

News from Santa Fe

by Susanna Carlisle

"Techne and Eros: Art and Science Laboratory"

Integrity, risk, and a striving for independence are the foundations upon which video and new media pioneers, Woody and Steina Vasulka, have built their art. In the early nineteen seventies they founded The Kitchen in New York with Andres Mannik to provide an unbiased, open stage for artists to present their work. The emphasis was on the electronic arts, but all genres were welcome. The Kitchen, according to Woody, "was a true emergent event in its time, specific to the manifestations of a generation. Institutions were discredited and rejected and we watched how there was a need for an open media stage."

Almost thirty years later, the Vasulkas continue to seek creative independence and to establish an alternate space. Freeing themselves from gallery representation and the constraints of the existing system, they have dedicated themselves to creative work. Not many artists would be so reckless. Their latest collaboration is the realization of the non-profit *Techne and Eros: Art and Science Laboratory*, a free and open environment for research and exploration of technology in the creation of art. It addresses a dialogue between man and machine, an opportunity to track the boundaries of possibilities, to identify the "new" in ethical ways. The moment of negotiation between the new and the old must be reevaluated and challenged as part of the evolution. Two others are pivotal in this venture. Composer and musician, David Dunn, gracefully accepted the directorship of the Laboratory. Chaos physicist and Santa Fe Institute fellow, Jim Crutchfield, was invited to represent the ancient dialog in the practice of art and science.

Last summer a series of new media workshops took place under the umbrella of The Santa Fe Art Institute. Presenters included the Vasulkas, Dunn, Crutchfield, electronic composer Morton Subotnick, extended vocal techniques artist and composer Joan La Barbara, art technologist Bruce Hamilton, software engineer Russ Gritzko, and the creator of the real time video processing program Image/line, Tom Demeyer, from Steim in Amsterdam. Participants came from Germany, Canada, Brazil, the Czech Republic, and the US.

These workshops provided presenters

and participant alike with three distinct "spaces." Steina named them, "space of creation," "space of presentation," and "space of dialogue." The "space of creation" provided an environment to find time alone to try out software, work on one's own or collaborate with other participants. The "space of presentation" was a more formal experience where one shared one's work and was able to be touched by the work of others. The "space of dialog" afforded artists, whether workshop leaders or participants, an opportunity to share passions and problems and explore questions and dilemmas.

A workshop was designed as a walk-in participatory environment. This environment was technology in a state of "awareness." When an individual entered the space, sensors would recognize a presence and engage that individual in the interplay of different modalities of the media.

After the workshops ended, the Laboratory moved for the winter to a donated space in downtown Santa Fe. Another series of workshops is scheduled for this spring and summer. The presenters include electronic composer Mark Coniglio, choreographer/dancer Dawn Stoppiello, and artist/scientist Dan Sandin. Woody said, "Coniglio has dealt with new technologies and software and created sensory environments, he has collaborated for many years with Stoppiello, and together they have assembled personalized tools and concepts, suggesting a language. They will bring an approach which connects performing space to technology. Sandin is the Director of the Electronic Visualization Laboratory at University of Illinois, Chicago. He entered the electronic arts by conceptualizing and building a video processor in the early seventies. He is now involved in advanced digital technologies, such as the conceptualizing and building of virtual environments."

One may ask, is it necessary to have the physicality of workshops when the internet suggests a new window of opportunity, perhaps an alternate stage? Unfortunately the internet does not yet seem to have the performing aspect. We know it is possible, but at the present moment it is a poor vehicle for real time events. Director David Dunn eloquently sums up the desires of this new media "Art and Science Laboratory." "The intention is to provide a creative environment where we might glimpse a future redefinition of the familiar boundaries between human sensory experience and those of the machine. The hope is to

encourage strategies for exploration of a new type of human perceptual space and space for the creative imagination."

For further information see

<http://www.artscilab.org> and <http://sfai.org>

Frederick Hart @ CFM Gallery

Frederick Hart's sculpture is about as far removed from the post-modernist sensibility as art can get. Hart belonged to a tradition in which artists were more concerned with how to make exquisitely beautiful work than they were with why they should ever want to make such a thing again. In Hart's world, the "why" did not exist, which is the reason for which he was virtually out of the loop of contemporary critical dialogue despite his enormous success with collectors and public commissions.

Much of Hart's work – his marbles, bronzes, and acrylic castings – have a sort of magical beauty. Not the beauty of rough, raw, scumbled, expressionist or minimalist surfaces, or that of found objects patinaed by time. Not the beauty of concepts delicately, mathematically or politically intertwined with those that preceded them. And certainly not the strident beauty of busts carved from frozen blood. But rather the beauty of works such as the *Illuminata Trilogy* with its highly polished icy chunks of transparent acrylic shot through with light, and of the ghostly classical figures embedded within.

Exhibited in New York recently has been the entire gamut of the sculptural spectrum, from Damien Hirst's animals in formaldehyde and Rachel Whiteread's castings of negative space to Richard Serra's "Switch." The closest anyone has come to Hart's traditional approach is Christian Lemmerz (DCA Gallery) whose classical marble sculptures also recalled the idealized perfection of Greco-Roman sculpture. However, his repellent subject matter – that of a murdered woman hacked to pieces and eviscerated ("Virginia"), or a stroke victim – casts his work in a compelling contemporary light.

Frederick Hart presents a dilemma unique to the 20th century. Where does one place work that is impeccably crafted and beautifully realized but whose content cannot be located within the current forum? It is not imprinted with today's raw, gritty sensibility. Disjointed from an art historical context, we simply do not know how to read it anymore.

Joyce Korotkin