

VIDEO, MUSIC, DANCE, PERFORMANCE & FILM

THE KITCHEN

NEW ENTRANCE AT 59 WOOSTER

THE WEST

Camera by Steina; Audio by Woody.

"Steina and Woody Vasulka's THE WEST used video (Steina's) and sound (Woody's) to address and replicate the vast, arid, clear Southwestern landscape as a site for the making of signs: ceremonial Indian dwellings, the arrays of scientific instruments New Mexico hosts, even artworks. Though more conventionally reliant on imagery than Primarily Speaking, THE WEST is just as demanding in the precision of the Vasulkas' use of video and sound to generate a phenomenological experience of space.

Austerely minimal in conception, the piece used a circle of six monitors suspended at eye level in a darkened room, thus mitigating all aspects of the standard carpeted museum room but size and emptiness. The eerie tones of the audiotrack, low-frequency sound reproduced at a high amplification, heightened the emptiness by surrounding the viewer sitting in the center of the circle of monitors, watching the imagery from below. On the screens - generally used as three pairs in this two-channel work - the structure invoked circles (the Vasulkas' mirrored, rotating globe), as well as mirror imagery. Using highly saturated reds, pinks, and blues (the color manipulation hardly seemed to intrude on the 'natural' appearance of the landscape), the imagery was in constant, stately motion; from the spinning mirrored sphere reflecting a blue sky against the red New Mexico land to the Anasazi's Casa Rinconada in Chaco Canyon, where the camera probed, in parallel but off-sync images, the passages of the ruin; from superimposed reverse pans over mesas to the mirrored sphere reflecting, and framed by, the giant silver disks of New Mexico's VLA (Very Large Array) radio-telescope system, which itself, of course, turns slowly to scan the sky.

In its representation not just of 'landscape', but of efforts to mark that landscape, to plot points in that landscape against the system of moving space - a process in which the individual is necessarily the focal point - THE WEST served as an uncanny embodiment of Clancy's thesis. It elegantly demonstrated how imagery and sound, pared down to the barest possible elements, could constitute a complex mapping of space and time."

Carol Lord
Afterimage, October 1983