

9/00

Somersault 5:20

Steina: Santa Fe, New Mexico

Somersault centers around Steina herself. Or rather, her machine image. Or rather, it centers around the black eye of the camera itself, with Steina's image revolving - somersaulting, gyrating, splitting, jumping - around this center. Throughout the tape Steina, with her yard, house and sky in the background, moves madly around and behind, over and under the lens, caught and yet freed in this fisheye world, which can be turned right-side-up with miraculous ease. All during this mad dance, with Steina careening, the lens is immobile, staring at us from the center of the screen. The illusion is a mystery. What's really happening? How is it done? In real space, the machine moves and the "world" is stable, with the video maker firmly rooted on the ground. But in video space, the lens is immobile, inexorably still, while "the world turns" - human body, grass, house, sky, uprooted from all laws of stability and gravity. But even if we know the mechanism behind the illusion, even knowing that the machine moves and the woman is upright, we are drawn into a full participation in the illusion, because its kinetics are so powerful, corresponding to deep fantasies of our minds and bodies. We are placed in a world not unlike the telecasts of the astronauts' first space walks in the 1970's, which gave us a revelation of the human being's possible existence in gravity-free space.

(excerpt from "Steina's Somersault", by Amy Greenfield)

Steina, born in Iceland in 1940, attended the Music Conservatory in Prague from 1959 to 1963, and joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra in 1964. She came to the U.S. the following year and has been a seminal force in the development of the electronic arts since, 1970, both as cofounder 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. In 1978 she had an exhibit, "Machine Vision" at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1976 and has, with her husband Woody, received grants from NYSCA, NEA and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

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