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"The Brotherhood: Table III," a video installation by Czech artist Woody Vaskula, includes images of the Persian Gulf War. It is showing at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown, through May 17.

Vaskulas' 'Electronic Image' a video stunner at Wood Street

By Mary Thomas

Steina and Woody Vaskula are masters of electronic art. The artists, based in New Mexico, are known for their stunning works and technical innovations.

You can see for yourself at Wood Street Galleries, where their captivating video installation, "The Electronic Image," is on view through May 17.

The Vaskulas co-founded New York's The Kitchen, a theater space for experimental electronic media in 1971.

Steina studied violin and music theory, and her "Borealis" has been aptly compared to a musical composition. She taped nature in the raw, coastal surgings and simmering volcanic hot spots, in her native Iceland.

These images were manipulated and made into a beautiful 10-minute sound-accompanied work that is projected onto five large screens suspended in a dark room.

The characteristic video light component flushes the screens with a supraorganic brilliance.

At one moment, an abstract expressionist panel appears, its colors fluid and vibrant. In the next, the horizon line is turned on end, and waves become silky veils fluttered by an alien wind.

Sitting through the piece more than once compounds the experience, allowing the viewer to discover complexities of motion and pattern. At times one may feel swept into the swirls like a bobbing bottle.

Woody's "The Brotherhood: Table III" addresses modern warfare and makes for quite a contrast.

Its technology is exposed within the structure of a bomber computer skeleton gleaned from Los Alamos surplus. Five screens are orderly and geometrically arranged within a gray space that suggests the constant twilight and directed intensity inside a military plane.

Here the soundtrack is terse, some of it conversation from a real incident of "friendly fire" during the Persian Gulf War. The tone and the telescoping images that suggest targeting and speed convey the experience without falling into stereotype.

At times more lovely footage contradicts place: a yellow-orange flame contracting like a sun's aura, a gridded black and white room.

A panel at the side allows the viewer to become co-creator and co-conspirator by pushing pads that alter the computerized piece.

Enter Wood Street Galleries at the corner of Wood Street and Sixth Avenue. An elevator takes you to the galleries on the second and third floors.

Out on a limb

Also at Wood Street, an intent audience of about 400 turned out last weekend for Stelarc's mesmerizing futuristic performance, "Parasite." The artist's limbs moved in response to muscle stimulators activated by commands searched out on the Internet.

This happened within a backdrop of technorhythms culled from Net sites, body sound amplification and a lush saturation of projected visuals that expanded the work's aesthetic reach.

It was an experience that won't be easily forgotten, conceptually or optically.