

# THE VASULKAS

## INSTALLATIONS & MATRIXES

*It is at the rupture between the mechanical and the electronic that the importance of the Vasulka's work may best be positioned, posing crucial questions about the role of the machine in the creative process and how electronic space is redefining the way we perceive, specifically the way we experience space and time. In Steina's recent installations, landscape—and what it symbolizes about the passage of time and memory—is a persistent presence. These installations involve multiple monitors or multi-channel synchronous video matrixes displayed on 4 to 48 monitors.*

### TOKYO FOUR

Steina

1991

“No form of moving-image art comes as close to musical composition as multiscreen video, where the different channels of image and sound are equivalent to musical polyphony, each functioning like a voice in a musical ensemble. And no multiscreen work is as spectacularly musical as Steina's. She works as a composer would, playing on the visual equivalents of timbre, texture, and tone. *Tokyo Four* is the audiovisual equivalent of a string quartet. In one compositional strategy, Steina begins by assembling a long single channel segment which represents the “melody,” or what she calls the “ground track.” Sometimes one screen is the melody and the others are accompaniment, then another screen takes the lead. A musical syntax emerges from this visual point/counterpoint organized around duration, interval, rhythm, repetition, and series. *Tokyo Four* is organized around five categories of imagery: Shinto priests meticulously grooming their Zen garden on New Year's Eve; train conductors monitoring rush hour crowds, reminding passengers to watch their umbrellas and not to forget their children; elevator girls bringing a superfluous, but charming High Touch to the high tech world of the shopping malls; a segment about food, beginning with the vertiginous fisheye lens in a supermarket; and an emotionally charged meta-choreography of a dance troupe's performance and curtain call. . . . Her compositional devices include flipping or reversing an image and playing it at imperceptibly different speeds on different screens, which gradually all synchronize at the same speed. These strategies are especially effective in the final movement when the female dancer is bowing. The Strauss waltz the dancers use would be banal without the manipulations of Steina's spectacular visual matrix, which transforms it into something at once exotic and poignant.” — *Gene Youngblood*