

PYROGLYPHS 1994

A VIDEO MATRIX INSTALLATION BY STEINA IN COLLABORATION WITH TOM JOYCE

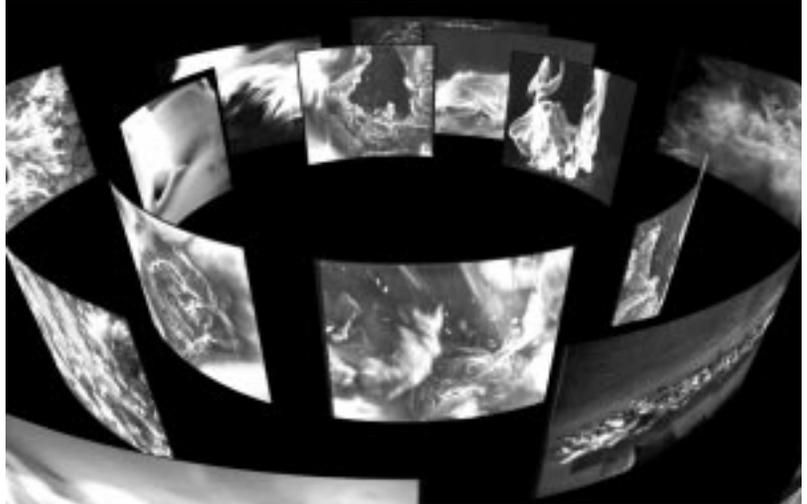
The initial inspiration for *Pyroglyphs* was the ancient art of blacksmithing but it soon became a musical treatise . . . In Steina's words: "In 1994 I spent long hours with blacksmith Tom Joyce, videotaping the process of building an iron gate. I found iron gates a little too concrete, so I closed in on the intense and violent nature of materials being manipulated by torches, files, and anvils—the rapid flicker of flames. . . . Tom and I share a fascination with fire — as a phenomenon and as a medium that transforms other materials . . . as a medium of transmutation."

Steina videotaped, mostly in closeup, the activities of blacksmithing (hammering, filing, welding, manipulating fire), the phenomenology of fire (flames, sparks, combustions, glowing metals), and various improvised scenes — a vise crushing a timber, a stack of books burning, paper and wood being scorched.

*Editing this material into three complementary image tracks was relatively easy (the visuals were similar or dissimilar in compatible ways) but the sounds of those images were often too similar or too strident, competing for attention. So the sounds determined the editing. Steina processed them through digital devices like harmonizers, which couldn't turn the random noises into harmonics but produced interesting sounds anyway; pitch shifters that move a sound to the octave immediately above or below; and reverb circuits to create echo effects. The sounds and rhythms are rendered *allegro con brio*, *pianoforte*, or *pianissimo*: there is a lot of percussive hammering, say, then all is quiet and we hear only crackling flame or the hollow whisper of the blowtorch. . . .*

PYROGLYPHS is a spectacular meditation on fire. Steina has created a sublime landscape illuminated by the many-hued glow of fevered metals and shows of sparkling scintilla. She makes us feel the hypnotic pull of lambent flames even as our breath is caught by the preemptive ignition of the torch, our hearts quickened by the violence of the forge.

— GENE YOUNGBLOOD, MEDIA THEORIST



DESCRIPTION

In *PYROGLYPHS*, fifteen (or eighteen) monitors are arranged in a circle on the floor facing up and inward at a 30 degree angle. The viewer stands outside this circle looking in.

Three channels of video program recorded on laser disk players provide one video and two audio sources each routed to a circle of video monitors with internal speakers (see drawing for assignment). The laser disk players are aligned by a synchronizer for synchronous playback. Each player at the end of its twenty-minute cycle automatically returns and re-synchronizes for a continuous performance.

THE SPACE

The minimum active space required is 7.5 meters by 7.5 meters by 3.5 meters high, or, 25 feet by 25 feet by 12 feet high. The major consideration in terms of space is the total avoidance of ambient light. The space should be painted a non-reflective black and no light source should exist, other than the one that emanates from monitors themselves. Also include a low bench seating four or five people. The entrance must be well insulated from light and sound. Most ideal is a double trap door with sound insulating material. (See floor plan and entrance diagrams.)

NOTE: The tech equipment except the monitors and speakers should be located outside the exhibition space in a small adjacent tech area.

EQUIPMENT

The Vasulkas can provide all the equipment listed below, or share resources with the exhibitor. This will be reflected in both shipping and equipment budgets.

- 15 or 18 matching video monitors
- 3 Pioneer Video Laser Disk Players, LD-V Series
- 3 program video laser disks NTSC, color
- 1 three channel synchronizer
- 3 stereo audio amplifiers (6 audio channels)
- 6 speakers (internal speakers of superior quality may be used)
- 6 speakers stands or wall mounts
- 15 video cables
- 3 pairs of stereo cables
- 4 speaker cables
- 22 power outlets
- 1 circular rug (optional)

NOTE: The laser disk synchronizer used by the Vasulkas is custom built and interfaces only with Pioneer Industrial Laser Disk Players (2200 to 8000 Series). It is not interchangeable with laser disk players from other manufacturers, such as Sony and Phillips, which require a commercially available synchronizing

MONITORS

The fifteen (or eighteen) monitors must be matching in size and manufacture. They are placed on the floor in a circle facing inward without spacing in between, tilted about 30 degrees upwards. Some monitor models are designed to make this easy; with others, wedges must be built to be put under the monitors to tilt them upwards from the floor. These wedges must be custom-made (one for each) to fit the size and shape of the monitors.

VIDEO MATRIX ASSEMBLY AND WIRING

Place a circular rug (provided along with the other installation equipment) in the middle of the room. The rug provides a convenient way to establish a center around which the monitors can be placed in an approximate circle. An alternate method is to draw an erasable circle on the floor.

First connect the players to the monitors (see drawings). Channel one connects to the first on the line, skips the next two, connecting to the fourth, seventh, etc. Channel two connects to the second, fifth, eighth monitors, etc. Channel three connects to the third, sixth, ninth, etc., monitors in the circle. If the monitor speakers are of very good quality, the audio can be chained the same way as the video (six discreet audio channels), so the sound emanates from each monitor in equal intensity.

After verifying that all audio and video cabling is working, lift the front of each monitor one-by-one about 30 degrees up to place the pre-fabricated wedges underneath. Now push the monitors toward the middle, an equal distance from the edge of the rug, so that the front edges of the monitors touch. Once the circle is perfect, all the cables should be tucked under the monitors and tied down. Finally, remove the rug or erase the drawn circle.

AUDIO WIRING

Connect the two stereo cables from each player to the three amplifiers, and the six speaker cables to the speakers. The speakers should be hung on the walls at equal distances.

SOUND AND IMAGE ADJUSTMENT

Treble should be normal and bass at maximum. All 75 ohm terminators located on the back of the monitors must be switched to open, except for the last monitor on each chain. Contrast should be high and brightness below middle. The basic rule here is to set up the proper deep color black as a reference to the maximum contrast and brightness. With that, the other components (hue, color saturation) can be assigned. The persons installing the environment must use their esthetic judgment as to the proper monitor settings for maximum visual impact.

DAILY OPERATIONS

TO START: Power up the monitors, disk players, and synchronizer. Wait a short while to verify that the installation is starting synchronously. If not, turn power off and on again for the players and synchronizer. If problem persists, notify Steina by phone, fax, or e-mail.

TO SHUT DOWN: Turn power off the monitors, disk players and synchronizer.

MAINTENANCE: The monitor screens need to be cleaned with a soft cloth at least once a week.

POWER REQUIREMENTS

(depending on equipment used)

Video monitors:	Sony PVM 1910	120 watts
Stereo amplifiers:		150 watts
Video disk players:	Pioneer 2200	70 watts
	Pioneer 8000	100 watts
Synchronizer:	Jericho Data Systems	40 watts

NOTE: Outside USA, use a Power Transformer 220 to 110, 1000w.

CREDITS

At the entrance to the installation these credits should appear:
 "Pyroglyphs by Steina in close collaboration with Tom Joyce."

SHIPPING INFORMATION

Installation is shipped in one crate. Weight and dimensions available upon request.

Shipped to and from:

Steina and Woody Vasulka
 Route 6, Box 100
 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
 ph: 505-424-8786
 fx: 505-473-0614
 email: woodyv@santafe.edu

