



Vortex: A Swirling Mass of Terrestrial Elements by Film-artist, Nataša Lisa Young-Prosenc Stearns, at Wallspace, Los Angeles

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The view from the street is spectacularly distracting. From outside, in the flash and the glimpse that a drive-by meagerly offers, the front picture window of Wallspace, Los Angeles is filled with the swirling of fire and earthly elements.

During the month of February, gallerist Valda Lake is exhibiting the gallery's second video installation, *Vortex*, by film-artist Nataša Prosenc Stearns.

Upon entering the gallery, flashes of light can be seen as a projector beams a continual stream of imagery onto a thin, woven fabric screen. The sheerness of the screen allows the images from the video to transmit to the other side, allowing passersby access to the goings-on within the gallery. This "night window projection," perhaps intentionally or unintentionally, serves as a public art piece. With lights dimmed, the darkened gallery is filled with the swooshing sounds of moving earth: sand, rocks, wood, soil, sea salt, charcoal. The sounds are soothing, a sort of meditative humming; working together, the video and sound engage and hypnotize the viewer. Both the visuals and the calming audio envelop the viewer and stimulate the senses.

Stearns, a Slovenian artist, is a filmmaker based in Venice, California. In the early 90s, she received her undergraduate art degree in Slovenia, where she began creating video art. In 1997, Stearns was honored with a Fulbright Grant to work on her terminal degree in film and video at the California Institute of Arts. In 1999, chosen as the artist to represent Slovenia, Stearns first exhibited *Vortex* at the 48th Venice Biennale.

Vortex is a 5-minute looped video featuring terrestrial elements, swirling violently as they are being sucked into a black hole. The earthly materials gradually shift from one type to another, blending together to show that one is related to the other. Different shades of sand alternate with different shades of rocks, wood, soil, salt, etc. Fire dances intermittently with the sand and rocks. Gusts of dust flurry. Leaves sparingly make appearances. The elements are in constant motion.

The audio overwhelms the gallery. The sounds shift with the change in elements. The continual humming tricks the senses into hearing the ocean, coincidentally, another of earth's elements. The overall experience of Stearns's video piece is sublime.

Although we might deduct from Stearns's video piece a comment on the environment, such as in a political manner, the artist explains that it is not her intention to be didactic. The artist tells me that her video doesn't have one interpretation. Each viewer will bring their own experiences to the gallery and interpret her video according to their own relationship to the world. She continues, "[My video] will not be understood the same everywhere." Each and every culture may have a different understanding of the environment and/or what it means to them.



To the rear of the gallery is a massive 56" x 77" photo-mosaic composed of stills from *Vortex*. The mosaic, also titled *Vortex*, is assembled with 182 separate photographs, converging together in an intentional yet imperfect manner. And, although created with still prints, the captivating mosaic evokes supernatural movement. Stearns tells me, "Each print catches certain things that are not in the video. They are moments just before the video happens." *Vortex*, the mosaic, was introduced to the public in an exhibition at the Slovenian Embassy in Washington D.C., and is now being shown for the first time in Los Angeles, at Wallspace.

Vortex will be shown as a night window projection at Wallspace throughout the month of February. The video installation will be projected every evening beginning at dusk and running throughout the night; it is viewable from the sidewalk. Wallspace is located at 607 North La Brea, Los Angeles 90036, just south of Melrose. Its hours of operation are: Monday-Wednesday 11am-7pm, Thursday and Friday 11am-9pm, Saturday noon-9pm, or by appointment. <http://www.wallspacela.com/>

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