

PRYOGLYPHS  
Alphaville Video  
Albuquerque, NM

from one  
of my  
customers...  
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Steina Vasulka's installation video, "Pyroglyphs" was taped at the Santa Fe foundry of Tom Joyce, a metalsmith with a bent for alchemy and its manifestos for purification and transmutation.

"Smiths and shamans come from the same nest." A nest of sparks born from gaseous clouds spread over millennia of human endeavor to become something else, as Steina, Icelandic by birth, bears that volcanic country's mystical landscape in much of her work.

In the gallery's grotto a circle of shadows absorbs episodes of light projected onto four large freestanding translucent screens, the images visible on both sides, and a wall, were set up. Sounds, mixed down to two channels for two speakers, because of the limited acoustics of this space, boom, crackle, explode like muffled bombs, and retreat into caverns pregnant with silence. Wood is slowly, mercilessly, crushed into long stringy veins; paper burns and twists in a macabre dance; a hammer forces its way down through smoke-laden air; "letterboxed" images spread over the screens as lava distilling messages the earth began transmitting ages ago.

There are as many senses of time-flow, time-erupt, time-withdrawn, as the mirror of our eyes can reflect and refract. Thus the various sites stagger, misfire, and unite. Sounds, too, lay waste to eardrums, the deep slow beats of centuries of liminal enterprises, entering icy streams, hearts beating in stereo, following visions down to their phlogistic source...where to meet those tiny figures, theimps of crankum, tricksters who mimic our heated debates on ontology and epistemology, grinning at the occluded channels we tend to carve through the liquid latitudes of our minds.

"Pyroglyphs" takes us to a scene of work where the heating and pounding of metal is timed to the forging of images into space. Everything is questioned here, from parturition to extinction, all the somber intonations are lighted, then doused out.

On the evening of the opening, a group of friends were standing around discussing the fate of the arts. Woody Vasulka, Steina's husband and fellow video art pioneer, was bewailing how, especially in this country, real risk, putting one's life on the line, is not in the artist's purview anymore. Steina laughed and said, "When I was born, the world came into being."