



NEWS photo/SUSAN J. HINKLE

A scene from an art video produced by Woody Vasulka with camera help by Steina.

# Video lovingly sings of the quiet glory of western nature

By Dan Nather  
Athens NEWS Arts Writer

At the same time a travelogue and an homage to nature, Steina's "The West," a video piece in two-channel video and four-channel sound on 10 video monitors, opened in Seigfred Gallery Thursday.

Steina, a native of Iceland, studied violin and music theory in Prague before coming to America in 1965. She has been working in video since 1970, along with her husband, video artist Woody Vasulka. "The West" is her most recent work, built on audio tracks that Vasulka recorded in 1972. The 30-minute presentation utilizes two tapes shown on alternating monitors in a sort of glorified diptych.

"The West" differs from many of Steina's works in that it has grown and developed

more in terms of hardware than any other video work. Originally produced for three video monitors, it has since been shown on six monitors, but in order to better use the space in Seigfred Gallery, Steina used 10 monitors. "I wouldn't mind having a thousand," she said.

Steina's camera lingers lovingly and longfully on Western landscapes around her adopted home of Santa Fe, N.M. The Indian ruins, contrasted with the Very Large Array (VLA) radio telescope screen in two separate segments of the tape create a historical trace of the region without using words. The long pans of landscape that seem to be four-fifths sky, light shining through the trees, and the overlapping images shot in double exposure, some shown in a mirror sphere, comprise a mute tribute to the western United States.

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"I was trying in this work to depict nature—to sing of the glory of nature," Steina said, well aware of the medium's limitations. "There is no way that you could take this overwhelming beauty and (put) it into a little box successfully."

The long pans and lingering shots in "The West" were intended to make full use of the landscape. "I was very intimidated about us-

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—Steina

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ing any kind of manual movement," she said, "because it seemed to trivialize (the material)."

Steina says she drew very little inspiration from the huge, monolithic rumblings in the original audio tape entitled "The West." "All these images (in "The West") are very small and very long, and the sounds are as small and long," Steina said. "In a way, the images break the established law that image

has to have quick movement in order to keep you attention. I broke that rule, but I manage to keep most people's attention."

Steina credits her previous training in violin and music theory to her unique approach to video pieces like "The West." "Usually, visual material wants to go forward," she said. "In film and video making, you don't want to see the same image twice—you don't want repetition. It doesn't fit into the story (or) anything connected to visual thinking.

"But in music, everything is always repeated. If you think of any large form or small form, even a song, it is repeated in different texts. It is very common in music to take several themes and weave them together. I didn't have that in mind, but it works out in the retrospect."

The presentation of "The West" has gradually changed, but the quality of the presentation also changes from city to city. "It's always different," Steina said. "It also changes in quality. If you have Sony monitors, you get different picture quality than Panasonics or with Sharps. Every configuration gives you a slightly different show, but the tapes are the main event."