

THE WESTFIELD REPUBLICAN

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A review of "The West," video exhibition

by Michael Nyerges

The video composition, "The West," by Steina and Woody Vasulka of Santa Fe, N.M., opened at the Michael C. Rockefeller Arts Center Gallery in Fredonia on January 31. Continuing through February 20, it is a must for anyone whose interests lie in the contemporary visual arts.

The 30-minute work, using six high-resolution video monitors, examines in a hypnotic procession of images the tracings of human life in the silent expanse of the American Southwest.

Steina selects a Spanish ruins, the ruins of the Anasazi in Chaco Canyon, the dishes of New Mexico's VLA (Very Large Array) radio-telescope system and the serene but magnificent desert landscape against which all these images are thrown, and creates a world that is at once familiar and exotic.

The electronic and atonal accompaniment, created by Woody Vasulka, completes this environment.

The pace of Steina's work

is serene, and the flow is disturbed only once. Wiggling the camera, Steina humorously focuses on a rock, suggesting the movement of some strange creature.

Steina's use of a rotating and motorized camera focusing on a spherical mirror — the reflection of the camera and its background at the center of its revolving field of vision — provides an interesting symmetry with the radio-telescope dishes, each standing mute, recording an impersonal world. They have the appearance of drones and relics of an unseen agency;

having a past with which we possibly share but whose presences are now mysteries.

It's a fascinating world that is created by the Vasulkas: a world insensitive to the perishable haunts of man; its architecture not dependent on human invention, but upon epochal forces; its light upon a star. For its meditative beauty alone, I recommend it.

The gallery hours are 11 a.m.-4 p.m., Wednesdays and Thursdays, and 3-8 p.m. Fridays and Sundays. The video can be seen at other times by appointment.