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CART 263 Section A

### **Jennifer Steinkamp: Where Nature Meets Code**

Nature, filtered through technology, is at the heart of Jennifer Steinkamp's immersive art. Jennifer Steinkamp, an American installation artist, was born in Denver, Colorado, in December 1958. The eldest of five children, she grew up in a family that moved frequently before eventually settling in Edina, Minnesota. At the age of twenty, she moved to Los Angeles to attend the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. There, she studied alongside influential figures such as artist Mike Kelley, known for his provocative multimedia work; media theorist Gene Youngblood, author of *Expanded Cinema*; and painter and critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, recognized for his writings on aesthetics and contemporary art. Steinkamp later transferred to the California Institute of the Arts to study experimental animation, a discipline that would deeply influence her artistic practice. She returned to the Art Center to complete her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1989, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in 1991. Twenty years later, the Art Center College of Design recognized her with an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts. At present, she is a professor in the department of Design Media Arts at UCLA.

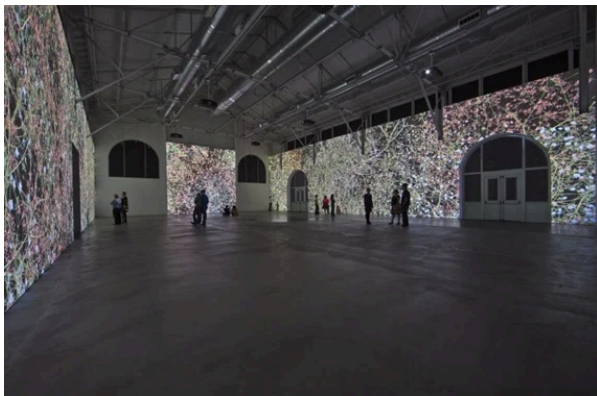


Working primarily in video and digital media, Steinkamp has played a crucial role in the development of 3D animation as an artistic practice. Since the late 1980s, she has created immersive, computer-generated environments that challenge conventional boundaries between the virtual and the physical. By adapting and altering existing software, she crafts dynamic visual experiences that reshape the viewer's perception of architectural space. Her installations often use projected light to dissolve the solidity of walls, replacing them with vividly rendered, digitally animated simulations of natural elements. These organic forms (trees, flowers, vines) appear simultaneously lifelike and synthetic, evoking a world that feels at once soothing and strangely unfamiliar. Steinkamp's work frequently explores how we relate to space, nature, and time, and how digital technology mediates that relationship. As described on Lehmann Maupin

gallery website, she “uses technology to render organic and abstract forms in motion and give deeper insight into the often unseen complexities of the natural environment.”

Commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in 2011, *Madame Curie* is a site-specific, immersive video installation that exemplifies Jennifer Steinkamp’s signature approach to digital animation. Projected across a sixty-foot-wide wall in the museum’s Farrell Gallery, a space that once functioned as a railway baggage room, the work responds directly to the gallery’s architecture while inviting viewers into a meditative, sensory environment. The installation comprises seven synchronized video channels that form a continuous stream of hyper-realistic flora drifting in a slow, mesmerizing procession. Steinkamp drew inspiration from her research into atomic energy and its environmental aftermath, translating these themes through the lens of Marie Curie, the Nobel Prize, winning scientist best known for her pioneering work on radioactivity. Curie’s passion for gardening offered a poignant counterpoint to her scientific legacy. To reflect this duality, Steinkamp referenced over forty different plants mentioned in Eve Curie’s biography of her mother, including rambler roses, wisteria, chestnut blossoms, and hop vines. These plants, rendered with remarkable realism, form the core imagery of the work, set in motion by complex computer algorithms.

The result is an environment where digital nature moves rhythmically across the walls, evoking both the quiet beauty of a garden and the invisible forces of radiation and energy. Steinkamp’s technique manipulates architectural space, using projected light to dissolve the solidity of walls and construct an uncanny atmosphere that blurs the line between the organic and the artificial. In this digital landscape, time becomes fluid, and space becomes memory. As viewers move through the installation, they are enveloped by the gentle flow of blossoms, invited to feel a disorienting calm, at once intimate and vast, familiar and strange. *Madame Curie* not only honors a scientific legacy but also proposes a poetic contemplation of nature transformed by



unseen forces. In *Madame Curie*, Steinkamp invites us to see nature and science not as opposites, but as intertwined forces. The result is an environment where technology deepens, rather than distances, our sense of wonder. By merging digital animation with natural imagery, Steinkamp crafts immersive experiences that redefine how we perceive space, nature, and time.

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