

# Steina

(Steinunn Briem Bjarnadóttir)

Born in 1940, Reykjavík, Iceland

Lives and works in Santa Fe, NM

## Bio

Steina (b. 1940) is a pioneering video artist who has been producing work since the 1960s. She moved from Reykjavík to Prague in 1959 to study the violin and there met her husband, the filmmaker Woody Vasulka. In 1965 they relocated to New York where Steina gradually came to focus on electronic media and video art. With Woody, she began showing video art, and in 1971 they founded The Kitchen, which has been a powerful force in shaping a cultural landscape in the US. It was among the very first American institutions to embrace the emerging fields of video, performance, and cross-disciplinary explorations. An internationally acclaimed institution, the Kitchen is one of New York's oldest and most active nonprofit art centers, and has helped launch the careers of many artists who have gone on to worldwide prominence. Together they also worked to develop the Center for Media Studies at the State University of New York in Buffalo. Although Steina and Woody have often collaborated in their art, Steina's own approach has resulted in an extensive body of work, which includes both video art and performances. She often uses the violin to create not only sound but also images by manipulating the signal through electronic means. Steina's work has a strong lyrical quality, which is perhaps most clearly expressed in her series of multi-screen video installations using images of landscapes in Iceland and New Mexico, where she and Woody settled in 1980. She has explored the entire range of possibilities in video art and electronic media, from documentaries to purely machinegenerated art. Her work has been exhibited at major museums and festivals around the world, including the Whitney Museum, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Berlin Film Festival, and the National Gallery of Art in Reykjavík. Steina became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1976, and in 1997 she represented Iceland at the Biennale di Venezia. In 2014, the Vasulka Chamber, a center of electronic and digital art in Iceland, was established at the National Gallery of Iceland. The Vasulka Chamber is a collaboration with Steina and Woody Vasulka, and includes a part of the Vasulkas' archive.

## Chronology (selected)

1953–1957	Studied violin and music theory in Reykjavík.
1959–1963	Received a scholarship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture to attend the State Music Conservatory in Prague, Czechoslovakia.
1962	Met Woody Vasulka in Prague.
1964	Joined the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. Married Woody Vasulka in Prague.
1965	The Vasulkas emigrate to New York City.
1965–1970	Worked as a freelance musician and studied music. By the end of the 1960s she decided to focus entirely on video.
1969	The Vasulkas began experimenting with video feedback and working with the SONY Portapak Video System.
1970	Became very involved in the New York cultural scene, taping theater and music, notably at the "legendary Audubon Hall in Harlem." Their early tapes, such as <i>Don Cherry</i> (1970) and <i>Participation</i> (1971) are from this period.
1971	Co-founded The Electronic Kitchen (later abbreviated to The Kitchen), an experimental performance space devoted to electronic media in New York (official opening June 15th),

together with Woody and Andres Mannik. In addition to the vanguard daily program at The Kitchen, established the first annual video festival and cooperated with David Bienstock in the organization of *A Special Videotape Show* at the Whitney Museum.

Participated in some of the first exhibitions of video art, such as *Continuous Video Environment*, at WBAI Free Music Store (New York) and *Transmitted Environment* at the Experimental Television Center Binghampton (New York).

During this period Steina and Woody collaborated in wide-ranging investigations into the electronic nature of video and sound.

- 1973 Moved to Buffalo, New York.
- From 1974 and over the ensuing years, the artistic interests of Woody and Steina diverged. Steina started to experiment with the camera as an autonomous imaging instrument which evolved into her *Machine Vision* series, and that has since been widely exhibited e.g. at Albright-Knox Gallery Buffalo, NY (1978), The Pittsburgh Museum of Art, PA (1982) and ZKM, Karlsruhe (2006).
- 1976 Received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship.
- Participated in the Berlin Film Festival, 6. Forum des Jungen Films.
- 1977–1979 Taught video at the Department of Media Study, State University of New York, Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo).
- 1980 Moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. In the following years, the exploration of landscape became a recurring theme for Steina. She applied her idea of *Machine Vision* to diverse landscapes, e.g. in *Ptolemy* (1990) and *Geomania* (1987) and used the Digital Image Articulator in works such as *Selected Treecuts* (1980) and *In Search of the Castle* (1981).
- 1981 New Mexico Art Division Production Grant for *Summer Salt* (1982).
- 1982 Received grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts to produce her installation *The West* (1983), which in the following years, was widely shown both within America and internationally, e.g. at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (1984).
- 1984 Received the Laser d'Or AIVAC, International VideoArt Festival Locarno, Switzerland.
- 1986 Collaborated with singer and composer Joan La Barbara on a series of interactive technology compositions included in the works *Voice Windows* (1987) and *Events in the Elsewhere* (1989).
- 1988 While spending six months in Tokyo on a U.S./Japan Friendship Committee grant, she produced *In the Land of the Elevator Girls* (1989) and *A So Desu Ka* (1994).
- 1989 Received the American Film Institute Grant to post-produce her video installation *Tokyo Four* (1991).
- 1991 Began producing interactive performances titled *Violin Power* applying the Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) to a videodisk player control, enabling communication between her violin and video images.
- 1992 Together with Woody, received the Maya Deren Award for Independent Film and Video Artists, conferred by the American Film Institute, Los Angeles, California, honoring her for her contribution to developing and reinventing the film and video industry.
- Together with Peter Weibel the Vasulkas acted as curators for the exhibition *Eigenwelt der Apparate-Welt* (Pioneers of Electronic Art) for Ars Electronica Linz (Austria). Taught media at the Akademie für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, Austria.
- 1993 Media Art Production Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
- 1995 Received the Siemens Media Art Prize, conferred by the ZKM | Karlsruhe and, together with Nam June Paik, performed at the Kwangju Biennale, in South Korea.
- 1996 Served as artistic co-director at STEIM (Studio for Electronic Instrumental Music) Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Collaborated with software engineer Tom Demeyer in the development of a

- performance-in-real-time image processing software.
- 1997 Represented Iceland at the Biennale di Venezia, 47e Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, where she presented *Orka* (1997) at the Icelandic Pavilion.
- 1998 Received an honorary doctorate from the San Francisco Art Institute, and was honored with an award for her exceptional contributions to media art by The National Association of Media and Culture (NAMAC), San Francisco, CA (together with Woody Vasulka).
- 1999 Organized a workshop on Art and Science in collaboration with Woody Vasulka, the composer David Dunn and the physicist James Crutchfield at Santa Fe Arts Institute.
- 1999 Showed three installations in three countries: *Nuna* (1998) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, *Textures* in Reykjavík, Iceland and *Machine Vision* (1978) in Milano, Italy.
- 2000 Created two installations (*Lava & Moss* and *Mynd*) for the Art Festival 2000, in Reykjavík, Iceland.
- 2001 Invited to festivals in Norway, Russia, Estonia, Portugal, Montreal, England and Italy.
- 2006 Vasulka Lab, 1969–2005 *Allvision* (1976) and *Theater of Hybrid Automata* (1990) presented at the ICA, London and VIVID, Birmingham, UK.
- 2006–2007 Artist-in-residence at the ZKM | Karlsruhe, where she helped to organize and participate in the exhibition *MindFrames: Media Study at Buffalo 1973–1990*.
- 2008 *Steina: 1970-2000* solo show at SITE Santa Fe; shows in Iceland and Bern, Switzerland.
- 2009–2013 Works shown in Glasgow, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Reykjavík, Long Island City, Long Beach, Denver, Boulder, Albuquerque and Santa Fe, US.
- 2014 Presentations and workshops in France, Belgium, Germany, Norway and Seattle, WA.  
Works shown at Oslo Screen Festival, Oslo.  
Nomination for Prix Ars Electronica award, as Visionary Pioneers of Media Art.  
October dedication and opening of the Vasulka Chamber, at the National Gallery of Art, Reykjavík, Iceland.
- 2015 Works shown in Culturehouse, Reykjavík, The Vasulka Chamber at The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Momentum 8: Tunnel Vision, Norway, Currents Festival, Santa Fe, Hafnarborg, Iceland, Nordisk Panorama, Malmö, Sweden, Axle Contemporary, Santa Fe, Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, Czech Republic, The Paseo Taos Outdoor Art Festival, New Mexico.  
Received Knight's Cross of the Order of the Falcon from the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson.
- 2016 September dedication and opening of the Vasulka Kitchen in Brno, Czech Republic.  
Works shown in Whitechapel Gallery, London, Entrance Gallery, Prague, The Vasulka Chamber at the National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Raven Row, London, Le Lait Art Centre, France, Galeries Lafayette, Toulouse, France, Berlin Atonal, Berlin, Code Art Fair, Copenhagen, Atelier Nord, Oslo, Kuryokhin Center of Modern Art, St. Petersburg, Neon Digital Arts Festival, Dundee, Scotland, Untitled Art Fair, Miami Beach, Vasulka Kitchen, Brno, Czech Republic.  
Received the Distinguished Artist Award For Lifetime Achievement in Digital Art by The ACM SIGGRAPH Awards Program and an Honorarium Artist Salary from the Icelandic parliament.
- 2017 Works shown in the Vasulka Chamber at The National Gallery of Iceland, The Vasulka Kitchen in Brno, Czech Republic, The Reykjavík Art Museum, The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, BERG Contemporary, Reykjavík, Photo London, LOOP Barcelona.
- 2018 Solo exhibition with Woody Vasulka, *Art of Memory* in Pori Museum, Pori, Finland.  
Works shown in Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany, The Current Museum of Art, New York, Media Art Festival, Rome, Carroll Gallery, Huntington, WV, Verksmiðjan, Hjalteyri, Iceland, and the National Gallery of Iceland,

- Vasulka Chamber, Reykjavík.
- 2019 Works shown in Zebrustraat, Ghent, Belgium, BOZAR, Brussels, Peter Blum Gallery, New York, Museum of History of Photography, St. Petersburg, Russia, Fiac, Paris, France, Gerðarsafn – Kopavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland, Hafnarborg – Centre of Culture and Fine Art, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland and the National Gallery of Iceland, Vasulka Chamber.
- 2020 Works shown at CHART Art Fair, Reykjavík, Iceland, Centro Internacional de Cultura Contempoánea Tabakalera, San Sebastian, Spain, Kjarvalsstaðir, Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland, the National Gallery of Iceland.
- Videos by Steina
- 1972 Distant Activities, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 4:48 min.
- 1975 Land of Timoteus, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 6:46 min.
- 1976 Switch! Monitor! Drift!, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 50 min.
- 1977 Flux, 3/4" U-matic video, b&w, sound, 8:12 min.
- 1977 Orbital Obsessions, 3/4" U-matic video, b&w, sound, 24:13 min.
- 1977 Nam June Paik (with Esther Harriott), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 25:55 min.
- 1978/2006 Funtime at the Vasulkas (with Tom Busch, Hollis Frampton, Jeffrey Schier, Paul Sharits), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 7:30 min.
- 1978 Violin Power, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 10:04 min.
- 1979 Bad, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 2:10 min.
- 1980 Cantaloup (with Jeffrey Schier and Woody Vasulka), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 22:56 min.
- 1980 Selected Treecuts, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 6:39 min.
- 1980 Urban Episodes (with Josef Krames and Woody Vasulka), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 8:59 min.
- 1980 The Making of Urban Episodes, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 2:20 min.
- 1982 Summer Salt, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 17:56 min.
- 1982 The Making of Somersault, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 1:30 min.
- 1987 Lilith (with Doris Cross), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 9:12 min.
- 1987 Aria, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 3:13 min.
- 1989 In the Land of Elevator Girls, SVHS video, color, sound, 4:16 min.
- 1990 Ptolequad, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 12:20 min.
- 1990 Vocaquad (with Joan La Barbara), 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 11:35 min.
- 1992 Eigenwelt, Video Hi 8, color, sound, 15:05 min, with Peter Weibel, Lee Harrison, Stephen Beck, Lori Zippay, Glen Southworth, Bill Etra, Ralph Hocking, Sherry Miller Hocking, Eric Siegel, David Dunn, David Muller, MaLin Wilson, Melody Sumner Carnahan and Michael Sumner.
- 1994 Warp, digital video, color, sound, 4:13 min.
- 1994 A So Desu Ka, SVHS video, color, sound, 9:33 min.
- 1995 Pyroglyphs (with Tom Joyce), Video Hi 8, color, sound, 26:05 min.
- 1997 Orka, Video Hi 8, color, sound, 15:11 min.
- 1999 MidiViolin, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 10:50 min, with Michael Saup, Tim Thompson, Saburo Teshigawara, Joan La Barbara, Michel Waisvisz, Leatitia Sonami, Cas de Marez, Trevor Wishart and Francis M. Uitti.
- 2000 Lava and Moss, digital video, color, sound, 15:09 min.
- 2000 Trevor (with Trevor Wishart), digital video, color, sound, 11:06 min.
- 2002 Music in the Afternoon (with Tony Conrad), digital video, color, sound, 4:15 min.
- 2004 Twisted Water, Video Hi 8, color, sound, 4:33 min.

- 2004 Rome Performance, digital video, color, sound, 14:40 min.
- 2005 Pyrospheres (with Tom Joyce), Video Hi 8, color, sound, 5:57 min.
- 2014 Pergament, digital video, color, sound, 12:31 min.
- 2015 Emerald World Without Us, video, color, sound, 25:59 min.
- Videos by Steina and Woody Vasulka
- 1970 *Don Cherry* (with Elaine Milosh), 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 19:20 min.
- 1970 *Sketches*, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, approx. 27 min.
- Alfons, performer: Alfons Schilling.
  - Charles's Story, performer: Charles Hayworth.
  - Gundance, performer: Daniel Nagrin.
  - Let it be, performer: The Beatles.
  - Red Roses, performer: Jackie Curtis.
  - The Kiss, performer: Helen Wong.
  - Thierry, performer: Thierry Benison.
- 1970 *Studies*, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w and color, approx. 45 min.
- Calligrams
  - Decay I
  - Decay II
  - Descends
  - Discs
  - Tissues
  - Interface, performer: Charles Hayworth, audio: Gino Piserchio
- 1971 *Participation*, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 63 min, with Paul Ambrose, Ian Anderson, Billy Andrews, Garry Bartz, Tally Brown, Lary Chaplan, Don Cherry, Kevin Coe, Jackie Curtis, Candy Darling, Miles Davis, Jack DeJohnette, Eric Emerson, Estelle!, Christmas Eve, Michael Henderson, Jimi Hendrix, Stephen Holt, Keith Jarrett, Jay Johnson, Aunt Josie, Agosto Machado, Taylor Mead, Buddy Miles, Geri Miller, Mario Montez, Airtó Moreira, Paul Morrissey, Ondine, Ritta Redd, Al Sayegh, Silva!, Ekathrina Sobechanskaya, Steve Stanwick, Steina, Archie Strips, David Susskind, Tinkerbelle, Jethro Tull, Richard Weinstock, Holly Woodlawn.
- 1972 *Spaces II*, 1/2" Open Reel video, b&w, sound, 7:45 min.
- 1973 *Home*, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 16:45 min.
- 1973 *Golden Voyage*, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 14 min.
- 1973 *Telc*, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 5:10 min.
- 1974 *1-2-3-4*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 4:10 min.
- 1974 *Solo for Three*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 7:10 min.
- 1974 *Heraldic View*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 4:17 min.
- 1974 *Soundgated Images*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 9:15 min.
- 1974 *Soundsize*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 4:40 min.
- 1974 *Noisefields*, 3/4" U-matic video, color, sound, 7:05 min.
- 1981 *Progeny* (with Brad Smith), 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 18 min.
- 1981 *In Search of the Castle*, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 9:40 min.
- 1984 *Pariah* (with Tim Thompson), 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 26:05 min.
- 1987 *Voice Windows* (with Joan La Barbara), 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 8:05 min.
- 1989 *Events in the Elsewhere* (with Joan La Barbara), 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 15:40 min.



- 1992 *Doris*, 1/2" Open Reel video, color, sound, 16:35 min.  
 1999 *Techne and Eros*, digital video, color, sound, 14:35 min, with Mort Subotnick, Jim Crutchfield, Steina, Woody Vasulka, Diane Armitage, Oliver Scott, David Dunn, Joan La Barbara, Simone Aaberg, Tom Demeyer, Bruce Hamilton, Russ Gritz.

## Installations by Steina

- 1976 *Allvision*, electro/opto/mechanical environment, with instrumentation by Woody Vasulka.  
 1978 *Machine Vision*, electro/opto/mechanical environment, with instrumentation by Josef Krames, Woody Vasulka, and Bruce Hamilton.  
 1983 *The West*, two video/four audio channel video matrix, 30 min cycle.  
 1987 *Geomania*, two video/four audio channel video matrix, 15 min cycle.  
 1998 *Nuna*, three video/audio channels, 10 min cycle.  
 1990 *Ptolemy*, four video/eight audio channel video matrix, 10 min cycle.  
 1990 *Vocalizations* (with Joan La Barbara), four video/eight audio channel projected video environment, 15 min cycle.  
 1991 *Tokyo Four*, four video/four audio channel installation, 23 min cycle.  
 1991—present *Violin Power The Performance*, interactive performance.  
 1993 *Borealis*, two video/four audio channel projected video environment, 10 min cycle.  
 1995 *Pyroglyphs* (with Tom Joyce), three video/audio channels, 20 min cycle.  
 1997 *Orka*, three video/audio channel projected video environment, 15 min cycle.  
 2000 *Cascades* (with Sissú Pálsdóttir), six video/audio channels, 16 min cycle.  
 2000 *Mynd*, six video/audio channel projected video environment, 18 min cycle.  
 2000 *Lava & Moss*, three video/audio channel projected video environment, 14 min cycle.  
 2001 *Of The North*, three video/audio channel projected video environment, variable length.  
 2002 *Bent Scans*, life interactive environment.

## Installations by Steina and Woody Vasulka

(Produced various multi-channel installations and matrixes at *The Kitchen*, 1971–1973)

- 1970–1972 *Matrix I*, video installation, 12 monitors, b&w, sound, 24:20 min, dimensions variable.  
 1972 *The West # 1*, video environment, two channels, b&w, sound, 15 min cycle.  
 1974 *Matrix II*, video installation, 12 monitors, color, sound, 8:30 min, dimensions variable.  
 1983 *The West # 2*, video environment, two channels, color, sound, 30 min cycle.  
 1992 [1972] *Soundprints*, two channels video/audio, b&w, variable cycle.

Collections (selected)

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
The Daniel Langlois Foundation Collection  
The National Gallery of Iceland  
The Reykjavík Art Museum  
The Living Art Museum  
The Smithsonian American Art Museum  
The Thoma Foundation  
The Centre Pompidou  
Tate  
The Roswell Museum  
ZKM  
LUX  
The Whitney Museum