

# Gallery Hopping

By DEAN BALSAMO

The sense of poetry found in form played a large role in this week's exhibitions.

■ **Four Video Installations, Steina Vasulka, Center for Contemporary Arts, 291 E. Barcelona Road, through Feb. 24.**

Steina Vasulka is able to distance herself from autobiography, and the usual emotional ploys and expressions we tend to look for in art. Yet at the same time, this position allows her to uncover unsuspected layers of mystery and beauty, even in the most mundane or taken-for-granted activities.

Joseph Campbell says this has to do with the artist taking him/herself out of the limitations of time or re-hashing historical territory and into the demands of the present moment — the here and now. By analogy it's the point or circle rather than the line.

If you're tired of posturing masquerading as real art and artists, go see this show. Vasulka is a master because she creatively responds to life, not to the demands of the market place, art historians and curators.

Vasulka is working from her own responses to the material and situations at hand. *Pyroglyphs*, the collaboration with metalsmith Tom Joyce is an obvious example. Alchemical notions derived from using fire and other techniques to manipulate metal are ingrained in the video presentation itself. The imagery of transformation is further enhanced by the way Vasulka

introduces this nuance into the rhythm and pacing of the installation.

The viewer is taken into a fantastical realm through Vasulka's multi-screen, projected image approach with a processed soundtrack originating with Tom Joyce's work in the foundry.

This same economy of vision, where none of the artistic strengths of the material are wasted, also characterizes two other pieces, *Borealis* and *Drifts*. Architecture not only plays an important role in the hardware used to create these works, but also provides a metaphoric cast.

This is especially seen in *Drifts*, the most obviously autobiographical work, where elements from pieces over a 20-year period are shown in a bridge-like arrangement of monitors. The opening remarks about distance and perspective also are given impetus here.

Though apparently unrelated images are involved, attentive viewers will sense an underlying intimacy about the presentation.

■ **Recent Works, Michael Nakoneczny, Horwich LewAllen Gallery, 129 W. Palace, through Feb. 24.**

Although it's been several years since Santa Fe viewers have been treated to Michael Nakoneczny's intensely strange visual musings, it's safe to say he's lost none of his edge.

The mark-making is as raw as ever. Some viewers will call it juvenile. After all, it does conjure up the ballpoint pen scribbles of genitals that adolescent boys often do on their binders during class.

The analogy works up to a point. Nakoneczny does use this kind of energy to drive his work, but this impression quickly fades upon closer examination.

While it may look like Nakoneczny suffers from arrested development or is, at the very least, aesthetically challenged, serious viewers can feel there's a method to his apparent madness.

The fact is, Nakoneczny recontextualizes the energy we equate with this kind of drawing. He's not depicting schoolyard concerns, he's a mad anthropologist rifling the rubble heap of collective urban culture.

Forget about the painstaking removal the academic is trained to use. Nakoneczny is too busy throwing his discoveries out of the dig, stream-of-consciousness style.

Is it only an artistic ploy or does art and Nakoneczny's life really collide like this?

Who cares? It works. There's a feeling of an authentic, if skewed (and often funny) vision.

Look at the piece with Tylenol, Motrin IB and Advil combined with his rendering of a woodblock print taken from a book on Japanese art.

It's a strange vision. But isn't vision one of those qualities most of us long to see and feel in an artist's work? Yes, there's something manic about his vision, but it's hard to imagine him having trouble getting up each day. There's just too much for this contemporary scribe to record.

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# Visual Literary & Performing Arts

## STEINA VASULKA:

*Four Video Installations now through Feb. 24 Center for Contemporary Arts 291 E. Barcelona Rd.*

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cigarettes, booze, and crack. But I love riding the wild, late-night surf with that magic clicker clutched in my hand. The relentless waves of audio-visual juxtapositions are more fun than the programs I supposedly am watching. (As Marshall McLuhan always said, the commercials are the real show. And if you didn't know that all you had to do was watch the Super Bowl football game.) Television owes its debt to surreality and surrealism almost more than to the pop aesthetic. It creates an alternate and parallel reality, dependent on memory, desire, coincidence, and its relation to the dream. Who doesn't know the television as the ultimate surreality machine as they late-night channel surf? The random-access blur of images, as noted above, makes for unbeatable, brilliant, absurd nonsense.

Just as they immediately warmed to the still camera and the cinema, artists have used videos since they became available. "Video art" is a knotty conundrum, an oxymoron nearly, that has yet to be resolved and has been described by one critic as having a reputation as "clumsy, narcissistic, and obscure." The medium probably finally was given its imprimatur as a serious, legitimate artistic expression when the Korean-born New York City resident Nam June Paik had a retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 1982.

Still, the results of cam-corder art always have been inconsistent. Put me in an art gallery or museum with television monitors and without that remote in my hand and I start to get edgy. Not so with the quartet of video installations by Steina Vasulka currently on view at Santa Fe's Center for Contemporary Arts. For the past 25 years, Steina, often in collaboration with her husband Woody Vasulka, has created a great many video presentations and conducted numerous investigations into the web of electronic audio-visuals. These are the first works by either Vasulka that I have seen, though they live and work in Santa Fe and I've heard of them and their work for years. As is often the case with video art,

Tom Joyce and playing on six 4-by-8-foot screens, with mirrors split into a dozen competing and complementary images with six-track soundtrack amplified on six speakers, and "Borrealis," black-and-white closeups of a turbulent sea playing in reverse on eight stacked screens.

As Gene Youngblood, author, film and videophile, and professor of moving image arts at the College of Santa Fe,

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notes in his excellent essay that accompanies Ms. Vassulka's work here: "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 in this exhibition . . . are audiovisual equivalents of the trio, the quartet, the sextet . . . image and sound is edited to integrate with the others in an audiovisual point/ counterpoint organized around duration, interval, rhythm, repetition, and series."

**I**n the old days, Home was where the Heart was. Odysseus, Homer's (no pun intended) hero, couldn't wait to get back. And there was no place like it for Dorothy. (She got that right, but for all the wrong reasons.) In the modern experience, Home was where the Hurt was. Twain's Tom Sawyer couldn't get away fast enough, and Thomas Wolfe's anti-hero could never go back there again, even if he'd wanted to.

It is this modern, less cheery, dysfunctional (excuse the expression) aspect of the psychological and emotional terrain around Home that Nancy Sutor and Richard Hooker survey in their two-person exhibit at Eidolon, Home: The

hint of dread even in a tame, supposedly charming domestic scene such as "Kitchen with Mango and Peaches," despite the delightful red Chile Christmas lights that trim the border of the window above the sink. "Shadow Room is straight out of film-noir Raymond Chandler. A male and female silhouette are cast upon the seedy yellow light coming through lace curtains while a centrally placed vase of white flowers fights against the murky gloom. The murmuring of secrets that haunts all homes escapes out of the frame. (See the short story, "The Rocking-Horse Winner," by D.H. Lawrence.) In "Interior with Skeleton and Harlequin," death dances with farce precisely as they do in every home in the course of a day, and in "Fire and Water," the flood laps threateningly against the security of the blazing fire in the hearth.

Richard Hooker's evocations of home begin with a precise list of domestic and quasi-domestic activities — Eat, Sleep, Love, Create, etc. — that are given equivalent visual form by way of the repeated use of a pitched-roof black door painted on the wall and appropriate, or inappropriate, props included. The visual poetics are apt, cutting and emotionally charged, never sentimental. "Sleep," for instance, presents three pillows in scorched pillowcases bolted and baling-wired to the black silhouette of the looming door/house. Nights can be like that. "Create" is, again, the stark black door, but with a purple crystal doorknob. It's just waiting to be opened — the trick is picking the lock. His tableau, "The Topography of Home" — all-black chairs, end table, TV set with static black-and-white image around a multi-colored floor of smashed and shattered dishes, etc. — is terrifying and hilarious. We've all been there.

This is the best show so far at the newly opened, artist-run Eidolon. They seem to be hitting their stride, which is good news for interested art observers. ■

## **HOME: The Topography of Place**

*Richard Hooker,  
Nancy Sutor  
now through  
March 3  
Eidolon  
207 E. Palace Ave.*

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