

THE VASULKAS

Woody Vasulka seemed destined to spend his life as a tradesman machinist — the craft he inherited from his father. But instead of constructing steel behemoths he found himself writing poetry and cooking elaborate meals for the crew. Stopping him one day on the streets of Prague (1962), Steina asked him to fix her motorcycle. They went to New York City and he found work as a multi-screen film editor. Now known as a leader in the development of video as an art form, Woody has also been instrumental in the creation of advanced digital and robotic instruments working closely with inventors and designers over the years. A “practical philosopher” he describes his work as a form of play. The machine was never his *raison d’être* but in the machine he finds artistic inspiration: The poet-machinist says, “I like metal — I have a passion for it which is very much physical. It’s the touch. I can communicate with it. I prefer metal over moss.”

Born in Brno, Czechoslovakia in 1936, Woody emigrated to the United States in 1964. Since his move to Santa Fe in 1980, he has completed three major works, *The Commission*, *Art of Memory*, and *The Theater of Hybrid Automata*. His *Art of Memory* must be counted among the most acclaimed and widely-exhibited works in the history of video art. This fall, Woody displays at Artifices Two in Paris his latest incarnation of an ongoing investigation, *The Theater of Hybrid Automata* which includes in its early stages collaborative multi-media works with other local artists: Steina, composer David Dunn, vocalist Joan La Barbara, and actor Tim Thompson.

— Melody Sumner, for *Crosswinds*, 1992

The Theater of Hybrid Automata is a physical construction containing a pool of enlightened interactive tools. In its present state, it possesses the ability to communicate through the recognition and synthesis of speech, through vocalizations, through the actions of musical instruments, lights, and sounds, and by robotic response. A singular feature of the Theater is its complete internal interactivity — a single gesture in space can influence any other element in the system. In an attempt to extend the vocabulary of this newly-devised interactive environment, I must construct an extremely sensitive and articulate interface between a live performer and the machine, which would be based on a physical reading of the performer’s body. I have been working with actor Tim Thompson, who is well-qualified for such an engagement, and I have located the necessary hardware and needed components for the creation of an undergarment to monitor the body. I want to set up a series of experiments in space to study the voluntary and involuntary gestural and spasmodic data in order to integrate it into the continuously-expanding dramatic protocol of the Theater as a whole.

—Woody Vasulka, 1992