Pioneers of Electronic Arts
Woody and Steina Vasulka

It was no accident when Peter Weibel called Steina and me last November with the question: Could you curate this show? Peter had met with Gene Youngblood and us here in Santa Fe at least twice — 1986 and 1987 — for the sole purpose of illuminating ourselves through ongoing discussion about the remarkable experience of early video which still seems to occupy our life so much. Peter, Gene, Steina and myself have all gone through the "Media Activism" of the sixties which left us with a "front row view."

Frank Gillette: "Wipe Circle", 1969
Foto: Howard Wise Gallery

For me, video has not been an intellectual movement. Early protagonists Nam June Paik and Frank Gillette have given it an illusion of certain legitimacy, but no one has dealt with the formal concerns of media. My own interest was in confronting the syntax of film with the new video image, a concern that has not been addressed at all by the video movement. The criticism of media art has never risen from the shallow and sketchy.

Nam June Paik: Magnet TV, 1965

Yet, I think, Peter's offer to curate an exhibition made some sense, after all: Steina has a good personal video archive, and we have accumulated both general and custom/personal video instruments which map a certain line of aesthetic vocabularies (as they rather rapidly appeared in the early 1970's). We have also had a long standing interaction with their makers.


Eric Siegel in seinem Studio in San Diego, CA, 1991

When we arrived in New York in the mid-1960's Steina and I were struck by two experiences: the American decadent movement and the aesthetic use of technology. We set out to explore both via video. Jackie Curtis took us through the demimonde; with George Brown and Eric Siegel we poked through instruments — organizing Time and Energy. There were vast resources for our education, from LaMonte Young's Drift Oscillators to Automation House, from loft to loft there was a state of creative frenzy — a lot of materials, new systemic thinking, another promise of tech no-aesthetic utopia …

After Peter's call, our time got very short. It was mid-January when Ars Electronica confirmed and we assembled our team: MaLin Wilson (independent curator & writer), David Dunn (composer & writer), and David Muller (technician). I knew we needed to present not dead but live instruments the earlier the instrument the better. We had to locate them, transport them and restore many. As I am writing this in mid-April, only God knows how this adventure will turn out.


Ralph Hockings Studio in Owego, NY, 1991

On the other hand, many of those involved seemed to just be waiting for our call. Ralph Hocking, founder of the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton, New York, is now by default, the only large scale producer and facilitator of personalized, custom-built video instruments. By even greater default, Ralph and Sherry Miller Hocking are the only collectors

and archivists of many of these instruments. Ralph picked up the phone as if we were having an uninterrupted conversation over the years.

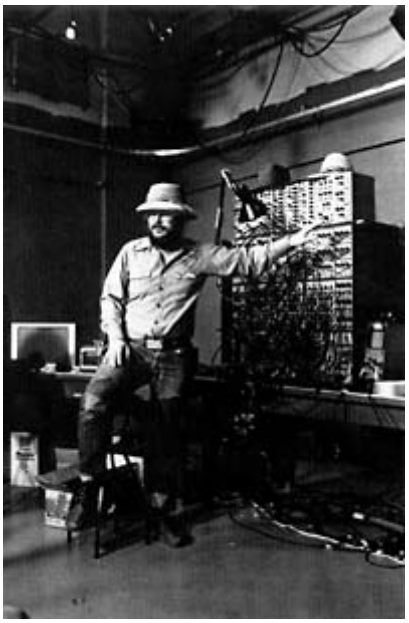
We still haven't located Al Phillips to whom Eric Siegel entrusted his only video synthesizer. In a comparison to electronic audio instruments, there is no comparable historical or intellectual protocol to even consider the video instruments as cultural artifacts. While Paik's first synthesizer is still in the basement of MIT, the first Buchla box has just been purchased from Mills College by a French institution.

It is a real pleasure to lift up a piece of scrap, to dust it off, return its name, restore it, insure it for thousands of dollars and publish it in an Austrian art catalogue!

The Myopsis

Video infringed on our private lives, crowding our loft on Fourteenth Street. We established the Kitchen in 1971 to resolve that. Overnight we became part of a large network ranging from Europe to Japan to Canada. Of course, the global character of the network did not help our own craft of making pictures electronically; that was helped by a very small tribe building circuits. This tribe is the subject of our exhibition. There was a legitimate underground technological community, with a life free enough to practice low budget experimentation and manufacturing. A new range of high frequency components appeared on the market at the same time that there was a dominant archetypical image commonly shared by the usage of hallucinogens. Finally, there was a generation of artists eager to practice the new witchcraft. And, indeed there was an audience …

It is important to note that besides these experiments with video, there was widespread practice of mixed media including television as closed circuit installations. And, of course, electronic sound making was in its golden era. It is even more important to understand that all of these forms of media work were being conducted against a full blown cultural background: painting, sculpture, poetry, music and film, to mention only a few. As insiders, the perspective we offer may be grossly exaggerated; nevertheless, that's what you, the viewer, will be getting.

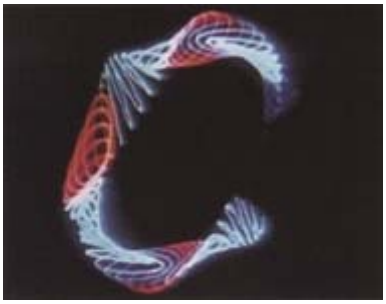


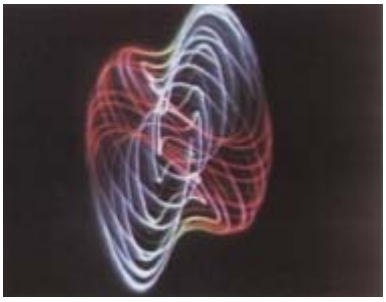
Dan Sandin mit dem IP (Image Processor), Chicago, 1972

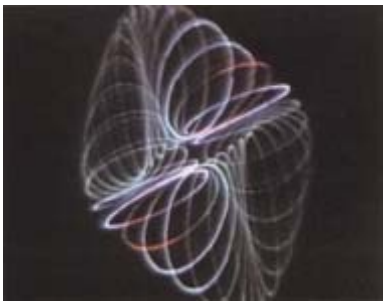
Within the video movement our choices for this exhibition will look a bit odd. We are not going to show or describe works outside of the consideration of audio/video as electronic signal — that blessed state when it becomes accessible for alternation by electronic instruments. We are avoiding the essential and important pictorial and conceptual influences arising from "art as style" during the time period, from social influences and, from gallery and art market influences. We also believe that the most important works of art in video have been systematically presented by other curators. On the other hand, what we found more essential, more mysterious and unexplainable as new comers from the "Old World" was the undefined spirit of American innovation and invention. To us it was all there was to do.

Ed Emshwiller: Sunstone, 1979

In the 1960's we used to distinguish between white collar and blue collar artists. Both of us came from socialist societies and would at "the tip of the hat" side with the working class. We thought the world was still material, even though we were handling metaphysical material- Time and Energy.







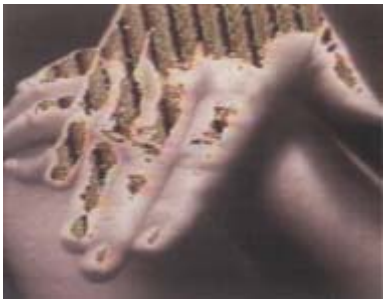
Bilder, die mit Bill Hearns VIDIUM hergestellt wurden, 1968—69, Berkelay, CA

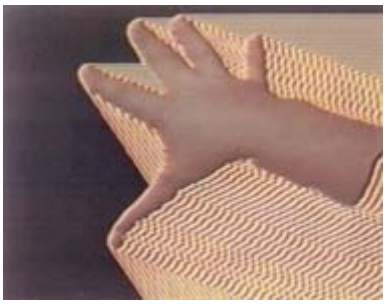
The Technology

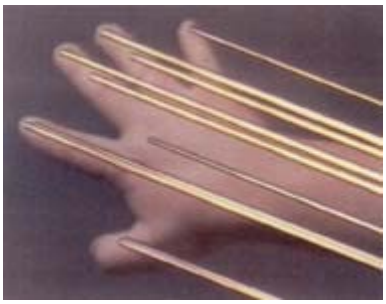
Besides the instruments, the essence of the exhibition is the images, both still and moving. In our private work we have advanced to the technological state of presenting our work on laserdisk. From the moment that we discovered a link between the laserdisk. and the printed page through the barcode we knew it would suit the purpose of the exhibition magnificently. Despite the clumsy laserpen for reading the barcode and despite the time delay, we are convinced that this is a perfect marriage of method and subject.

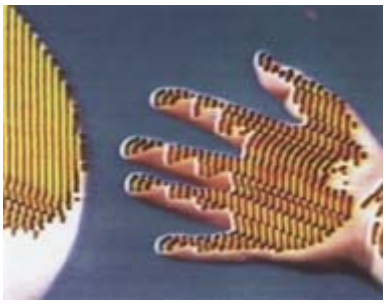
The Tapes

Steina has always been an avid collector of videotapes. Very early she was engaged in personal tape exchanges, a habit she still keeps. During the early days the urge to share unique discoveries drove people into almost compulsory communication videoletters, "how to's" and "look what I'm doing" were common, almost a genre. Many times we were the first on the receiving end, and today we are looking at an amazing assortment of tapes which forms the core of this exhibition.









Woody & Steina Vasulka: "Vocabulary", 1973
Produziert mit Eric Siegel DUAL COLORIZER, George Brown MULTIKEYER, RUTT/ETRA SCAN PROCESSOR

There is an unprecedented affinity between electronic sound and image making. Each generation of artists seems to come up with a tempting proposition of uniting the acoustic and the visual and vice versa — hoping once and for all to solve the mystery of audio-visual aesthetics. The generation that is the subject of our exhibition has gotten somewhat closer: even if the mystery of composing images with sounds was never revealed, this time the material, i.e. the frequencies, voltages and instruments which organized the material were identical. The advent and use of the oscillator became the natural link. As in our case, many of our colleagues and friends used audio oscillators of audio synthesizers to generate their first video images. The first video instruments were inspired by the architecture of audio instruments, and the first organization of images was negotiated in similar ways. With feedback, which all these instruments possess generically, the preliminary nomenclature of generated images was established. The continuity between instruments of sound and instruments of image making was basic to our conception of the exhibition in discussions with Peter Weibel. We also knew that there was a chance that the great weight of the cultural history of sound and music might tip the balance of the exhibition off center. So be it.

Woody Vasulka

Following are a list early "personal" electronic audio & video instruments used by artists and researched for this exhibition. Even though it is recent history, the whereabouts of a number of these machines is unknown, and we can only document their existence from ephemera images on paper, in photographs, and on video tapes. This Ars Electronica exhibition at the Landesmuseum will include those machines that have been dusted off and restored to life. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, it is archeological. During our research we found leads to many other instruments that we hope can also be revived — before it is too late.

Tänzerin mit am Körper befestigten Sensoren, die eine Echtzeit-Animation steuern.
Produziert mit: Lee Harrison ANIMAC, Denver, 1962

Experimental Ubiquitous
Video Feed Back w / Audio Input Modulation

1962
Lee Harrison Associates
ANIMAC (Hybrid Graphic Animation Computer)
Destroyed, documented on film

1964
Don Buchla
BUCHLA PRE-100 SERIES (Audio synthesizer)
Collection of Michael Czajkowsky, New York City

1968
Eric Siegel
IMAGE ORTHICON T.V. CAMERA
Courtesy of Vinnie Novak Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton Collection of Eric Siegel

1968
Eric Siegel
PROCESSING CHROMINANCE SYNTHESIZER
Where abouts unknown, no known documentation

1968—1969
Robert Moog
MOOG MODULAR AUDIO SYNTHESIZER
Courtesy of Norman Lowrey, Professor of Music; Collection of Drew University, Madison New Jersey
Donated by CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System)

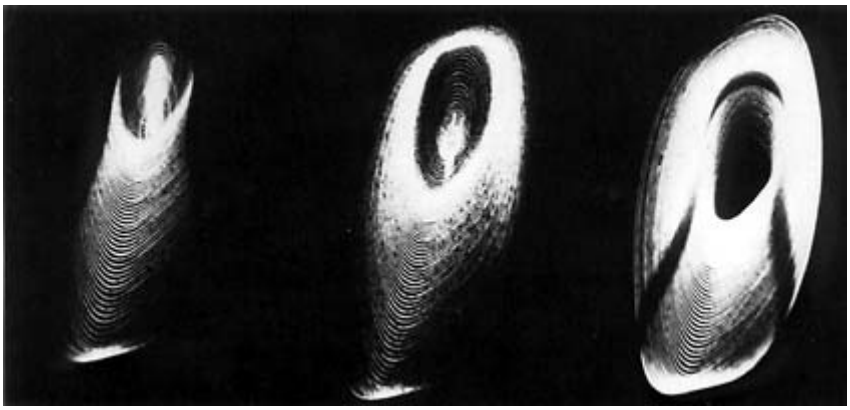
1968—1969
Bill Hearn
VIDIUM (Analog X Y Z Driver / Sequencer)
Courtesy of Steve Anderson, Physics Department, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California
Collection of Bill Hearn

1968
Pulsa Group / Peter Kindelman
HYBRID DIGITAL / ANALOG AUDIO SYNTHESIZER
Collection of Bill Crosby, Tucson, Arizona

1968
Industrial
PUTNEY, MODEL VCS 3 (Audio synthesizer)
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton


Salvatore Matirano mit seiner SAL-MAR CONSTRUCTIONK, 1969—72, School of Music, University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana

1969—1972
Salvatore Matirano
SAL-MAR CONSTRUCTION
Collection of Salvatore Martirano, School of Music, University of Illinois, Champaign / Urbana


Aldo Tambellini: Black Spiral

1969
Aldo Tambellini & Tracy Kinsel & Hank Reinbold
BLACK SPIRAL INSTALLATION (Prepared TV set)
(Awaiting restoration)
Collection of the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York

1969
Industrial
SONY CV PORTAPAK
Ubiquitous

1970
Stephen Beck
DIRECT VIDEO SYNTHESIZER (Analog)
Collection of Stephen Beck, San Francisco

1970
Eric Siegel
EVS (ELECTRONIC VIDEO SYNTHESIZER)
Where abouts unknown, last in the possession of Al Phillips, documented in photographs

1970
Glen Southworth
CVI (COLORADO VIDEO INC)
QUANTIZER (Colorizer)
CVI DATA CAMERA (Camera Scan Processor)
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton

1971
Nam June Paik & Shua Abe
PAIK / ABE SYNTHESIZER SCAN MODULATOR (a.k.a. the "Wobbulator")
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton

1971
George Brown
VIDEO SEQUENCER (a.k.a. FIELD FLIP / FLOP SWITCHER with digital control)
Collection of the Vasulkas, Santa Fe, New Mexico

1971
Dan Sandin
IP (IMAGE PROCESSOR)
Collection of Phil Morton, West Yellowstone, Montana

1972
Eric Siegel
DUAL COLORIZER (Analog)
Collection of the Vasulkas, Santa Fe, New Mexico

RUTT/ETRA SCAN PROCESSOR PROTOTYPE, ca. 1972
Foto: Dennis Dunda

CIRCA 1972
Steve Rutt & Bill Etra
SCAN PROCESSOR PROTOTYPE (Analog)
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York,

Binghamton
Donated by Barbara Buckner

1973
Don Hallock
VIDEOLA INSTALLATION, SAN FRANCISCO
Destroyed, documented in photographs

1973
George Brown
MULTIKEYER (Analog with digital control)
Collection of the Vasulkas, Santa Fe, New Mexico

1973
Bill Etra & Steve Rutt
RUTT / ETRA SCAN PROCESSOR (Analog)
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton

1973
Stephen Beck
VIDEO OUTLINER (Digital)
Collection of the Vasulkas, Santa Fe, New Mexico

1974—1979
David Behrman & Bob Diamond & Robert Watts
CLOUD MUSIC (Hybrid Audio / Video Installation)
Courtesy of Sara Seagull & Larry Miller, Robert Watts Studio Archives
Collection of David Behrmann, Bob Diamond

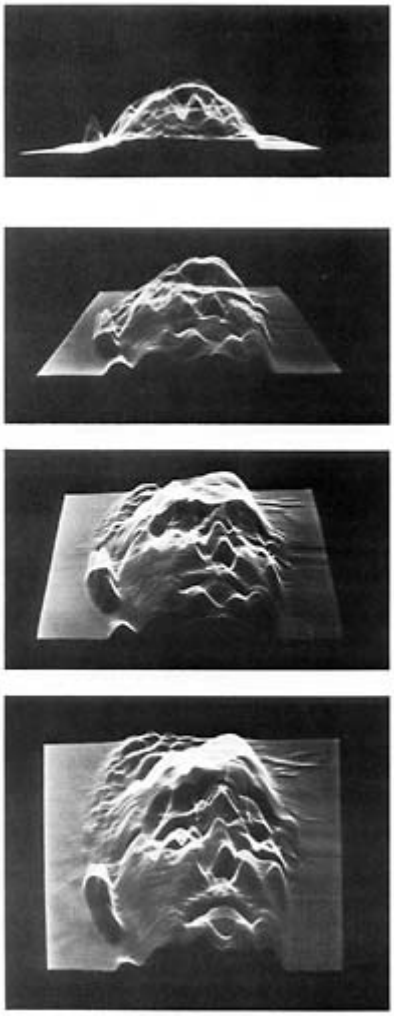
1974
Stephen Beck
BECK DIGITAL VIDEO WEAVER (Synthesizer)
Collection of Stephen Beck, San Francisco

1976
David Jones
JONES FRAME BUFFER (Digital buffer)
Collection of Gary Hill, Seattle, Washington

Don McArthur
SAID (SPATIAL AND INTENSITY DIGITIZER)
Collection of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. & The State University of New York, Binghamton

1976
Don McArthur & Jeffy Schier
DIGITAL IMAGE GENERATOR
Collection of the Vasulkas, Santa Fe, New Mexico

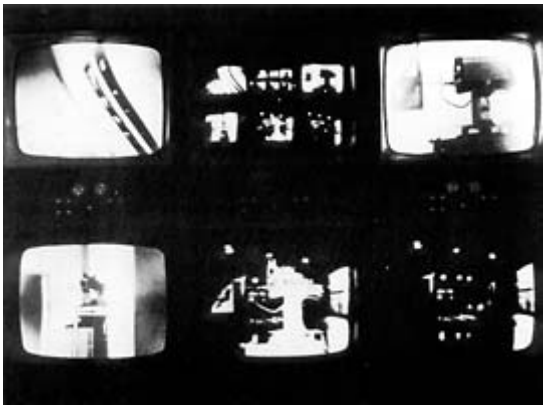
Date Unknown
Marcel Dupouy
LE MOVICOLOR (Colorizer)
Courtesy of Don Foresta
Collection of Ecole de Beaux Arts Decoratif, Paris



Woody Vasulka: Transformations, R/E Scan Processor, 1974

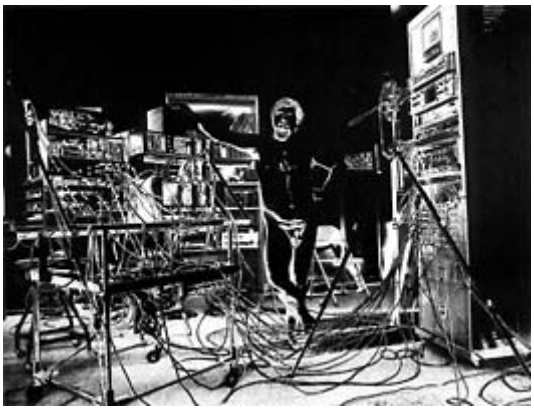
Doppelseite aus dem Katalog "The Machine". Eine Ausstellung des "Experiments in Art and Technologie" im MOMA, NYC, 1968


Monitorwand im Studio der Vasulkas, Buffalo, NY, 1973—78


Steina Vasulka: MACHINE VISION, The Kitchen, 1976


Steina & Woody Vasulka installieren MACHINE VISION, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Oktober 1978


Steina & Woody Vasulka installieren MACHINE VISION, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Oktober 1978



Woody zuhause, (Buffalo, 1974)