

July 26, 1998

Art That's Alive With the Meanings of Military Junk

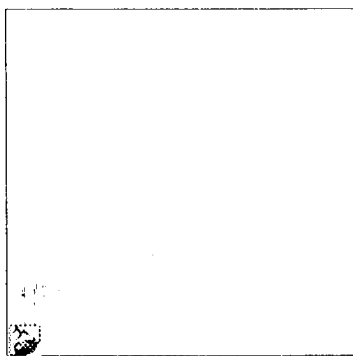
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By RUTH LOPEZ

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ANTA FE, N.M. -- On June 22, three days before Woody **Vasulka's** work was to be shipped to Japan for an exhibition, he stood in his cluttered studio amid packing crates, huge rolls of bubble wrap, cable of all sorts, dismantled computers and tables covered with tools going over last-minute details. Mr. **Vasulka** is a media artist, combining video, computer technology and traditional machinery in his work. It had taken him months to put everything together and relatively little time to take it apart. Something was amiss, but Mr. **Vasulka** appeared calm.



Laura Husar

Woody **Vasulka** in his studio, operating "The Maiden With Fans," part of his first solo show, in Tokyo.

"The machines want to work," he said. "They just have to overcome human frailty."

The machines, six interactive constructions fabricated as a series of tables, are made from discarded military equipment found near Los Alamos, N.M., where the nuclear bombs that fell on Japan were created.

They turn, they twist, they reach out, they reach back, often eerily in response to motions of viewers. Each is accompanied by a system of projectors, speakers, screens, lights and sensors through which each type of behavior is controlled. The result, titled "The Brotherhood," carries overtones of the destruction the Japanese experienced from American raids at the end of World War II, although nothing was made of that point in the planning of the show or the catalogue that accompanies it.

The show, Mr. **Vasulka's** first on his own, opened at the Intercommunication Center in Tokyo on July 17 and runs through August. The media museum was established in 1997

by the Japanese telephone giant, N.T.T. Visitors to "The Brotherhood" Web site, www.concentric.net/tables, will be able to view the show.

Choosing Mr. **Vasulka** for the gallery's first major show was in the mind of the curator, Gogota Hisanori, from the moment he stepped into his post two years ago and began planning exhibitions.

Mr. Hisanori said he had been following the career of Mr. **Vasulka**, as well as Mr. **Vasulka's** partner in life and art, Steina **Vasulka**, after seeing their installations at the Whitney Biennial in 1989. The Intercommunications Center commissioned three new pieces to accompany earlier work.

During the chaotic week before an 18-foot-long truck arrived to take away 20 huge crates for overseas shipping, Mr. Hisanori was in New Mexico for the final push, preparing the text in Japanese to accompany the exhibition. Because of the scale of the project, "The Brotherhood" had spilled out of its studio to a work space at the College of Santa Fe several miles away. Mr. **Vasulka** spent long days split between two locations.

"These are blue-collar artists," Mr. Hisanori said. "Sometimes media artists will do nothing by themselves. They have engineers and special staff to do everything."

While it is true that the bulk of the creation of "The Brotherhood" stayed in Mr. **Vasulka's** hands, he would be the first to point out that he was hardly alone.

"This is no longer something I can claim as a private work," he said. "This is the first time I've reached beyond my individual capacity. One always thinks that one can do it all, but that's not true." Mr. **Vasulka** had to bring in experts, for instance, after he enlarged his concept by incorporating MIDI (musical instrument digital interface), a communications system that enables electronic musical instruments to interact with one another.

"There were so many walls we had to crash through," said Ms. **Vasulka**, explaining that the project included several computer languages. "In the old days, Woody could go in with a soldering iron and fix the problem," she said. "But if a code breaks, we are defenseless."

The Vasulkas, leading figures in the history of video art, were co-founders in 1971 of the Kitchen, the experimental media space in downtown Manhattan. Their collaboration started in the early 60's when they met in Prague, where Woody was studying film and Steina the violin. They married and moved to the United States in 1965.

In those days, Mr. **Vasulka** was scavenging industrial scraps off city streets. When the couple moved to New Mexico in 1980, their explorations continued, but Mr. **Vasulka** was now picking through the junk piles near Los Alamos National Laboratory. His installations began to take on a more sinister tone inspired by the machinery of war. He also turned away from making only video images and began exploring the relationships between objects and space.

For Mr. **Vasulka**, "The Brotherhood" is the expansion of an idea that began in 1990 with a construction called the "Theater of Hybrid Automata" (now "Table II"). That installation explored both actual and virtual space. The device at the heart of this construction is a celestial navigator, a piece of military hardware originally designed to deliver a deadly bomb load somewhere off in the heavens.

The two installations that followed began to take on the structural military intentions of the original machine, but benignly: for Mr. **Vasulka** it was a way to examine the mind of the military designer or, as he put it, "the male idea" of the machine's destructive power. The original "Brotherhood" (now "Table III") was built in 1994, and its main component was a plotting device that once charted air interception. This sprawling installation is an interactive, computer-driven construction surrounded by five large screens. Mr. **Vasulka** repositioned the circuits to project computer-generated imagery onto the screens, which

are driven by the plotter.

Over the last year, Mr. **Vasulka** has been preparing the new tables for Tokyo. He calls "Stealth" ("Table IV"), a flashback to the 60's when he became bored with the cinematic frame. "The Scribe" ("Table V") is a code-breaking network for transferring linguistic data from one medium to another. Using a pneumatic device designed by a studio assistant, it consists of a video camera that locates words in a book.

A robotic arm turns the pages.

"The Maiden With Fans" ("Table VI") is probably Mr. **Vasulka's** most intriguing construction. A long metal creature, a cross between a giant praying mantis and a dinosaur skeleton, rises out of the base of a hospital operating table. Ms. **Vasulka** will direct the "Maiden" with a computerized violin on opening night.

In his artist's statement, Mr. **Vasulka** says that the theme of his installation is male identity and mankind's compulsion to reorganize nature. " 'The Brotherhood' neither argues for a reformist agenda nor defends a male strategy," he wrote. Later, he added, "I think art should be as far away from life as possible."

Mr. **Vasulka's** intentions are far-ranging. He is fascinated by the "discreet antagonism" between art and science and continues to examine objects in space that have "some self or independent sort of expression."

But as "The Brotherhood" neared completion, what seemed to concern the artist was the strange situation with, as he put it, the show business aspect of art. His bigger commissions will come with bigger expectations.

"I never believed art should be expensive," he said, clearly overwhelmed by the cost of resources during the last few months. "I seem to be facing an industrial involvement with logistics of organization, machines, tools. I don't think that's the right direction. If I could find an articulate group of Luddites, I would be interested in joining them."

But that could have just been fatigue talking. For now, Mr. **Vasulka** will have a show in Tokyo at a time when many galleries in Japan have closed. How the economic situation in Japan has affected the art world there was very relevant during that last hectic week in the **Vasulka** studio in New Mexico. Mr. **Vasulka** was weighing where to trim costs, at the request of the Intercommunications Center, and decided that the packing material for the delicate equipment was not the place to do so. Despite all the pressures, Mr. Hisanori said he was pleased with the project. His biggest concern was moving the crates through customs.

"Media art is not yet popular in Japan," Mr. Hisanori said, adding that the Government thinks machine imports should be taxed. Each time it is a small battle to convince the officials that the material is for artistic, not commercial, use. That the material being used is military scrap will only complicate things.

Mr. Hisanori said that to the Japanese viewer, Mr. **Vasulka's** works might seem like "grotesque handmade machines" and he hoped that the exhibit would challenge the notion that technology is always good.

That the show might disturb viewers would please Mr. **Vasulka**. "Art should not provide a kind of comfort," he said. "Art should be draining you and drenching you."

Mr. **Vasulka** and his team of five assistants will remain in Tokyo for the length of the exhibition. Between all the systems -- computer, pneumatic, optical, mechanical -- there is plenty of room for trouble.

"We have to kind of sit around and watch it," Mr. **Vasulka** said. "It is now complicated

enough to fail, and since this was all engineered on the kitchen table, one has to be aware that it's not like you put a picture on the wall and just go home. The whole exhibit lives with you. It is part of your nervous system."

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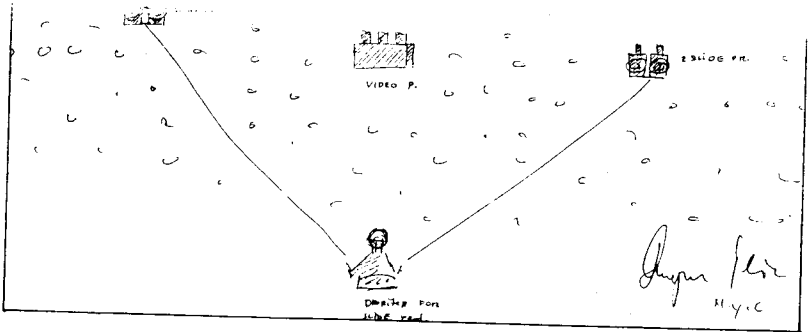
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石を運ばれたヒマラヤ
石を見学するパチカン市長とM.ヘインズ(=右)
下運送中の石

「えればいいのでは」
ヘインズをヒマラヤの頂上に運ぼうと
ニクな発想の持ち主だが、ステ
「観客に伝達し、はたらきかけること
ない。今回も観客の中に新しい「感
「モーショナル・システム」を生む
ている。
ヘインズの新作パフォーマンス「カ
は、五月六日のMアログラム「インフ
シルVII」のなかで行われる。



フェスティバル・インフオメーション

ビデオがあっても8ミリは必要なんだ！
自由なメディア・8ミリを救って欲しい

突然ですがお願いします。最小の映画
・8ミリを救うために署名して下さい。
署名運動を提唱したのはパリ大学映画
学教授ドミニク・ノゲース氏。どうや
ら8ミリをとりまく状況はフランスで
も日本同様、暗いようだ。

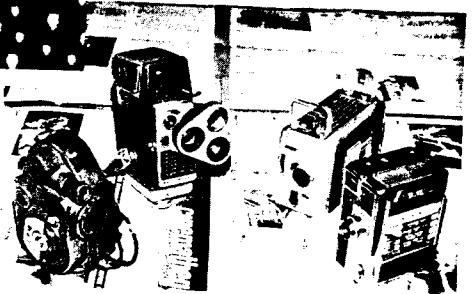
「8ミリが危ない」と月刊イメー
ジョラムが特集を組んだのが三年前
の秋のこと。この年フジカが8ミリカ
メラ・映写機の生産を終了してしまっ
た。その後、サクラはフィルム製造か
ら撤退。現在、新品機材を手に入れる
ことは不可能だし、修理やフィルム供
給・現像も東京はまだしも、地方では
かなり難しくなっている。「ビデオが
あるからいいんじゃない？」なんて言
わないで欲しい。発光画面であるビデ
オは、8ミリとは色彩も画質も異なる
全く別のメディアなんだ。どんなにビ
デオが手軽でも、8ミリにとって替わ
ることなんかできないんだ。そこをメ
ーカーの人達に判ってもらいたい。作
家の手から表現手段を奪わないため
に――署名用紙はロビーにあります。

フェスティバルの延長戦！ 一次審査通過作品、シネマテークで上映

今年的一般公専部門にはフィルム・
ビデオ合わせてなんと三七二本の作品
が寄せられた。ところが、フェステイ
バルで上映されるのは大賞各一本、入
賞各五本だけ。これじゃあんまりつて
んで、IFシネマテーク(四谷三丁目)
で一次審査通過作品(フィルム二六本、
ビデオ二二本)から一本を上映する
ことを決定。大賞、入賞を最後まであ
らそった作品を中心にセレクトしてい
るから見応えは保証つき。審査員の選
から洩れたけどあなたの趣味にはマッ
チする、という作品に巡りあえるかも。
期間はフェス終了直後、五月二日、
一五日「新作ショーケース」のアログ
ラムで上映。料金は700円(会員5
00円)。

シカゴ直送のアンティーク8mmカメラ
買って下さい。可愛がって下さい！

8ミリカメラといえば電池式が常識
だけど、オートサンン時代にはゼンマ
イ仕掛けの8ミリカメラがあったのを
知ってるかな？ カタカタというフィ
ルムの走行音に思わず「このケナゲな
ヤツ！」と胸が熱くなったもんだ。日
本じゃとんと見かけなくなっちゃった
愛しいカメラが、シカゴからイメー
ジョラムに到着。で、フェスティバ
ルに来てくれた人に可愛がってもらお
うとバザールを企画した。期日は五月
七日(土)一二時より、ホールロビー
で。古びてはいても、ゼンマイを巻い
てシャッターを押せばちゃんと動きま
す。操作法はスタッフが教えます。レ
ギュラー8のフィルムはもう手に入ら
ないかもしれないけど、インテリアに
してもいいかもしれない、レトロプ
ムらしいし。ひよっとするととんでも
ない値打ちモノも紛れこんでるかもし
れないけど、値段をつけるのはコッ
トウ品には素人のスタッフです。期待し
てほしいものです。



ワグナーは今日のパンク・ロック

無国籍演奏。パフォーマー飛び入り参加

フランスとドイツを本拠に、ビデオアーティスト、ミュージシャンとして幅広く活動しているマイク・ヘインズが来日。フェスティバルのプログラムの一つ「インフェルメンタル・東京編集版」に飛び入り参加して、映像と音楽を組み合わせたパフォーマンスを行う。



マイク・ヘインズ

マイク・ヘインズ

マイク・ヘインズはアメリカ生まれのヨーロッパ育ち。東欧、西欧を問わず渡り歩き、ほとんど無国籍に近い、ミュージシャンとして、スタート、一五年前のモノクロ・オーブナール時代からビデオを手がけている。最近では音楽を例にとってもアメリカのコピーばかり、伝統的なヨーロッパ文化は冷遇されている時代です。私はアメリカのコピーではないヨーロッパ文化を再生したいと思っています。もともと、自分をミュージシャンだとかビデオメーカーだとかパフォーマーというふうに限定したくはありません。むしろ、そうしたマーケットの中の例外でありたいんです。

今回のパフォーマンスは三部構成。第一部は古典的な甘いラブソング。第二部は、実験的なフリー・インプロビゼーション。そして第三部



では、ライフワークのワグナーの新解釈をテーマに据える。この三つは一見無関係に見えるかもしれない。しかし深層ではつながる部分があると思っています。例えばワグナーの解釈でも、従来の政治的な解釈ではなく、旋律の持つエモーショナルな部分の解釈を試みています。今日のパンク・ロックに通じる点もありません。ラブソングやフリー・インプロビゼーションもそういう視点に立てば無関係ではないはず。古典的なものと今日のものとワグナーの組み合わせを、新しいカクテルとして味

バルーン・エンバライメント 空中戦の実現

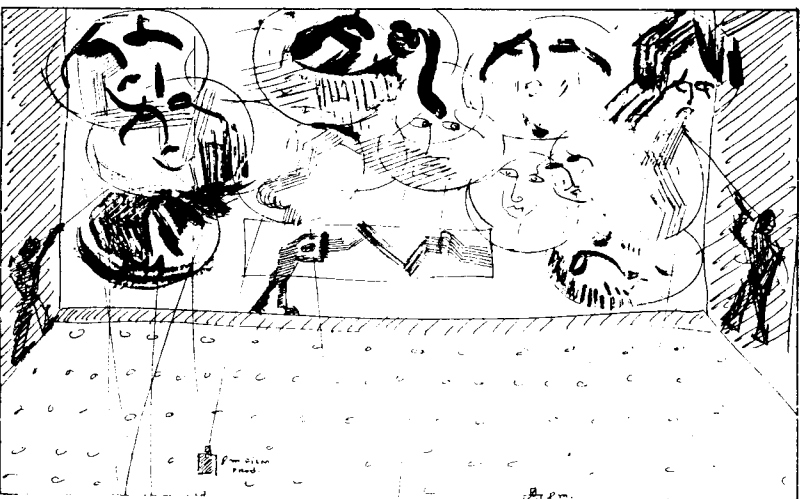
ドラガン・イリク

一九七五年、わたしは直感にみちびかれ一束の鉛筆を手にした。まず一束の鉛筆を使いマルチ・ラインのドローイングを始め、それは次第に鉛筆を使った彫刻、パフォーマンス、フィルム、ビデオ、そしてサウンド・アートへと発展していった。現在では、平行して他のメディアでのマルチ表現を試みている。ブラシ（鉛筆のように束にしたもの）やビデオまたはCGを使い「知覚速度」をコンセプチュアルに探求するのだ。そして人間の持つ想像力と機械的な（ロボットのような）制作プロセスのインターフェイスに魅かれる。それはハイテクの応用によるアートの領域でのサイコ・ジェネレーター構築でもあるのだ。

今回のパフォーマンスでは、シュルレアリスム的な夢のオートマティスム（風船に映し出された映像をブレンドしたり壊したりすることによって喚起される）と機械的なドローイング・パフォーマンスの持つテクノロジーのオートマ



ティズムが対比される。両者の関係性はまた、アートの本質とわたしたちの住むハイテク時代の関係を象徴するものなのである。



わって
スト
するた
ジの上
を常に
情回路
ことを
●マイ
ラオケ
ニルメ