

Developments in Programming  
and Technology Affecting  
the Home Viewer

November 1980

## THE VIDEO SCENE

### The Big Apple: First in Video

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#### The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, and Dance

A block away from Global Village is the Kitchen Center, which last month held a three-day international conference, "Television/Society/Art." Cosponsored by the American Film Institute and planned by the Kitchen's director, Mary MacArthur, the conference brought together intellectuals to discuss the importance of television as a mass communication, an art, and an ideological force. The conference not only marked the beginning of the AFI's expanded role in

the television arts, but it was also a recognition of the important role the Kitchen has played for a decade in developing the artist's perception of television.

Steina and Woody Vasulka, pioneers of electronically generated, synthesized video, founded the Kitchen in 1971, when the audiences who had been coming to their loft to see new video began to overflow. They set up a video theater in the Mercer Arts Center. (It was named the Kitchen because the theater was in the old kitchen of the Broadway Hotel, which housed the arts center.) The theater was completely reassembled for each show, with the artists designing their own exhibition to fit their work. This freewheeling, funky atmosphere accommodated single-channel or multichannel video, conventional or multidirectional seating, and became a model for future video exhibition.

The Kitchen moved to its present location, in Soho, in 1973. Its large theater-gallery with high ceilings, pillars, and gigantic windows allowed the Kitchen, in the mid-seventies, to play a part in the development of video installations, sculptures, and performances.

In 1978, to accommodate the proliferation of single-channel tapes, director Mary MacArthur expanded the Kitchen's video exhibition with its new Video Viewing Room. In this small, intimate room, tapes are shown on a single monitor, back to back, all day, like "a magic television network." The audience can lounge comfortably, become absorbed in New Wave, Australian, or electronically generated video, or leave to view an exhibit in the adjoining gallery.

In 1980 and 1981, five installations will be premiered. (An installation is an exhibit by one artist with a certain theme and using a configuration of television sets or other video equipment.) An elaborate work by Rita Myers, entitled "Dancing in the Land Where Children Are the Light," will convert the theater-gallery into a fantasy landscape of sandlike paths with hanging metal sculptures and monitors. MacArthur, video curator Jackie

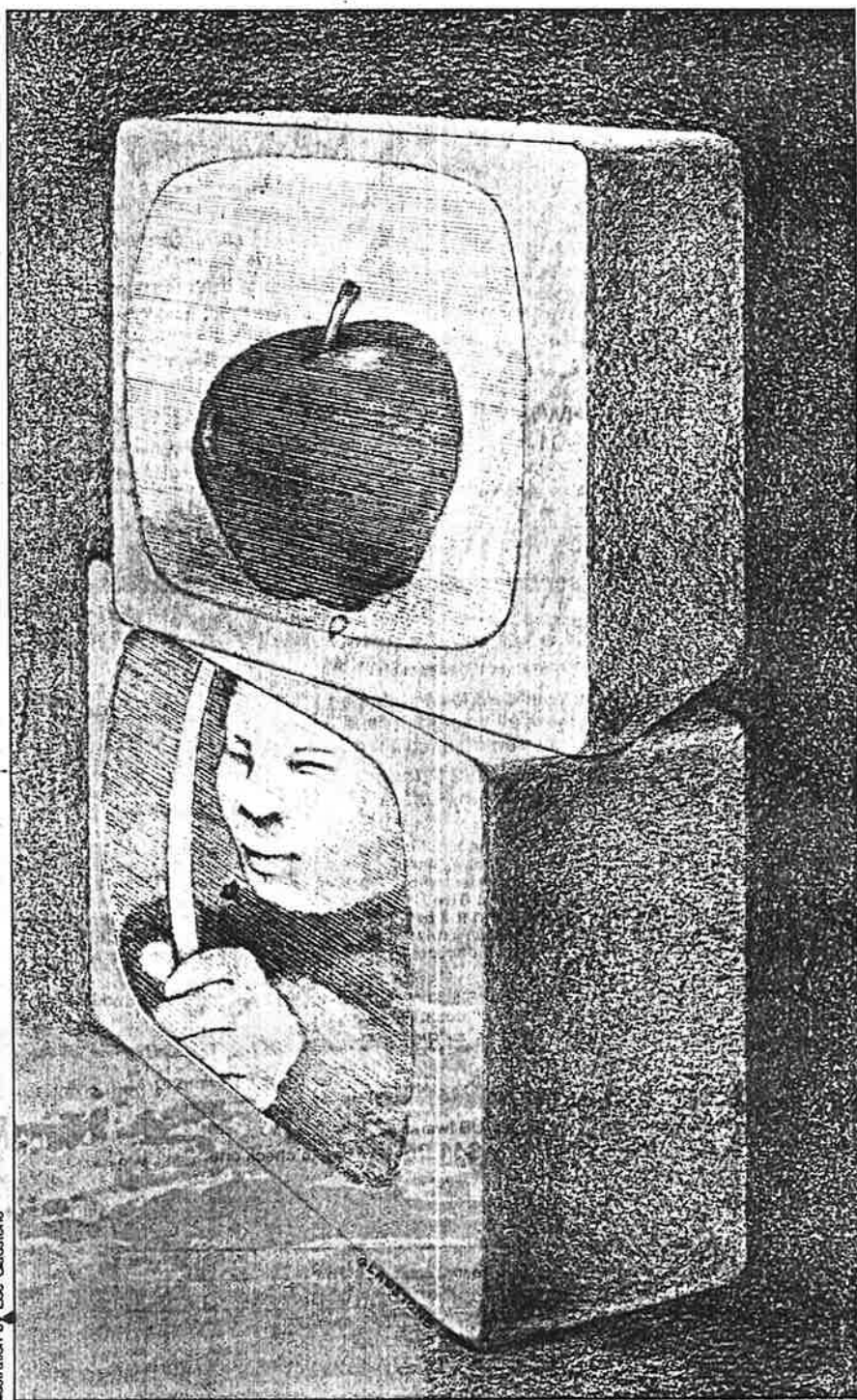


Illustration by Lee Gladstone

# THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR  
VIDEO, MUSIC  
AND DANCE

## Field of Vision (continued)

have this effect on many spaces, its "at homeness" at the Kitchen is particularly pertinent, as Steina was one of the founders of the Kitchen.

Hopefully, the words of this piece, meant to describe, are actually somewhat hard to decipher, mystifying. Because for all its centered simplicity, the piece is mysterious, and takes real concentrated deciphering on the part of the viewer to figure out just what is happening—what the cameras are doing there, what they are seeing, what we see on the monitors, what each monitor is seeing in relation to the cameras, how we seem to get into the picture in different ways, just how many different ways we are being seen, what happens when we move in relation to the whole thing.

Even after I had "figured it out," I still had a sense of mystery, and deciphering turned to a kind of philosophical meditation, until the piece asked the kind of philosophical questions such as "if a tree falls in a forest and no one is there, does it make a sound?" Since the space-time are the space and time of a compressed infinity organized out of immediate daily realities, we are able to relate ideas of infinity, paradox, riddle to ourselves and our surroundings, especially because ourselves and our surroundings are precisely the apparent subject of Allvision's imagery. Allvision is the land of meditative art being cultivated by artists seeking sanity and a profundity in a more-than-often hectic society which mainly cultivates the superficial. The whir of the machine, the sounds of distant footsteps, doors opening and closing, which accompany Allvision (the actual sounds of the piece and the environment), remind me of Susan Sontag's essay "The Art of Silence," its language of not-words, not-images, produced for a kind of positive endlessness.

Allvision to me relates to the history of twentieth century sculpture as much as it does to video art. The revolving machine reminds me somewhat of Tinguely's self-destructing machines, though Allvision's function is to organize and synthesize rather than disrupt and destroy. And the spherical video image is perhaps in the tradition of Arp sculpture.

It is this writer's opinion that video sculpture such as Allvision is one of the most vital and relevant forms of sculpture in the 1970s, and should be regarded as such by established museums. Video sculpture (all the artists I have written on for Field of Vision—Shigeo Kubota in the last issue, and Robbins, Clarke, and Vasulka here, make video sculptures) distill the positive electronic energy-field and the feedback properties of our twentieth century electronic technology into concentrated, highly charged art of processes, structures, and imagery.

