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VIDEO ART

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By Robert Graybill

These are excerpts from the article ...

During Festival week, the Sears show window TV's on Lincoln Avenue (That's right: Sears) will not be turned in to "The Price is Right" or "General Hospital." Instead, they will serve as windows into the world of video art, as the work of seven nationally known video artists will unwind to amuse and perplex the minds of those coming to buy their socks, chainsaws and food processors...

Steina Vasulka's "Urban Episodes," which she originally made for the Minneapolis Arts Council, relies on a complex mechanical device that not only pans the camera through a Minneapolis urban scene, but simultaneously zooms the image in and out, pans vertically and diagonally, so that there are four images, each moving in a different direction. Woody Vasulka is represented by "C-Trend," a work that transforms the images of cars passing by a window into sinuous, moving lumps. His work probably represents the highest degree of computer abstraction to be shown in the program.

Most of us, at one time or another, have complained about the inanity of commercial television. Video artists, however, take their gripes one step further and grasp the TV by the rabbit ears - so to speak. They are trying to develop, through their experiments, a different kind of art for the boob tube - one that's not based on plot, characterization, literary themes or commercials.

"We went to see 'Star Wars' a few times," said Vasulka of herself and her husband. "But we only go to see the special effects, because we know the people who did them. The story of the movie- something about a Skywalker, love and good and evil - that's all so boring. I've seen that stuff so much it bores me sick."

This off-the-cuff remark by Vasulka indicates the attitude of most video artists. They aren't the least bit interested in improving television by making better dramas, slicker variety shows or more high-brow documentaries. They are interested in nothing less than a complete revolution in how we view the television. They are exploring - through electronic and mechanical means - the very limits of what can be done with an electronically stimulated light beam.

As a consequence, video artists don't see eye to eye with network executives. "They're always telling us our work is too slow," Vasulka commented. "But what about those car chases that go on for 20 minutes? What's in them? Crushed fenders? That's boring. It bores the shit out of me. But if you go to a network executive with a program about people blowing bubbles, they say it's slow, and they aren't interested."

It is for reasons like this, Vasulka continued, why primetime television - or almost any commercially supported television for that matter - won't have anything to do with video artists. So if you would like to see some of the things you're missing by watching the local channels, or if you would like to see some mind-bending things that can be done with video images, or you would just like to placate your "television jones" by watching something besides "Mork and Mindy" reruns, then Lincoln Avenue, just outside of Sears, is the place for you to hang out. And in allowing this avant-garde work to be put in its windows, the local Sears store is sure living up to the vast chain's motto: "We're your everything store."

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