

Video Classics:

A Guide to Video
Art and Documentary
Tapes



ORYX PRESS

the meaning of a compulsion to endure this primitive race with death. It ends with producer Bill Marpet in the bull ring, trembling in his boots but gamely waving a cloth before a bull calf. He grins and waves, now a participant as well as observer of this age-old ritual.

Sabda

by Dan Reeves

1984. 15 min. color.

Distributor: EAI. Formats: ¾", VHS, Beta.

Credits: *Producer/Photographer/Editor* Dan Reeves *Associate Producer/Sound Recordist* Debra Schweitzer *Post-production Assistant* Larry Mishkin *CMX Editor/Digital Video Effects* Richard Feist *Post-production Facility* Matrix Video. *Thanks* Lillian R. Katz, Larry Mishkin, Marcia Dickerson, Marilyn and Bob Schweitzer, 185 Corporation. "Kabir's Song" translated by Swami Chidvilasananda; poetry by Nammalvar translated by A. K. Ramanujan; by Kabir, translated by Linda Hess; by Basavanna, translated by A. K. Ramanujan; by Ramprasad Sen, translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely. *Funding* John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, Port Washington Public Library.

Inspired by Indian poetry, philosophy, and religion, video artist Dan Reeves set out on his own mystical journey through India. SABDA is his lyrical video poem, a collaboration with some of the great Indian medieval poets. In it Reeves succeeds as few Westerners have in revealing the complex reality that is India.

The tape is a visual rhapsody of exquisite, luminous, slow-motion imagery. Reeves's movement vocabulary ranges from breathless still images of a moon between two trees to wide, sweeping arcs that shift ground and transport the viewer into a mental state where Shakti indeed seems to dance amid the flames. Loosely swinging his camera, Reeves addresses the eye level of a tiny child or soars heavenward, as though flinging his camera into the air. His sensuous camera movements are like the gestures of a dancer. Their subtlety and grace are further enhanced by digital video effects, which grab frames at varying rates, producing an illusory sense of reality: In one poignant scene, a woman beggar stands, solid despite her fragile frame, as the material world streams past, transparent and insubstantial.

Over lyrical phrases of people walking, working, begging, playing, over landscapes alive to the harvest picker or strangely still and remote, Reeves graphically displays the poems of Kabir, Nammalvan, Basavanna, and Ramprasa Sen. He thus enters into a dialogue with poets, a dialogue between eternal India and the heart of a Western visionary.

Visual images of elephants, tigers, leopards, water buffalo, and birds weave through the tape, powerful metaphors for states of being in life and death and the hereafter. Throughout, Reeves questions what is real, what is lasting, what is meaningful. What can a poor man do? SABDA is his answer.

Dan Reeves came to international prominence with his award-winning autobiographical tape, SMOTHERING DREAMS. Eager to separate from his searing memories of the Vietnam war, Reeves's recent tapes, such as *Haiku* and *Amida*, have been more poetic, revealing the profound influence of Eastern philosophy, religion, and art on his work.

Selected Treecuts

by Steina

1981. 6 min. color & b/w.

Distributor: The Vasulkas. Format: ¾".

Awards: Ithaca Video Festival

SELECTED TREECUTS rhythmically alternates between black-and-white images of trees blowing in the wind, a computer memory of those trees rendered as a digital, gray-and-white mosaic, and "real" trees, seen in shimmering color. While drawing relationships between these three levels of visual abstraction, Steina also creates a composition for the ear. With audio modulated by the video signal, an om-like sound reverberates, building in intensity as the various visual images cut in and out and the camera zooms in and out on them. The increasing speed of alternation between scenes and their sounds climaxes and subsides like the dying wind in the sunstroked trees. Mathematically balanced in its formal composition, the tape stirs a metaphysical reverie: Steina's images seem to peel away the surface of the natural world and reveal, in all its nakedness and primal energy, the life force at work.

Born in Iceland, Steina trained as a violinist before marrying Woody Vasulka and embarking on an internationally renowned career as a video artist. She is noted for exploring the aesthetics of "machine vision." Although she frequently collaborates with her husband, Steina uses only her first name when producing individual tapes.

SELECTED TREECUTS was made using the Digital Image Articulator, or Imager, a unique instrument the Vasulkas developed with designer Jeff Schier to explore real-time video and image performance. During the 18 months they spent designing the Imager, Steina produced a tape about its design, construction, and use for the Television Lab at WNET/13. Titled *Cantaloup*—the fruit is used as a model to demonstrate how the system works—this tape offers a fairly