

Vasulka telecasts in the abstract

By JEROME WEEKS
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The movie camera is generally thought of as a recording device — something “out there” gets put down on celluloid — but the video camera is a manufacturing device, the image is electronic clay, the raw material for a machine product.

Steina Vasulka, who will present and discuss some of her video works tonight at the Rice Media Center, has been a pioneer in what is often called “image-processed” video, although Vasulka has said she doesn’t “care much for images. I don’t have that emotional relationship to the iconic picture like I have with music.”

In 1971, Vasulka, who was trained as a classical violinist, co-founded (with her husband Woody) The Kitchen, the arts exhibition space in New York City well known for its avant-garde and alternative works. Since then the Vasulkas have moved to Buffalo and, most recently, Santa Fe, N.M., where they have moved be-

yond their early video documentary efforts into the manipulation of what Woody has termed “an energy system.” The title of one of her series — *Machine Vision* — sums up Steina Vasulka’s concern: developing and re-thinking her visual tools. In fact, Vasulka’s explanations of how she adapted her often self-designed equipment are as fascinating as any of her works.

When the video artist abandons the traditional, “painterly” concerns of the camera — the frame, perspective, etc. — the results still often resemble

abstract or Cubist art, and Vasulka’s tendencies are no different. In *Urban Episodes* (1980), which will be shown tonight, she has taken a camera, placed it on a slow-moving turntable in the middle of downtown Santa Fe, attached various mirrors and a zoom mechanism, and let it run — thus taking the three camera motions (pan, tilt and zoom), automating them (making them free of subjective

human interference) and creating a stately kaleidoscope full of odd juxtapositions and eye-bending angles. A Picasso extended in time with a dizzying rhythm.

Or a Seurat. Some of Steina’s other works reduce her images to so many pointillist light particles dancing to the throbbing, low-frequency hums created by Woody.

The most recent work she will present, however, moves from the painterly to the sculptural. *The West* (1983) is a multi-channel installation using several monitors displaying spare, image-processed New Mexico scenery — mesas, ruins, canyons, even a VLA (Very Large Array) radio-telescope. Yet the connections to her earlier works are still present — including a fascination with the distortions presented by mirrored globes, and a sense of empty space and time.

Steina in August will be presented by the Southwest Alternate Media Project at 8 p.m. at the Rice Media Center, University Boulevard at Stockton. Admission is \$3.

Video art