



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A fully illustrated catalogue of the exhibition containing essays by William T. Judson, Barbara Novak, David A. Ross and John B. Hanhardt, as well as biographic and bibliographic material on the artists, is available in the Museum bookshop.

Presentation of *American Landscape Video* in San Francisco is made possible with the full cooperation and assistance of The Carnegie Museum of Art. We are also thankful to artists Dara Birnbaum, Frank Gillette, Doug Hall, Mary Lucier, Rita Myers, Steina Vasulka, and Bill Viola for creating these compelling works of art; to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, and The Carnegie Museum of Art for lending video installations from their collections to the exhibition; and to the New England Foundation for the Arts, Cambridge, Massachusetts, for their cooperation and support of the exhibition.

The exhibition was initially funded by the Lannan Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. We are particularly grateful to the Lannan Foundation and Bonnie Clearwater, former Director of Art Programs, for their continued support of the exhibition in San Francisco; The Fleishhacker Foundation for their support to the Media Arts program; and the Modern Art Council of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Particular thanks are extended to Bill Judson, Curator of Film and Video at The Carnegie Museum of Art, for his initial conception and three-year devotion to this project; and to the staff of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: to Dr. John R. Lane, Director, whose encouragement and enthusiasm made this exhibition possible; to Graham W. J. Beal, Chief Curator; to Karin Victoria, Publications Coordinator, and Tracy Davis of the Design Department for assuring the successful production of this brochure; to Registrar Carol Rosset; to Peter Samis and Cam Sinclair of the Curatorial Department; and especially to Kent Roberts and the installation crew for resolving the complexities of each installation and reorganizing the exhibition for this presentation.

Robert R. Riley
Curator of Media Arts

Copyright © 1988 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102-4582

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a member-supported, privately funded museum receiving major grants from the California Arts Council and Grants for the Arts of the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund.

AMERICAN LANDSCAPE VIDEO

10 NOVEMBER - 1 JANUARY 1989

Rita Myers • Dara Birnbaum • Doug Hall • Mary Lucier

17 JANUARY - 19 FEBRUARY 1989

Frank Gillette • Steina Vasulka • Bill Viola

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

■ born in New Jersey, 1941;
lives and works in New York City

Aransas, 1978

6 monitors
¾" videotape, 6 channels,
sound, color
duration: approximately
45 minutes

4 pedestals, each approximately
4' high

Collection of the University
Art Museum, University of
California, Berkeley
Gift of Ann Williams Harithas,
Houston, Texas

FRANK GILLETTE

Named after the coastal region north of Corpus Christi, Texas, where the artist recorded the images and sounds for this installation, *Aransas* consists of six video monitors facing the center of the gallery, arranged singly or in pairs at the four points of the compass. The images on each monitor are distinct, presenting details or delineating the broader configurations of the terrain. Each record of the environment moves at a reflective, thoughtful tempo and the complete work comprises a carefully composed representation of landscape.

In the sixties, Gillette turned from abstract painting to video with a special interest in taxonomy and ecology. The artist saw ecology as a metaphor of psychological rather than physical survival, and taxonomy provided him a way of classifying objects and ideas by aesthetic rather than scientific association. *Aransas*, one of the first works to address issues of landscape in video installation, is a multi-channel contemplation invoking nature as the basis for reflection on the individual's place in the world and, at the same time, illustrates a geometric sensibility found in the structural art of the seventies. *Aransas* is a complex of signs electronically removed from the natural setting to stress that the natural sign is simple, the invented sign compound.

STEINA VASULKA

The West is an electronic landscape based on the American Southwest which plays both harmony and counterpoint to the rich colors and forms of the New Mexican mountains, desert, and architectural remnants. The semi-circular configuration of sixteen video monitors, stacked to emphasize horizon and overlapping movement, envelop the viewer with boundless vistas of western space.

Vasulka recorded the video images in *The West* with a motor driven camera pointed directly into a spherical mirror. This device allows the artist to record on videotape landscape imagery in front of and behind the lens simultaneously, creating a circular area of optically transformed space centered in the otherwise rectangular shape of the video monitor.

■ born in Reykjavik, Iceland,
1940; lives and works in Santa Fe,
New Mexico

The West, 1983

16 monitors
¾" videotape, 2 channels,
sound, color
instrumentation and production
assistance: Woody Vasulka
4-channel audio environment:
Woody Vasulka
duration: 30 minutes

Collection of the artist

The complete layering of space and the electronic manipulation of image characteristic of Vasulka's work is central to her tribute to the powerful landscape. The elegance and spatial complexities of the video medium are explored in Vasulka's installation structure and double panorama. *The West* is an electronic expression of mood and place, an eloquent resolution of image and form.

Produced by Programs in the Arts of the State University of New York for SUNY/The Arts on Television, with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

BILL VIOLA

■ born in New York, 1951;
lives and works in Long Beach,
California

Room for St. John of the Cross,
1983

1 monitor, 1 projector
¾" videotape, 2 channels,
sound, color and black
and white
reading: Francesc Torres

cubicle, table, water glass,
pitcher, earth

Collection of The Museum of
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
The El Paso Natural Gas
Company Fund for California Art

Room for St. John of the Cross combines two states of mind in a single work of art, one turbulent and one at peace. Viola's title refers to the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic and poet who was imprisoned by the Inquisition. During his incarceration, St. John (1542–91) wrote profoundly spiritual verse that envisioned soaring over confining walls and mountains during moments of ecstatic communion with God. The roaring wind and gyrating images of mountains in the darkened installation evoke not only St. John's anguish, but also the passion in his heart that sustained and inspired him. The cell in which St. John was held for nine months has been recreated to scale for this installation and contains furnishings and a serene view of a mountain in miniature on a small video monitor suggesting the peace the poet found within himself.

Viola's video landscape extends the artist's established concern for intense meditations achieved by the transformation and skillful manipulation of video recording processes, as well as symbolic relationships between form and content. The incantatory whisper of his ecstatic poems (read in Spanish), which speak of love, ecstasy, and passage through a dark night, reminds the viewer of the dichotomy between body and soul and refers to the triumph of the imagination.

Equipment donated by Polaroid Corporation.