

STEINA VASULKA

Bio:

Steina was born in Iceland and was trained in the violin and music theory. She started working in video with Woody Vasulka in 1969. In 1971, she and Woody founded The Kitchen, an electronic media theater in New York City. She has exhibited extensively nationally and abroad. Her video work is distributed by New York based Electronic Arts Intermix. She currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

"Violin Power" (videotape) 1970-78

"Opening with Steina's parodic performance of classical music, a sequence shot in 1970, the videotape presents her well known, macro view of herself lip-syncing The Beatles' song "Let It Be," a humorous homage to the power of rock music that predates more recent popular forms of lip-sync performance. Steina plays her "wired" violin through a series of electronic devices that directly alter the video signal by utilizing signal disruption, video keying, and a scan processor. The movement of her violin bow across the strings of the instrument disrupts and transposes the video image, causing the violin bow to appear to squiggle and snake into interlocking waveforms... The violin is thus a means through which electronic sound can be spatialized to create an image performance." (text by Marita Sturken from the "Machine Media" catalogue of the Vasulka exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1996.)

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Steina Vasulka: 1995-1997 Activities:

1995:

- May 14 Recipient of the Siemens Media Art Award, Karlsruhe,  
Sep 20 Midi Violin presentation at a concert with Nam June Paik, Kwangju, Korea  
Sep 20-? Installation, Kwangju biennale, Kwangju, Korea  
Dec 15-Jan 11 6 Installations with Woody at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome  
Dec 20-Feb 21 "Machine Vision" Installation, 3e Biennale de Lyon, France

1996:

- Jan 23 Midi Violin Presentation, "The Butterfly Effect" Conference, Budapest  
Feb 2-Mar 31 8 Installations with Woody, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Mar 96-Mar 97 A year appointment as Artistic co-director of STEIM, Amsterdam  
Apr - May Three Installations at the City Museum, Reykjavik  
May 2-10 "Pariah", Installation at Stroomgeist, Haarlem, Holland  
Jun 2-Sep 30 "Media Scapes", A group show, Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Jun 8 Midi Violin presentation at STEIM Concert, Synthese 96, Bourges  
Jun Midi Violin Demonstration, Ircam, Paris  
Jul 12-15 Midi Violin presentation at Homage to Nam June Paik, Darmstadt  
Aug 3-7 Midi Violin presentation at Flaherty Seminar, Aurora, New York  
Sep 1-4 ZKM International Video Art Award, Jury member, Baden Baden  
Sep 17-20 Midi Violin presentation at Digitale 96/Hochschule fur Media Kunst, Koeln  
Sep 25 Midi Violin presentation at BEC Studios, Bonn  
Oct 15-25 Museum of Fine Arts, Brno, 6 Installations  
Oct 16-Aug '97 "Dawn of the Magician", National Gallery, Prague  
Oct 18-Feb 3 8 Installations with Woody, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe  
Oct 25-26 Midi Violin presentation at "Total Museum" conference, Chicago Art Institute,  
Nov 8-30 "Tokyo - 4" installation at Montevideo, Amsterdam  
Nov 9-17 Midi Violin presentation at VideoBrazil Festival, Sao Paulo  
Nov 19-21 Speaker at "European Cultural Council Conference", Prague  
Dec 4-6 Three Days Guest Lecturer at AKI, Enschede, Holland  
Jan 23 National Gallery, Prague  
Jan 24 Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Bibliography:

Kwangju Biennale Catalog, Sam Shin Gak Publishing house, 93-40 Sang Su-dong, Ma Po-Ku, Seoul, Korea

Lyon Biennale Catalog, ??

El Palacio. The Magazine of the museum of New Mexico, Winter/Spring 1996-1997 (10 pages)  
Machine Media, Library of congress ICatalog Card Number: 95-71807, ISBN:01918471-35-4

Steina e Woody Vasulka: Video, Media e Nuove Immagini Nell'Arte Contemporanea,  
1995 Edizioni Fahrenheit 451, Campo de' Fiori 44, 00186 Roma

CD-ROM:

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3e biennale de lyon, Les publications de la Biennale

STEINA VASULKA

(Installation)  
"Borealis"

Critic Gene Youngblood describes Steina Vasulka's "Borealis" (a 10 minute repeating cycle) as "a multiscreen video, an artform Steina pioneered a quarter of a century ago, [which is] informed by her attraction to the fevered landscape [of her native Iceland] and her fascination with the fearsome majesty of fire and water."

"Borealis" meaning "northern" draws from Steina's childhood memories of Icelandic rivers, lava flows, galciers, sulphuric geysers and the Aurora Borealis which haunted the skies above her family house. Youngblood continues: "Steina defamiliarizes the coastlines and rivers of Iceland through upside-down closeups that are slowed, reversed, flipped and displayed on up-ended screens... Steina proceeds as would a composer, playing on the visual equivalents of timbre, texture and tone."

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STEINA

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Steina (born in Iceland 1940) attended the Music Conservatory in Prague from 1959 to 1963, and joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra in 1964. She came to the United States the following year and has been a seminal force in the development of the electronic arts since 1970, both as co-founder of "The Kitchen", a major exhibition center in New York City, and as a continuing explorer of the possibilities for the generation and manipulation of the electronic image through a broad range of technological tools and aesthetic concerns. Her tapes have been exhibited and broadcast extensively in The States and Europe, and in 1978 she had an exhibit "Machine Vision" at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1976 and has received various other grants.

Since moving to Santa Fe New Mexico in 1980, she has produced series of Video Tapes relating to the land, and an installation titled "The West."

# Steina

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Steina was born in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1940. She studied violin and music theory, and in 1959 received a scholarship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture to attend 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 she worked in New York City as a freelance musician. She began working with video in 1969, and since then her various tapes and installations have been exhibited in USA, Europe and Asia. Although her main thrust is in creating Video Tapes and Installations she has recently become involved in interactive performance in public places, playing a digitally adapted violin to move video images displayed on large video projectors.

In 1971 she co-founded The Kitchen, an Electronic Media Theater in New York. Steina has been an artist-in-residence at the National Center for Experiments in Television, at KQED in San Francisco, and at WNET/Thirteen in New York. In 1988 she was an artist-in-residence in Tokyo on a U.S./Japan Friendship Committee grant. She has received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute and the New Mexico Arts Division. She received the Maya Deren Award in 1992 and the Siemens Media Art Prize in 1995. In 1993 she co-curated with Woody the exhibition and catalogue, *Eigenwelt der Apparatewelt* (Pioneers of Electronic Art) for Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria. In 1996 she served as the artistic co-director and software collaborator at STEIM (Studio for Electronic Instrumental Music) in Amsterdam. In 1996 Steina and Woody showed eight new media installations at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, an exhibition repeated in Santa Fe a few months later. Her latest installation, titled *Orka* was featured in the Icelandic Pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale.

Since 1980 the Vasulkas live in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Steina Vasulka, born and raised in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1940, began a music career in her youth as a concert violinist, studying harmony and music theory. In 1959, her musical studies brought her to Czechoslovakia where she met and married Woody Vasulka, an industrial engineer as well as jazz critic, photographer, and filmmaker. With Steina's background in music (with its mathematical abstractions) and Woody's interest in technology, it's not surprising that soon their future careers would lead them toward the exploration of video technology.

In 1965 Steina moved to New York City where she made a living as a freelance musician. In 1969, she was introduced to video for the first time. She describes this early experience:

"We would come in and just sit for hours and watch feedbacks--it's a self-made process...Then we started to figure out how to interfere with it, how to control it, what to do to change it--to find out the laws, if there were any--why it happened in the first place, what was the reason for it, and why the hell I was staring at it."

In 1970, with a modest purchase of a portapac unit, sound synthesizer and monitors, the Vasulkas began creating videotapes of performances--taping small gatherings of New York artists or larger events such as the concerts of Jethro Tull and Jimi Hendrix. They formed a group in 1971 called "Perception" after receiving a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, through Electronic Arts Intermix. The grant funded the now-famous exhibition center--The Kitchen. Steina's development as a video artist moved into a new realm in the 1970's. No longer interested in framing an object in front of the camera as in film and traditional television, Vasulka's interest began to develop in the manipulation of what she calls "machine vision" in which "all camera movements are pre-programmed mechanically and optically and executed without further intervention." Creating a form of television that is far different from what most television viewers expect, Vasulka uses computers and electronic synthesizers not as a means to an end but as part of the end product itself. Her videotapes and installations created in real time, fuse art and technology.

In 1973, the Vasulkas were invited to work at the WNET-TV Lab in New York and then followed that experience with a move to the Center for Media Study, SUNY, in Buffalo. In 1975, her work began to explore space and time. She explains:

"There are two ways to induce movement to a still image; to move the camera or to have something move in front of the camera. By mounting a camera on a motor driven device (a car, a turntable), I could make timeless cyclical programs of zooms and turns."

In 1978, she exhibited a major work MACHINE VISION at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. MACHINE VISION is a collection of video installations grouped around a center piece "Allvision," an installation with a mirror sphere, two cameras and two monitors, "signifying the awareness of an intelligent, yet not human vision."

The development of her video exploration continues to investigate new realms. Both Vasulkas take on projects which they feel can teach them more about technology and the creative process. Their world of video art now includes computers and custom-designed equipment which serve their very specialized needs. Steina Vasulka's work has been acclaimed internationally and she has been the recipient of numerous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the New Mexico Arts Division. In 1976, she was a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Steina was born Steinunn Briem Bjarnadottir in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1940. She studied violin and music theory, and in 1959 she received a scholarship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture to attend the music conservatory in Prague. In 1964, she joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra.

Woody Vasulka was born Bohuslav Peter Vasulka in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1937. He studied metal technology and hydraulic mechanics at the School of Industrial Engineering, Brno, where he received a baccalaureate degree in 1956. Later, he attended the Academy of Performing Arts, Faculty of Film and Television, in Prague, where he directed and produced several short films.

The Vasulkas met in Prague in the early 1960s, married, and moved to New York City in 1965. There, Steina worked as a free-lance musician and Woody as a multiscreen film editor, experimenting with electronic sounds, stroboscopic lights, and, by 1969, with video. In 1971, with Andres Mannik, they founded The Kitchen, a media arts theater. The same year, Steina and Woody established the first annual video festival at The Kitchen, and they collaborated with David Bienstock on organizing *A Special Videotape Show* at the Whitney Museum.

In these early years, Steina and Woody collaborated extensively on investigations into the electronic nature of video and sound, and on producing documentaries about theater, dance, and music, with a special fascination for the New York underground scene.

In 1974, the Vasulkas moved to Buffalo, where they joined the faculty of the Center for Media Study at the State University of New York. At this point, their interests diverged: Woody turned his attention to the Rutt/Etra Scan Processor, while Steina experimented with the camera as an autonomous imaging instrument in what would become the "Machine Vision" series. In 1976, working first with Don MacArthur and then with Jeffrey Schier, Woody began to build the Digital Image Articulator. This device introduced him to the principles of digital imaging.

Since 1980, the Vasulkas have lived and worked in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Steina has continued her work in video, media performance, and video installation, and Woody has continued to produce work in video, three-dimensional computer graphics, and media constructions. In 1992, the Vasulkas organized *Eigenwelt der Apparate-Welt: Pioneers of Electronic Art*, an exhibition of early electronic tools for Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria, with a laserdisc interactive catalogue.

The Vasulkas have been artists-in-residence at the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET), at KQED in San Francisco, and at WNET/Thirteen in New York. Individually and collectively, they have received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the New Mexico Arts Division. Both received the American Film Institute Maya Deren Award in 1992 and the Siemens Media Art Prize in 1995. In 1988, Steina was an artist-in-residence in Tokyo on a U.S./Japan Friendship Committee grant. In 1993, Woody received a Soros Foundation fellowship to lecture and present work throughout Eastern Europe.

Steina has taught at the Academy for Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria, the Institute for New Media at the Staedelschule, Frankfurt, Germany, and the College of Arts and Crafts, Reykjavik, Iceland. Since 1993, Woody has been a visiting professor at the Faculty of Art, Polytechnic Institute, Brno, Czechoslovakia.