

Interiors: A Review of Amer. Landsc. Video by Margaret Morse

in
Video
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was restrained within any one screen but high in contrast between screens; for instance, strong verticals on rhyming screens contrasted with strong horizontals on screens above and below them. The music (by Earl Howard) was evocative of the scenes on video—an iceberg, an abandoned mansion, a mountain lake—without matching them.

Lucier's valley of monitors conveys an ending. In this installation space, the viewer is invited to occupy a seat across from a perspectival view of a unified and mastered world, in the garden layout which developed during the Renaissance. Now that perspective is shown to be broken into multiple images which have lost their presence—ghosts condemned to memory. There was a sense of finality at every level of the installation: The rhyme scheme of the monitors offered closure at a poetic level. The monitor images also emphasized their pastness in two ways: peaceful images of the natural world were "busted through" by bulldozers and trains which expanded algorithmically to take over the whole frame. Furthermore, each scene was eventually enclosed in a computer graphic gold-leaf frame restating the referent of the image framed within a frame (within a frame within a frame) as a certain kind of commodity and an art object, not as nature per se.

What seems miraculous is less a view of nature in sublime repose than that these images of the dead could have been captured on video. The garden itself is wholly interior and no longer a bridge to the uncultivated world. *Wilderness* is an elegy to the American landscape.

5) Frank Gillette's *Aransas*, an older work than the others, addresses the different issues of a recent period nonetheless removed from our own. Gillette's piece admirably combines an interest in the variability and beauty of the land with an abstract structuralist aesthetics. The installation space is empty except for an arrangement of monitors on pedestals, one that could perhaps have influenced Rita Myer's video configuration. That is, the visitor must face outward and turn around in a circle in order to eventually see all six monitors with six different channels. The monitors are arranged in ones and twos at the four points of the compass. A varied landscape is presented in many configurations over the forty-five minute cycle, from close-ups to extreme long shots. Water could lap in one direction while two exquisitely contrasting blues (a cloudy landscape, a plant) were displayed next to each other in another.

6) Steina Vasulka's *The West* is listed in the visitor's guide as having 16 monitors, but at SFMOMA there were 22, stacked in two rows of eleven. The two channels were distributed in different alternations above and below, creating a criss-cross pattern of rhymes:

a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b/a
b/a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b

This horizon of monitors was also curved in a bow around a bench. Such a massive display of change and repetition, along with a considerable amount of computer intervention in the video images tended to make whatever was on screen more an abstraction than a realistic landscape. One computer effect was the garish coloring by a paint system which substituted acid blues or oranges for part of an ancient Indian ruin or an eroded valley. Another was the laying of images over each other, either in dissolve fashion, or like a tiny insert. For example, one reduced view of a scene floated across another scene like a tiny cloud. All the overlays tended to move in contrasting directions in the two different channels, making a kind of dance of separation and convergence.

The first part of the 30-minute cycle consisted of these computer-produced abstracts, while the second part made use of images made with a motor-driven camera pointed directly at a spherical mirror, revealing the camera and imagery in front and behind the lens simultaneously. Computer effects were added even to these complex visual distortions; for instance, in a sequence involving a satellite dish on both channels, once directly, once in the spherical mirror, the dish in direct view was matted out to reappear in the spherical mirror view and a spherical landscape appeared in the now empty matte. The four channel-audio environment seemed electronically generated as well, so that one could say that this installation went the farthest toward producing an "electronic grove." The end result had no pretension to simulate the natural world, rather it marked our greatest distance from it.

However, in this display of pyrotechnics, the viewer remains physically passive, invited only to sit and construe the abstract patterns dancing across a bowed shape, perhaps while also enjoying the perversity of their creation out of the monocular perspectives of Renaissance space. For this reason, I think of this piece as somewhere between a massive kinetic painting and a video sculpture, rather than an installation.