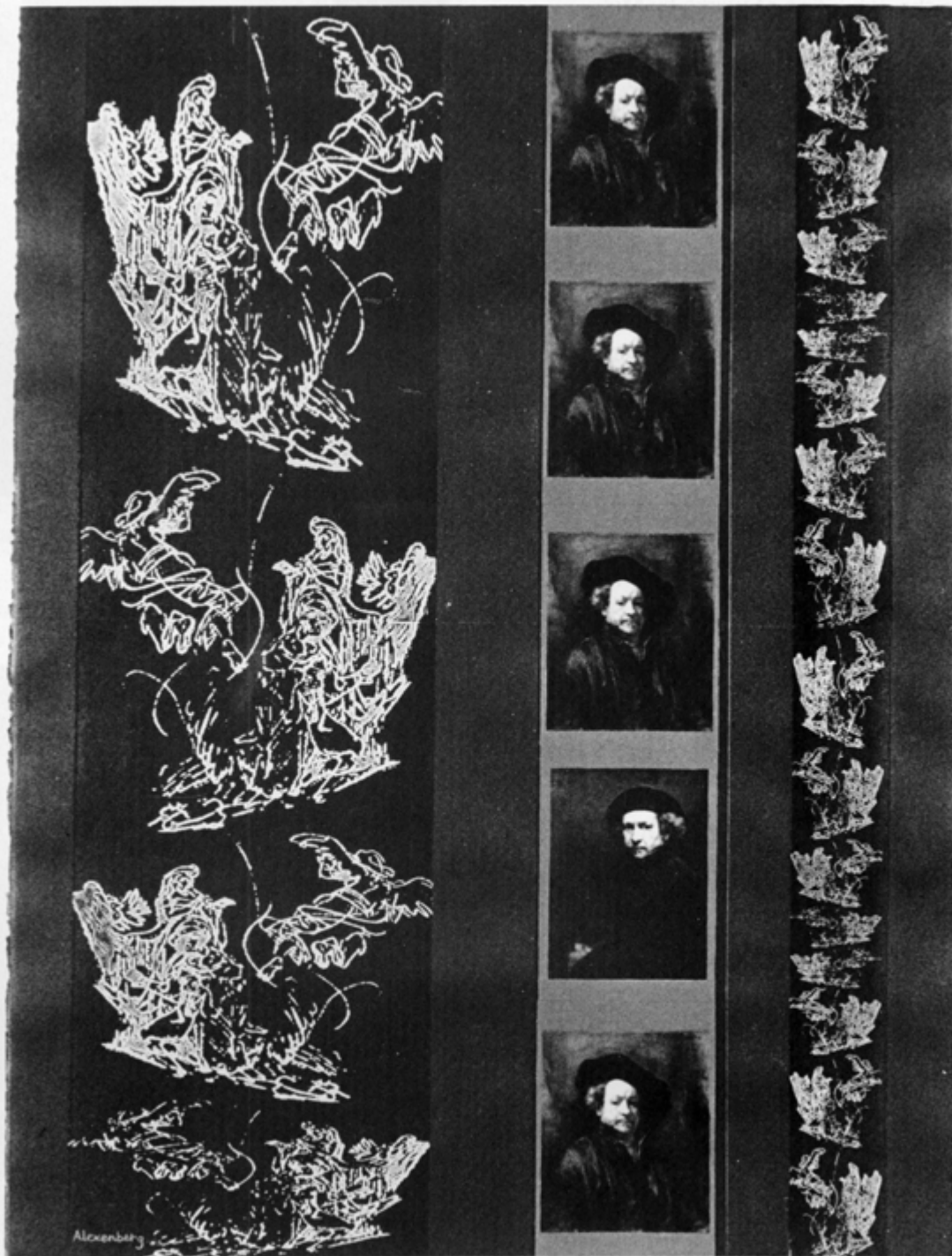


# MEL ALEXENBERG COMPUTER ANGELS



**NOVEMBER 24 - DECEMBER 24, 1987**

**THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to guest curator Stephen Larese, Technical Specialist in the Department of Art at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, for initiating the exhibition of works by Mel Alexenberg. I also want to thank Eleanor Flomenhaft, Executive Director, and Charles Olson, Registrar, of The Fine Arts Museum of Long Island in Hempstead, and Lewis Lusardi, Director of the Educational Communications Center at the University at Stony Brook, for their technical assistance with the preparation of the Alexenberg show.

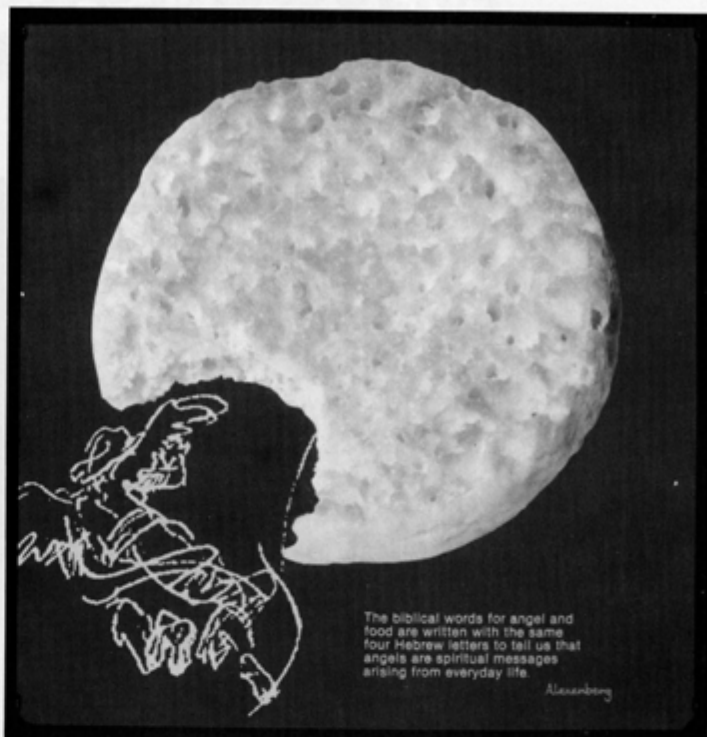
I also want to acknowledge the assistance of Patricia Kerr Ross, Director, and Janet Brennan, of Programs in the Arts of the State University of New York in Albany, for making Steina and Woody Vasulka's video installation available to us.

Special thanks are also extended to Michael Giangrasso and Pete Pantaleo for installation assistance and to members of The Fine Arts Center staff: Joyce Chen, Nancy Dugan, Ophelia Lopez, and Selena Wright, Art Gallery Assistants; Cynthia Maki, Jill Muller, and Eileen Solomon, Gallery Interns; Patrick Kelly, Technical Director, and Liz Stein, Assistant Technical Director, Fine Arts Center, for exhibition lighting; and Mary Balduf, Gallery Secretary.

Most of all, I wish to thank Mel Alexenberg and Steina and Woody Vasulka for sharing their work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper  
Director

*Front cover:* Mel Alexenberg, *Rembrandt Observing Computer Transformation of His Drawing*, 1987  
Relief etching and collage, 30" x 22"



Mel Alexenberg  
*Subway Angel*, 1987  
Mixed media, 23" x 21"



Mel Alexenberg  
*Subway Angel*, 1987  
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## COMPUTER ANGELS

### Mel Alexenberg: Artist's Statement

My art explores the aesthetic and socio-cultural impact of the Electronic Revolution on our lives and consciousness. I believe that the Electronic Revolution will be the most far-reaching revolution in the history of humanity. Electronic media are extensions of our nervous system. They are extensions of mind. Computers add mindpower. Telecommunications systems give global range to our interactions. Our perceptions of ourselves and our place in the universe are being transformed. Our concepts of space and time are shifting.

The two earlier revolutions of comparable magnitude were the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. Unlike the Electronic Revolution which is a qualitative leap, these two prior revolutions were quantitative changes. They provided extensions of our muscular system. The ox made our arms stronger and the horse made our legs faster. The tractor and automobile just added more strength and greater speed. There was no shift in kind.

The circular/cyclical organization of space and time in the Agricultural Revolution can be symbolized by the round, flat pita bread. The rectangular supermarket bread fragmented into slices, wrapped in plastic to stop olfactory and tactile contact can symbolize the rectangular/lineal organization of reality in the Industrial Revolution. Art actively engaged in ritual, teaching, and decoration were replaced by "art for art's sake," by still-life/*nature morte*, by art clearly separated from everyday life by a golden frame. Art that told the legends of the tribe and didactically presented the cosmology of a people gave way to the visual illusion of three-dimensional space delineated in single-point perspective.

The dynamic multiform experience of the Electronic Age changes the assembly-line mentality that fragments time and traps it in the rectangular boxes of calendars and schedules. Telecommunications technology frees me to simultaneously be in today and tomorrow. If I phone Jerusalem tonight, it will be the morning of the next day for the person who answers my call. I can speak into tomorrow.

In contrast to the circle and rectangle, which are closed forms, electronic information is stored, processed, and communicated in spirals and branching systems. Spiral and branching forms are open-ended systems of life and growth. The genetic information for all living organisms is encoded in the DNA helix; electronic information is stored in-spiral computer, video, and audio tapes and discs. Like a branching tree, electronic networks, computer architecture, telephone systems, and electrical systems are organized for growth of new branches.

I started to use electronic technologies in making art in 1965 while I was a doctoral student at New York University. I pioneered in generating images using computers. Concurrently, I began research on the psychodynamics of aesthetic experience in the creative work of artists and scientists, which was published in my book *Aesthetic Experience in Creative Process*.

Working with computer imaging and employing general systems theory to build conceptual models of creative thought and action demanded a counterbalance in my life. Thus, at the same time, I was painting with colorful molten waxes in the encaustic technique popular 2000 years ago, as well as writing books for children. One of my encaustic paintings, based on my computer graphics explorations, was reproduced in full color on the cover of the April 1966 issue of *International Science and Technology*. Three years later, Prentice-Hall published the first edition of my best-selling book for young readers, *Light and Sight*.

In a chapter entitled "High Tech/High Touch," in John Naisbitt's book *Megatrends*, he points out that the high tech drain of working with computers creates a counter-balancing demand for high touch experiences. The human potential movement, meditation, and the revival of crafts grew alongside the Electronic Revolution. "We must learn to balance the material wonders of technology," Naisbitt writes, "with the spiritual demands of our human nature."

I believe, moreover, that the Electronic Age of extended mind and global range carries within it the seeds of spiritual renewal. Consider, for example, that in the very room in which you are reading my words thousands of events from throughout the world are happening simultaneously. A concert in Moscow, a baseball game in Los Angeles, cooking lessons in Jerusalem, Big Bird in New York, a carnival in Rio, ski jumping in the Swiss Alps, an auto race in the south of France, and more and more events all happening in the room in which you are now reading. You may ask, "What are you talking about? My room is quiet and empty. The only event occurring in this room is my act of reading this catalog." Think, however, if you had a TV receiver with a large enough dish antenna or a shortwave radio receiver, you could tune into all the events that have been silently present in your room all the time. These events will have been electronically transformed into signals of electromagnetic energy that cannot be perceived by our ordinary senses. But they are here now nonetheless, permeating our environment, even passing unnoticed through our bodies. With the right receivers, however, these hidden worlds are

revealed to us.

The Kabbalists tell us about other hidden worlds intermingling with our everyday world of ordinary perceptions. These are the world of Formation from which angels of emotion emanate and the World of Creation from which angels of mind emanate. Sometimes we can feel good or bad "vibes" permeating our environment. These are worlds that the artist can tune in that exist beyond our senses.

The Electronic Age of television, radio, and facsimile machines which bring myriad events from invisible realms into our perception gives us a clue to the worlds that the Kabbalists described millennia ago.

During the past year, I have been appropriating Rembrandt's angels, digitizing and transforming them with computers and sending them on circumglobal voyages by fax machine via communications satellites. These computer angels symbolize the spiritual. I make them ascend from the subway posters. They emerge from the products of the supermarket. They hover over UPC bar code symbols striped like ancient prayer shawls. They point out that we can reach spiritual heights in the quality of our encounter with everyday life. The difference between the material world and the spiritual world is one's perspective. It is the special way in which we view our everyday world that can change it into a spiritual realm. We can see the angel or get the spiritual message by shifting our angle of vision. The angle from which we see the world determines whether it is merely material or it is also spiritual. A shift in point of view can transform the material world into a spiritual one.

To emphasize the emergence of the spiritual from material realms, I also created computer angels on differing materials. I screen-printed, painted, and etched them on bright plastics, wood, cork, black rubber, masonite, rusted steel, zinc, and other materials. I call them "Material Angels."

As an artist of the Electronic Age, I am most interested in pointing out the spiritual in everyday life. I strive to make the ordinary extraordinary. I aim to show the miraculous in the mundane.



Mel Alexenberg  
*Digitized Homage to Rembrandt: Joseph's Brothers I*, 1986  
Serigraph, 30" x 22"  
(not in exhibition)

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Measurements are given in inches, height preceding width. All works are lent by the artist.

1. ***DIGITIZED HOMAGE TO REMBRANDT: JACOB'S DREAM***, 1986  
Etching, photo-etching, and aquaprint, 30" x 22¼"
2. ***NIGHT ANGELS***, 1986  
Lithograph, 30" x 22"
3. ***DIVERGING ANGELS OVER UPC RICE KRISPIES LAWN***, 1987  
Triptych: acrylic on canvas, 52" x 126"
4. ***MATERIAL ANGELS***, 1987  
Series of twelve: mixed media, 12" x 16" each
5. ***RAINBOW ANGEL: COMPUTER ANGEL OVER UPC RAISIN BRAN RAINBOW***, 1987  
Acrylic on canvas, 52" x 68"
6. ***REMBRANDT OBSERVING COMPUTER TRANSFORMATION OF HIS DRAWING***, 1987  
Relief etching and collage, 30" x 22"
7. ***SUBWAY ANGELS***, 1987  
Series of eight: mixed media, 23" x 21" each

**MEL ALEXENBERG**  
**BORN 1937, NEW YORK**

Mel Alexenberg studied at the Art Students League of New York, Cornell University, and Columbia University. He has received degrees from Queens College, City University of New York, Yeshiva University, and New York University. Mel Alexenberg was Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Adelphi University, Long Island, New York (1965-69); Senior Lecturer at Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, and Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem (1969-73); and Associate Professor of Art at Columbia University, New York (1973-77). He served as President of Ramat Hanegev College, Yeroham, Israel, and as Associate Professor of Aesthetic Education at Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel (1977-84). From 1984 to the present, Alexenberg has been a Research Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for Advanced Visual Studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since 1985, Mel Alexenberg has served as Professor and Chairman of Fine Arts at Pratt Institute's School of Art and Design in Brooklyn, New York, where he is also Director of the Pratt Graphics Research Center.

**RECENT ONE-PERSON Exhibitions**

- 1987 Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, New York  
Pratt Manhattan Gallery, SoHo, New York City  
Horace Richter Gallery, Old Jaffa, Israel
- 1986 President's Gallery, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York  
"Parentheses of Asia," Environmental art work on the beaches of Chikura, Japan and Tel Aviv, Israel. Serigraph documentation in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and in the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo.

**RECENT GROUP Exhibitions**

- 1987 "Lights/Orot," Yeshiva University Museum, New York City  
"The Hundredth Year," Art Gallery, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia  
"Second Emerging Expression Biennial: The Artist and the Computer", Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York  
"High Tech/High Touch," Pratt Manhattan Gallery, SoHo, New York City  
"Transformations," Reynolds Gallery, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California
- 1986 "Sky Art '86," Center for Advanced Visual Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge  
"Imagining Antarctica," State Museum, Linz, Austria

**SELECTED MUSEUM COLLECTIONS**

Art Museum of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Canada; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio; Chiba Perfectural Museum of Art, Chiba-Shi, Japan; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York; Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, New York; Greenville Museum of Art, North Carolina; Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee; Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Scotland; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Long Beach Museum of Art, California; Malmo Museum, Sweden; Meridian Museum of Art, Mississippi; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Midwest Museum of American Art, Elkhart, Indiana; Musee des Beaux-Arts, Budapest, Hungary; Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Caracas, Venezuela; Museo Nacional de Artes Plasticas, Montevideo, Uruguay; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, Austria; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri; New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Australia; San Antonio Museum of Art, Texas; Tel Aviv Museum, Israel; Toronto Center for Contemporary Art, Ontario, Canada; University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, Wyoming; and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England.



**Mel Alexenberg**  
**Subway Angel, 1987**  
Mixed media, 23" x 21"

## STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA: THE WEST

"The West," a six screen video installation by Steina and Woody Vasulka, is a 30-minute piece which runs continuously. It employs state-of-the-art video technology, yet is lyrical in its imagery. Since its premiere in Albuquerque in May, 1984, "The West" has been seen in New York City, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles, and at video centers and festivals in Spain, Switzerland, Iceland, and France. The piece was originally produced by Programs in the Arts of the State University of New York for SUNY/The Arts on Television.

In "The West," video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka explore the ancient and contemporary records of mankind's actions on the desert landscape. Steina's camera has recorded the ceremonial sites of Chaco Canyon, home of the ancient Anasazi people, ancestors of today's Pueblo Indians; the ruins of a Spanish church at Quarai; and New Mexico's VLA (Very Large Array) radio-telescope system. With Steina's mechanized camera and spinning mirrors, and with highly saturated golds and blues, the imagery is in constant, stately motion. Woody created the four-channel audio environment and assisted with production and instrumentation.

In describing the inspiration of her work, Steina says, "In no other region of the country does the presence of the sun play such a significant role in the ecology of the land — arid and eroded, with an exceptional clarity of the bright skies — forming notions of extra-terrestrial importance in the minds of its inhabitants. The landscape, by its dimension and by its geometric and textural variety, inspires man to create harmonious structures, dwellings, and other earth works."

Steina was born in Iceland in 1940 and attended the Music Conservatory in Prague. She came to the United States in 1965 and has been a seminal force in the development of the electronic arts since 1970. She and her husband, Woody, are co-founders of "The Kitchen," an experimental video center in New York City. Her tapes have been exhibited and broadcast extensively in the United States and Europe. She was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1967 and has, with her husband, received grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Woody Vasulka was born in Czechoslovakia where he studied metal technologies, hydraulic mechanics, and the arts. He emigrated to the United States in 1965, and in 1967 began experiments with electronic sounds, stroboscopic lights and, two years later, with video. In 1974, he became a faculty member of the Center for Media Study at the State University of New York at Buffalo and began his investigations into computer controlled video, building "The Vasulka Imaging System," a personal imaging facility. Like Steina, he has been a Guggenheim Fellow.



Steina and Woody Vasulka in Kiva Rindonada, Chaco, New Mexico during the shooting of *The West* in 1983.

**The West**  
Created by: Steina Vasulka

Instrumentation and production assistance:  
Woody Vasulka

Four-channel audio environment:  
Woody Vasulka

Produced by Programs in the Arts  
of The State University of New York  
for SUNY/The Arts on Television

With funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and the  
National Endowment for the Arts.

## PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975** FACULTY EXHIBITION
- 1976** MICHELLE STUART  
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF  
ARTS EXHIBITION)  
SALVATORE ROMANO
- 1977** MEL PEKARSKY  
JUDITH BERNSTEIN  
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION  
OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
- 1978** LEON GOLUB  
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK  
JANET FISH  
ROSEMARY MAYER  
THE SISTER CHAPEL
- 1979** SHIRLEY GORELICK  
ALAN SONFIST  
HOWARDENA PINDELL  
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
- 1980** BENNY ANDREWS  
ALEX KATZ  
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK  
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS  
OTTO PIENE  
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
- 1981** ALICE NEEL  
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS  
JOHN LITTLE  
IRA JOEL HABER  
LEON POLK SMITH
- 1982** FOUR SCULPTORS  
CECILE ABISH  
JACK YOUNGERMAN  
ALAN SHIELDS  
THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL  
ANN McCOY
- 1983** THE WAR SHOW  
CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW  
CINDY SHERMAN  
THE FACULTY SHOW
- 1984** BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS  
ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS  
NORMAN BLUHM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES  
EDWARD COUNTEY 1921-1984  
CARL ANDRE: SCULPTURE
- 1985** LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919  
FRANCESCO TORRES: PATHS OF GLORY  
HOMAGE TO BOLOTOWSKY: 1935-1981  
FREEDOM WITHIN: PAINTINGS BY JUAN SANCHEZ/  
INSTALLATION BY ALFREDO JAAR  
ABSTRACT PAINTING REDEFINED
- 1986** KLEE: METAL SCULPTURE  
TOBY BUONAGURIO: SELECTED WORKS  
YANG YEN-PING AND ZENG SHAN-QING  
EIGHT URBAN PAINTERS: CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS  
OF THE EAST VILLAGE  
TV: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS  
WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE SURREALIST MOVEMENT
- 1987** HANS BREDER: ARCHETYPAL DIAGRAMS  
MICHAEL SINGER: RITUAL SERIES RETELLINGS  
JUDITH DOLNICK/ROBERT NATKIN  
MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE: THE HUMANITARIAN VISION

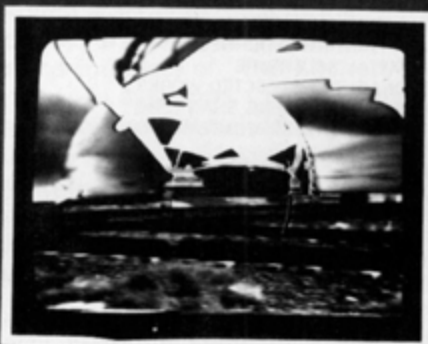
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**art gallery**

# STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA THE WEST



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