

9/00

Article Number 00029

FOREWORD: ROBERT T BUCK, JR. (Director)

INTRODUCTION/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Linda Cathcart (curator)

Foreword

About five years ago, just when they became Buffalo residents, I viewed for the first time Woody and Steina Vasulkas work, at that time a joint effort. I recall my surprise then at the visual impact and sensitivity to mutating shape and color which imbued their work. I sensed that their commitment to and accomplishment with the video medium as visual expression transcended practically all other artists' works I had viewed in the same medium up to that time. Today, the same is true; in their individual and collective work they continue to demonstrate a deep knowledge and awareness of the older and more traditional artistic mediums, in particular, painting, sculpture and early photography, because of the way their images unfold and transform before the viewer.

For example, in one tape the camera is simply aimed in a stationary position out the artists' second floor studio window at the block-long vista of the busy city street below. One's initial perceptions of the out-of-focus images which are first presented are not of the city street but rather, of the sterile, dust-covered, other-worldly planet or satellite surface image in the famous photograph *Elevage de poussiere*, 1920, done by Man Ray in collaboration with Marcel Duchamp. Slowly the reality of the situation becomes apparent, leaving one stupefied at the agility and creative handling of the medium by these artists as actuality unfolds through gradual focusing. Or again, a color-grid reminiscent of a Vasarely painting is suddenly penetrated by the camera lens in the third dimension as the viewer is taken on a *fantastic voyage* to inspect inner dimensions of that structure unimaginable at the outset.

Although this is not the first occasion of their work being shown at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, it is indeed a pleasure and honor to show the Vasulkas recent work in its own context, that is, in a two-artist presentation undisturbed by other video installations. We are very grateful for the support of the National Endowment for the Arts for this project. I wish to extend my thanks to Linda L. Cathcart, Curator at the Gallery, for organizing this exhibition and writing its accompanying catalogue.

I trust the viewer will enjoy, as much as I, the penetration of new experience in a still just burgeoning artistic medium through the considerable talents of the Vasulkas.

ROBERT T BUCK, JR.
Director

INTRODUCTION/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Vasulkas bring to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery a complex and unique exhibition. In four galleries are assembled works which represent part of their on-going exploration of video. The works exhibited are slices out of what is, for these two artists, a continuous exploration of the processes and tools of this medium.

Steina and Woody are referred to as pioneers in video. Icelandic and Czech by birth, their attitudes are those of Europeans in love with America's boast of freedom, love of technology and promotion of independence. Neither artist, although their work developed concurrently with the radical politics of the 1960s, sees their video explorations as connected with the politics of television. They are interested in the magic and rituals of image making with the tools of video. Each new group of tapes is the result of their investigation of new tools - tools they often conceptualize or invent or which are invented by their friends.

In 1974 they began to concentrate on putting together the “tapes in distribution” listed in this catalogue. These tapes are the results of what they have generated in the “raw tapes.”

Each artist is independent, strong-minded and opinionated. Yet, they work together constantly developing a working dialogue with each other as well as with their students and many friends from other disciplines such as film, science and linguistics.

Steina was trained in the violin, Woody studied engineering, film, photography and poetry; both were early travelers. Change and movement are associated with knowledge for them. They are explorers and inventors in their field. They are also educators. Co-founding The Kitchen in 1971, they created a forum for the exchange of ideas, concepts, images and dialogue between not only those people working in video but also between those working in sound and movement. They have also educated the public and the grant-giving organizations. In 1967, possibly the first applicants for a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in video, they faced a panel who didn't know the meaning of the word; ten years later Steina received the award to continue her tapes which began in the early 1970s as sketches and experiments with the equipment.

In 1975 they began to identify separate conceptual interests in their works and to identify them as individual efforts. However, they continue to work together, each very much involved with the other's techniques and tools.

The artists have included here joint works and Woody is represented also by his recent examinations into interlocking and stereo images. In Steina's installation *Machine Vision*, space, which has become the major concern in her tapes, is explored using the viewers and monitors and cameras to generate the images and mix the composition.

I would like to thank both artists for their generous efforts which provided us with these exhibitions as well as for their patience in culling the material which forms the catalogue. Karen Lee Spaulding, Editor at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery deserves special thanks for hours of research and editing of this material with the artists as does Kevin Noble for documenting the recent work and these installations especially for this catalogue.

Linda L. Cathcart

End