 16mm

Sound Design by Beo Morales

The Red Book is an elliptical, pictographic 16mm film using flat, painted figures and collage elements in both two- and three-dimensional settings to explore the realms of memory, language, and identity from the point of view of a woman who has lost her memory.

The Pharaoh's Belt, Lewis Klahr, 1994, 43 min, 16mm

"In his most masterful film to date, Lewis Klahr provides a lesson in modern hieroglyphics, assembling collages of contemporary demons and divinities in the guise of advertising images culled from a consumer culture's larger-than-life presentation of its products and the ecstasies they offer. These hyperbolic presences with their radiant colors and alternate promises and pitfalls provide the landscape for a childhood quest that teeters between nightmare and promised land, as Klahr's characters negotiate a labor of extrication from the morass of Betty Crocker chocolate icing, formica kitchens and parental phantoms toward a mastery of the imagination and the attaining of true love." — Tom Gunning

Please note:

The Stan Brakhage Film
Forum will resume on
Sunday nights at 7:30pm in
Fine Arts N141 beginning
January 7, 1996.