



Marnie Weber

By Annie Buckley

The velvet curtain parts, a singular light shines, and we are transformed into another space. This phenomenon of theater as portal gets refracted, like so many beams of light, in Marnie Weber's video works. An artist with the astounding ability to perceive and reflect the emotional and psychological states of being human, Weber is known for her uncanny and touching works. Women in masks, bunnies in tutus, a violin-playing pink snail, and other noble creatures grace her collages and sculptures with intelligent innocence.

In video works Weber has been making since 1993, this sense of a separate but familiar space is echoed and expanded to enfold the viewer. Narrative is spun with a poetic sensibility; motifs and themes are clarified not by insistence, or even explanation on any concrete level, but by a deepening familiarity. Cycles, transformation, death, and metamorphosis are explored through actions like turning, floating, dancing, or sleeping, and imagery such as flowers or feathers, and the ubiquitous friendly animals and dreamy but persevering women.

While the majority of her earlier video works take place outside with Weber as the primary actor, the newest, *The Spirit Girls: Songs that*

Never Die (2005) explores similar themes with a larger cast and more intricate sets. Each of the five female leads wears a white mask, long white gown, and longhaired wig. The limited exposure of women's faces and bodies promotes a meditative awareness of what remains; each breath, blink of the eyes, and movement of the hands stands out as if in stark relief to the near motionless gown, fake hair, and plastic face. As in Japanese Noh Theater, the effect seeks to portray not what lies on the surface but that which remains unseen — soul, feelings, or essence.

The piece opens with a spinning pink ballerina and movements offer subtle transitions throughout. Blowing out the candles on a round birthday cake begins the shift to a fantastical outdoor landscape, resplendent with gold and purple skies. A white-feathered bird-woman dances towards the entrance of a lone theater, whose sign advertises the Spirit Girls' performance. Spinning parasols take the women from stage to sea, where they wait in a ship moored by glistening rock. The female characters are by turns ghosts with white animal ears, flowers with petal-framed faces, a glittering mermaid, and a captain at sea, but their metamorphosed journey returns them to the theater.

The ship's captain spies in the distance, not an oncoming ship, but an audience of animal



Songs that Never Die, 2005, video still

friends. Bear, Deer, Pig and the Others clap outsize paws and throw flowers, gradually rising in a standing ovation. Ghosts and angels, unicorns and dancing bears, fantasies and dreams may be the stuff of this multi-dimensional space, but at the heart of the serene and surreal atmosphere of Weber's ingenious weaving lies a Zen-like acceptance, embracing even, of presence and happenstance, cycles and being in this created universe, and by extension - through each blink and breath, gesture and spin — in ours. ■

