

Artist's Statement

I have always seen the video camera as a tool, as an instrument, not so different from a musical instrument. On a violin you have to practice, you have to bow, you have to know how to get musical effects. If I wanted to get a visual effect, and I was using a camera, I needed to practice. . . . It was my rebellion to put motors to the camera, to devise a moving platform, or use a car or any other way to get moving images that were in a continuous motion. . . .

For both Woody and me the magic of video was (and still is) the electronic signal. The first video we looked at was a feedback, a phenomenon of the medium itself. Woody has always stayed very close to the signal and the philosophy of the signal, whereas I ventured out into using machines and motors, and then I became very interested in optics. . . . My work with optical and motorized devices actually occurred in space. My *Machine Vision* installations were performing systems, and they occur in the studio, or out in the landscape or an exhibition. . . .

To me, living in the 20th century, nature not altered by man is romantic. It is mostly romantic in the sense that landscape can never be ugly. I have spent a lot of time thinking about what is beautiful art and what is ugly art, and why people engineer certain ugliness into their images, often very successfully—Picasso probably the most successfully. If you are working with the landscape you basically eliminate ugliness, because there is no such thing as an ugly landscape. That is, in a certain way, intimidating. It is very romantic. That was what a lot of Romantic painters painted. I have no defense, but it is hard to find ugly images through the lens of the camera. The camera does not want to render ugly images the way painters can—by distorting reality. . . .

I moved to Santa Fe from Buffalo, New York in 1980 because I wanted to experience what it is to live in the

beauty. I did not want to think that it was going to affect my images as much as it did. For the first two years I resisted it, first of all, because the beauty of the West is so seductive. And, secondly, I didn't feel up to it. I mean, are you going to take on God?

Also I lost my studio. I had always had large interiors in which to work. Suddenly, we were restricted to a small house. I just went outside one morning and said, "Well, my studio doesn't have any walls and the ceiling is very high, and it's blue." I just adopted the whole Southwest as my studio. So that's when I made my peace with the idea that the landscape of the Southwest was going to be my image material.¹

Any action of man on land stays recorded for long in the Southwest. In no other region of this country does the presence of the sun play such a significant role in the ecology of land—arid and eroded. The exceptional clarity of the night skies forms notions of extra terrestrial importance in the minds of its inhabitants. The landscape, by its dimension and by its geometric and textural variety, inspires man to create harmonious structures, dwellings and other earth works. Significantly, the Very Large Array (VLA) radio telescope system utilizes these conditions and has also inspired profoundly meditative pieces of land art based upon geo-observations and other events related to the position of stars.

The West is a video environment involving situations where human expression results in the marking of earth by building dwellings and ceremonial structures—creating works of art and developing scientific instruments of landscape proportions.

¹ These remarks are all excerpted from an interview with Steina Vasulka by Malin Wilson on 7 August 1986 and published by The Jonson Gallery, The University Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico.