

One of the paradoxes of contemporary video is that works by a number of artists in this high-tech field seem to yearn for nature in an almost romantic way. Mirosław Rogala's *Nature Is Leaving Us* and Woody Vasulka's *The Art of Memory* might each be used as examples of this somewhat unexpected theme.

Rogala's title has about it a certain ambiguity that its author cannot resist. On the one hand, it suggests a naturalist's protest against human destruction of the environment. On the other hand, it is a recognition that electronic imagery, rather than nature, has become the environment in which we live.

If there is a single image that is emblematic of Rogala's piece (an image that seems, indeed, to aspire to the status of icon), it is the one of an infant staring in its lunging, wobbly way into a green background. That background is pure media, an electronic optical effect generated wholly from the video equipment itself. We have come to recognize such intense color as something unique to the television screen. Or is it? The one point of reference this garish green might have would be to a grass stain. It is the color of chlorophyll, the substance in plants essential to photosynthesis--that is, to growth in nature. Rogala's baby appears to be gazing into its future, and whether that future represents the artificial blankness of pure video or the promise of a return to nature is a question *Nature Is Leaving Us* leaves open.

Vasulka's *The Art of Memory* also seems to contain an essential, core image around which the rest of the piece revolves. This is an image not of innocence and newness, like Rogala's baby, but of accumulated guilt. The setting of Vasulka's piece is the American Southwest. On this primordial stage, all of modern history is, almost literally, superimposed. History passes across the incredibly colored landscape, like a shadow across a beautiful face, in the form of old black-and-white newsreels of war and decimation that Vasulka electronically distorts into the shapes of three-dimensional graphs, complex representations of mathematical formulae. Against the background of timeless nature, human history becomes a mere abstraction. This is an image of extraordinary mythic power, and one that, like Rogala's baby, leaves unanswered the question of man's place in nature in the future.