

New Media Fellowships
2004 Project Cover Form

STEINA VASULKA

Title INTERACTIVE SAMPLER.

Genre INTERACTIVE

Applicant's Role in Production ALL EXCEPT SOFTWARE WRITING

Production Format SOFTWARE INTERACTIVE

Brief Project Description (do not exceed space given below)

I propose to use the Rockefeller fellowship to develop and expand two parallel tracks: One is life performances Controlling Laser Disk, Quick Time Movies or Camera input with my 5 string MIDI Violin, the other is audience interactive installations. The two activities use similar software, namely "Image/ine" "Isadora" and "Jitter." They develop along similar lines of implementation, but use different tool configuration.

The Midi Violin Performances are highly scored with mainly pre-recorded image material and depend on innovative, continuously evolving Tools. What started in the 70ies as applying my acoustic violin to image control evolved to digital signal control and eventually to digital image processing. As the tools evolve, so does the performance, gradually getting more portable but more equipment demanding.

The interactive installations engage a single camera to multiple computer platforms, from 3 to seven. In the first tape sample, there is a demo of a single camera, 3 projectors and 3 computers, in the second a single camera feeds seven computers, applying different software for seven monitors.

All equipment in both installations is very old and obsolete with a resolution of 240 x320. There is still an ocean of wealth to mine in the above-mentioned software programs for more complex interactions with an audience.

I have made a great effort to explain these interactivities on the on the accompanying video tape.

STEINA VASULKA

If you are sending more than one sample, please copy this page. Sample(s) must be cued: indicate how long each sample should be viewed for a COMBINED viewing time of no more than 15 minutes. If slides are included in this application, please list the title and year of the work on this form.

Title

Year

Technical Information

Original Format

Software

Web

Installation

Other PERFORMANCE

Format Submitted for Viewing

Software

Web

VHS

Other _____

Preferred OS

Windows

Mac

Unix

Other _____

Web Information (answer only if sample work is in Web format)

URL WWW.VASULKA.ORG "WORKS BY STEINA" (if more than one please list them below)

Browser requirement(s) "VIDEO WORKS"

Plug-in requirement(s) _____

This sample requires broadband connection (fast Internet connection)

A local copy of the sample work has been included with the application

Special Information For Viewing:

1. SAMPLE OF INTERACTIVE VIOLIN
2. SAMPLE OF INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION
3. SAMPLE OF INSTALLATIONS } 15 MIN.

Description of Work (use an additional sheet if necessary)

The supplementary material on VHS describes my playing video on the violin from early experiments in the mid 70ies to variety of machine controls. I have not found limits yet, maybe some day I might play the bulldozer digging up the road. The tape then continues with two description of interactive performances, in the first one two projectors overlap on one wall, where the third projector is on the opposite wall. The second has seven variations on a single camera feed, yet too expensive for 7 projectors. The tape continues with samples of some installations, old and recent.

My love affair with art was all-consuming from the time I was 8 or 9 years old until my late teens. I lived by it. I went to every concert, play, opera and gallery show I could. Nothing else in life made any sense to me. I never chose to be an artist, I just knew I would not work in a bank or wait on tables. I loved playing my violin, but when faced with the prospect of being a professional musician, I realized I had made a dreadful mistake. I found myself in New York in the mid-1960s going from gig to gig, wondering if there was not more to life than black dress and meager fees. Then I discovered video - what a rush! It was like falling in love; I never looked back. As soon as I had a video camera in my hand-as soon as I had that majestic flow of time in my control-I knew I had my medium.

I always intend my installations to be experienced in a quiet, dark place. A museum is potentially a good exhibition venue, but museum people always seem interested in placing video installations in a maximally visible location. They tell me triumphantly, "We are going to give you the lobby." It is always assumed that video ought to be loud and public, but I really want it to be quiet and private-a thousand monitors and one viewer, and not the other way around. I want the viewers to be so absorbed by the work that they experience another level of mind. I expect them to share the kind of strong feeling I have for the material, and to my amazement, they sometimes do.

The aspect of the process of creation I like most is the initial recording. Sleet or snow or howling rain, I love that part, especially if I am alone out in nature. In New Mexico, where I live, my images are rivers, mountains and arroyos, but when I found myself in the metropolis of Tokyo, my material became the people.

Between taping and editing, there is usually an intermediary step during which I alter and mix the images, change color or run things upside down or backwards. This is where the particular uniqueness of working with the electronic image comes into play. It is somewhat akin to photographic darkroom techniques, but it really reminds me of playing an instrument. I change style, timbre, dynamics and key in an improvisational and spontaneous way.

In my multi-channel video compositions, I often make a ground image of a certain duration, which I then duplicate as tape #2, tape #3, etc. I then drop different but complementary images into the copies, and a phenomenon similar to musical composition starts occurring. Starting with a melody or theme, I add harmonic lines and discover that the melody is far less interesting than the counterpoint. Sometimes there is an emergent melodic structure that interweaves through the instruments or (in my case) the video screens.

Late-twentieth-century art is fast-too fast for me. But I realize that I am out of sync with the mainstream, which wants things fast. Multi-channel compositions liberate me from this concern with speed, since they rely on different time principles and are more like music.

I do not like teaching, just as I did not like going to school. It is an absurd theater, the teacher supposedly all-knowing and the students posing as eager minds waiting for illumination. So when I do teach,

I go through the theory and the techniques-video is rather complex technically-and explain about frequencies, voltages and the timing structure of the signal. I go into history, show a lot of tapes-mine and those of colleagues- and discuss them with the students. Then I ask them if they believe in UFOs (unidentified flying objects), at which point the whole class gets very uneasy. Half of them say they do, half say they do not.

The class sessions that the students seem to appreciate most are the ones in which I present "the world according to Steina." We discuss the way the galleries sew up the art scene and make the artists kiss ass. I always tell them that they do not have to kiss ass. And they seem greatly relieved, almost as though they did not know this. I remember once overhearing a student say, "But we have to do this kind of conceptual/intellectual work because this is that kind of a school." I turned around and said, "NO YOU DON'T." And the whole class laughed because they realized that they really don't. I tell them that it is every artist's duty to be disobedient. We discuss what it means to be a mainstream person and have a comfortable life and how deciding to be an artist basically means deciding to live a materially uneasy but more rewarding life. They discuss this for a while-not that they have not already thought about it a lot, but they get lonely and confused. So I reassure them that there is no grander life than the creative, artistic life. It is the unknown, the exploration, the fact of being your own person on your own time.

After I ask my students about UFOs (which some of them say they do believe and others say they don't), I tell them we are not going to talk about UFOs anyway but about how we must stick to our beliefs. I tell them that, if they believe in UFOs, they should raise their hands whether or not the other half of the class is going to sneer. The discussion turns to intimidation and lying about one's beliefs just to get along. It is emotionally stressful to admit to having an independent mind. One does not have to be an artist to experience this dilemma, but I believe it is the artist's duty to stay on the fringe.

The creative process, for me, is a tremendous pleasure, even when it is painful, such as when I feel inadequate to the task. People perceive this pleasure in my work and often object, "But you are just playing!" This comment gives me tremendous pleasure!

The motivation to make art seems to come from a deep desire to communicate; for some artists, it comes from a desire to communicate on a massive scale-something that does not particularly interest me. I see no qualitative difference in more people versus one person if I am communicating. Our whole existence seems to be about communication. It cuts through cultures, languages and continents. It also cuts through time. We spend so much time with people we have never met-often with people who are long dead. But the primary motivation for all art is the desire to communicate with oneself. This is a spiritual idea. It has been the sad lot of many artists to communicate only to future audiences, but through lucky coincidences, artists and their audiences have sometimes found each other in the same place at the same time. Paris in the 1920s was like that. New York in the late 1960s was like that for us. It was a luxury.

Steina

Project Narrative

I am dividing the projects for a Rockefeller fellowship into two categories: interactive performances and interactive installations). Both are in dire need of upkeep and advancement. Technology is quickly advancing, enabling me to augment and improve upon my work.

Installations:

In the interactive installations I have been using 8-year-old software (very old by computer standards) with vintage Macs, the 8500 and 8600 series that have been discontinued now for several years. The new hard and soft ware promises much higher resolution along with enormous increase in speed. These are important considerations, but what is of importance though is the creative boost they deliver. It is hard to guess beforehand what works will be created, but I intend to take advantage of a large warehouse type space at Center for Contemporary Art of Santa Fe offered to me for next fall.

Performances:

For the performance video, I am moving away from the violin into a more general performance, using life images and sounds. This I will not be able to do without considerable infusion of time and money. Luckily I do not have to worry about exposure, I get fairly steady offers for performing both here and abroad.

Time Schedule:

Should I be so lucky to get a Rockefeller fellowship, I would spend the first 6 months working on upgrades and improvements, there is a steep learning curve in adapting new software. The next ca 6 months would be spending on creative applications, hopefully resulting in more than one new installation plus longer, more varied performances. The last 6 months would have my energy go into promoting and playing both locally and internationally.

Steina

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Budget:

A Mac Power Book	2,000.00
A Sound Processor	250.00
Software Assistance Fee	2,000.00
Three Mac 5 Computers	10,000.00
A Camcorder	750.00
Artist fee	20,000.00
Total	<u>35,000.00</u>

Explanations on budget:

The prices on equipment fluctuate enormously at the moment, specially on camcorders and MACs. There is a lot more equipment and software necessary for both the performance and interactive installations (projectors, violin and accessories), which I already own. What I need most are living expenses for a year.

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Steina

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Steina was born in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1940. She studied violin and music theory, and in 1959 received a scholarship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture to attend the State Music Conservatory in Prague.

Woody and Steina married in Prague in 1964, and shortly thereafter she joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. After moving to the United States in 1965 she worked in New York City as a freelance musician. She began working with video in 1969, and since then her various tapes and installations have been exhibited in USA, Europe and Asia. Although her main thrust is in creating Video Tapes and Installations she has recently become involved in interactive performance in public places, playing a digitally adapted violin to move video images displayed on large video projectors.

In 1971 she co-founded The Kitchen, an Electronic Media Theater in New York. Steina has been an artist-in-residence at the National Center for Experiments in Television, at KQED in San Francisco, and at WNET/Thirteen in New York. In 1988 she was an artist-in-residence in Tokyo on a U.S./Japan Friendship Committee grant. She has received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute and the New Mexico Arts Division. She received the Maya Deren Award in 1992 and the Siemens Media Art Prize in 1995. In 1993 she co-curated with Woody the exhibition and catalogue, *Eigenwelt der Apparatewelt* (Pioneers of Electronic Art) for Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria. In 1996 she served as the artistic co-director and software collaborator at STEIM (Studio for Electronic Instrumental Music) in Amsterdam. In 1996 Steina and Woody showed eight new media installations at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, an exhibition repeated in Santa Fe a few months later. Her installation, titled *Orka* was featured in the Icelandic Pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale. In 1999 she showed three installations in three countries: "Nuna" in Albuquerque, New Mexico, "Textures" in Reykjavik, Iceland and "Machine Vision" in Milano, Italy. She created two installations for the Art Festival 2000 in Reykjavik, Iceland. In 2001 she was invited to festivals in Norway, Russia, Estonia, Portugal, Montreal, England and Italy. Between July and October of 2002 she realized four installations in four locations in her hometown of 22 years, Santa Fe, NM