

Some Notes On Seeing The Waters Reglitterized

For the last year I've been on the road doing a solo performance "The End of the Moon". Every night another theater, another hotel room. Gradually my dreams became wild, vivid, more and more relentless. Headless singing squirrels, vast empty spaces, bizarre clatterings and invasions. My own dark and private theater was slowly taking over. I began to draw these dreams literally out of self-defense. I kept the computer drawing tablet next to the bed and when I woke up in the dark hotel rooms I tried to draw my dreams before they disappeared.

Over many months of drawing I started to become familiar with their language. Often they were versions of the day's events with a twist of paranoia or fear. Sometimes they seemed portentous, occasionally momentous. Sometimes they would evaporate and I'd spend the day seeing them in tantalizing little snatches, feeling a sense of terrible loss, my heart aching as they dropped out of sight. Keys to lost worlds known only to me.

Obviously the images I was trying to capture weren't really pictures. They were made of ideas, guesses, approximations. So the "people" were a little fuzzy and frayed around the edges. The way they spoke and acted was a bit off. Complicated things like planes or telescopes were a bit vague, their more technical parts buried under sketchy brush strokes. This was partly due to my limited drawing skills but mainly because none of these people or things were actually there. They were pictures invented by the body with the eyes shut tight. There was no way to check the drawing against the real thing.

Who's Watching Who?

As I drew these dreams I noticed several things. One was that my own head often appeared in the foreground. Poking in from the sides. Peering into scenes. Was I watching myself watching my own productions? I began to try to find out how dream images are made. Along the way I came across many questions and theories. Do we dream to remember? To forget? And why dream at all since we almost always forget them right away?

One of the weirdest things I learned about dreaming is that there's a sudden odd reversal that occurs during REM sleep. The set of neurons that usually sends information to the brain about head and body positions abruptly switches off and all sensory information about the head and body is totally suppressed. Then (and this part is *really* strange) this same set of neurons opens two new channels— audio and visual— and begins to send its own "representations" of our head and body along them, fake information about where we are in space, where the head is. So we spend the rest of the REM state sorting through this bogus information, never quite getting a handle on where we are. So in our dreams we float or fly. We're disembodied. Everywhere and nowhere.

Meanwhile the dream drawings were piling up. But they were all so provisional, they were notes to myself, not as evocative as I'd hoped. With pens and brushes I could never really catch the right atmosphere, the huge looming spaces, the heavy charged air. The more I drew the more the drawings began to look like storyboards. Also, dreams aren't just pictures. They're portrayals of physical sensations and emotions: bewilderment, ecstasy, weightlessness, abandonment, freedom— things that are really hard to draw. I needed a medium with more air, fewer scratchy surfaces, movement. So I made one into a movie.

The Blind and the Dead

I chose **4.17.05: The Fox** largely because the center of the image is a corpse. All the "action" revolves around it. The action becomes the watching. We're all circling around and watching something that isn't moving. A bit like a sleeping wake.

Like in other dreams, I could be anywhere. I had the sensation of intense nervous shuffling, snuffling. I could smell the cold skin of the corpse. I could hear myself breathing heavily, my toenails clacking on the floor. I was— after all— inside the head of the fox. Then suddenly I could jump inside my brother's camera and then back to my own spot in the front row. It's as if each time I invented a character I'd see things from that point of view. I could play all the parts. And watch too.



Recently I spent a lot of time in Athens and I often visited the Museum of Cycladic Art. I loved the small stone figurines— their arms crossed, their features streamlined and modern. Nobody really knows quite what their function was. Buried along with the bodies, they seemed designed to be hand held. Like cell phones or I-pods they were smooth and portable. But to me they seemed sort of like calling cards— something you could present when you arrived in the afterlife: “This is what I looked like in the previous world when I had a body.” Whether you enter the other world of dreams or death, there's no way to take your actual body along with you. At most you can take a representation.

The Stills

I also made ten stills of details from the film and printed them on the flimsiest material I could find. I meant it to be like snakeskin, like celluloid film frames, like something peeled from the eye. I had read once about an experiment in which the researchers held a rabbit's head pointed toward a bright window. Then they killed the rabbit and removed the retina from the eye. The image of the window was still printed on the retina like a burning afterimage. In **The Stills** the indelible image floats inside and in front of the gelatin-like material: a hologram, a slide, a phantom. The way our own inescapable pictures become part of our physical bodies.

And the Title?

This summer I spent some time at the Henry Miller Library in Big Sur. I was really curious about what kind of paradise he'd found after traveling all around the world looking for one. And anyway, how can an artist live in a spectacularly beautiful place and still get work done? But Henry Miller not only wrote a lot in Big Sur he also painted many watercolors and wrote about what it was like to try to see and then re-see things, to reglitterize them, to transfer them from one medium to another. In his essay 'The Waters Reglitterized' he wrote:

"You can look at things all your life and not see them really. This 'seeing' is, in a way, a 'not seeing', if you follow me. It is more of a search for something, in which, being blindfolded, you develop the tactile, the olfactory, the auditory senses--and thus see for the first time."

I love the phrase “The Waters Reglitterized” because it suggests our own powers to reinvent what we have seen, to re-create its sensual animal energy . And then to recognize it as the illusion it really is. My secret goal in life is to begin to see not just my dreams this way— but my waking thoughts as well.

Laurie Anderson
September 2005

LAURIE ANDERSON

THE WATERS REGLITTERIZED

September 17 - October 22

Exhibition Coordinators:
Brad Hampton and Amy Gotzler

Dream Book, 2005

Handbound book of iris prints

Bookbinding: Sara Parkel; Woodworking: Ben King
Additional Graphic Layout: Roxanne Wolanczyk & Dyske Suematsu

4.17.05: The Stills, 2005

Iris prints on fabric

4.17.05: The Fox, 2005

High definition video, 5.1 audio

Director: Laurie Anderson
Producer: Cheryl Kaplan
Cinematographer: Toshiaki Ozawa
Camera Assistant: Joe Foley
Production Assistant: Brad Hampton
Location Assistant: Joe Howard
Editor: Kevin Messman
Score: Laurie Anderson
Audio Engineer and Mixer: Jody Elff
Animal Trainer: Sassie Joiris
Hair and Makeup: Wendy Karcher

Cast:

Brother - Chris Anderson
Corpse - Vlatka Horvat
Fox - Abby
Observer - Laurie Anderson

Special Thanks:

Derek Costas, Marc Finer, Don Parenta,
Jeff Sugg, Nahoko Tono, Abel Cine Tech,
Alliance Digital, Barbizon Lighting
Company, Big Apple Lights, Duggal,
Filter Gallery, Panavision New York,
Post Works New York, Xeno Lights
Location courtesy of Julian Schnabel

Iris prints for *Dream Book* and *4.17.05:Stills* printed at Duggal under the supervision of Jose Vargas

QUALIA by Sony Electronics, has generously provided the QUALIA 004 front projector in support of this exhibition.

Stewart Filmscreen has generously provided the screen in support of this exhibition.

Madeline Weinrib Atelier at ABC Carpet & Home has generously provided the rugs for this exhibition.

Special thanks to Toshi Ozawa, Cheryl Kaplan, Lou Reed & Henry Miller for his title