

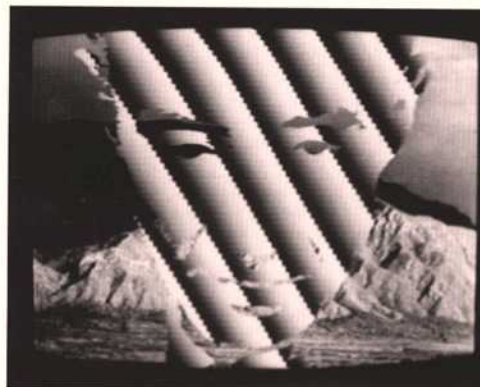
**STEINA**



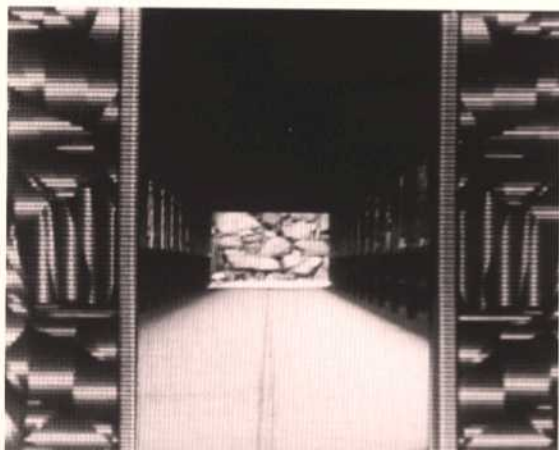
**&**

**WOODY**

**VASULKA**



**January 25-  
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Denver Art Museum**



# VIDEO BY STEINA & WOODY VASULKA

## TOKYO FOUR

Steina lived in Japan from November 1987 to May 1988 on a fellowship from the US/Japan Friendship Commission. There she recorded sixty hours of video with a camcorder. She let the tapes sit for a year, then began working on them in May 1989. Now, more than two years later, there is *Tokyo Four*, her sixth multiscreen composition. It is organized around five categories of imagery: Shinto priests meticulously grooming their Zen garden on New Year's Eve; train conductors monitoring rush hour crowds, reminding passengers to watch their umbrellas and not to forget their children; elevator girls bringing a superfluous, but charming, High Touch to the high tech world of the shopping malls; a segment about food, beginning with the vertiginous fisheye lens in a supermarket; and an emotionally charged meta-choreography of a dance troupe's performance and curtain call.

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No form of moving-image art comes as close to musical composition as multiscreen video, where the different channels of image and sound are equivalent to musical polyphony, each functioning like a voice in a musical ensemble. And no multiscreen work is as spectacularly musical as Steina's. She works as a composer would, playing on the visual equivalents of timbre, texture, and tone. *Tokyo Four* is the audiovisual equivalent of a string quartet. Sometimes one screen is the melody and the others are accompaniment, then another screen takes the lead. A musical syntax emerges from this visual point/counterpoint organized around duration, interval, rhythm, repetition, and series.

In one compositional strategy, Steina begins by assembling a long single channel segment which represents the "melody," or what she calls the "ground track." She makes three copies of it and inserts new images into each channel as accompaniment. Sometimes she records the ground track in reverse motion, which, in her musical



terminology, "breaks the line" (the linear progression) and makes it easier to start inserting other images. She often works on all four channels simultaneously, using time code to bring them forward synchronously. They don't always have the same edit at the same point, but, like a musical canon, they progress simultaneously toward a unified conclusion.

Her compositional devices include flipping or reversing an image (right becomes left) and playing it at imperceptibly different speeds on different screens, which gradually all synchronize at the same speed. These strategies are especially effective in the final movement when the female dancer is bowing. The Strauss waltz the dancers use would be banal without the manipulations of Steina's spectacular visual matrix, which transforms it into something at once exotic and poignant.

cover horizontal images by Woody Vasulka from *Art of Memory*, a videotape, 1987; vertical images by Steina from *Tokyo Four*, a four-channel video matrix, 1991. **above** *Tokyo Four*. **facing page** *Art of Memory*. **back panel** *Art of Memory*.