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Kristine Shomaker “Marnie Weber on Fairy Tales, Performance Art and Edward Kienholz,” *Art and Cake*,
August 20, 2016

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cake

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I had the immense pleasure of meeting with Los Angeles artist Marnie Weber in her studio in Eagle Rock. She is getting ready for a solo exhibition at GAVLAK, which opens Saturday September 17, along with the American debut screening of her film “The Day of Forevermore” presented by Artillery and The Theatre at Ace Hotel on Sunday September 11th. Entering through a white picket fence that surrounded a lush spirited garden, Ms. Weber’s studio and home are clearly an extension of her work. We began the interview by talking about her music background and how it has influenced her work.

Kristine Schomaker: Music is a huge part of your work. I read that it was an important part of your life early on, were you also interested in art in the same way?

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Marnie Weber: It was the classic story. I went to art school and was in a band at the same time. I was living downtown and I was playing in the band, Party Boys. I would go to school in the daytime, rehearse at night and perform with the band on the weekends. When I got out of school I had to get a full time job, so I was pretty much focused on the band at that point. We put out three records and we toured a bit in England and New York, and we played a lot. The band broke up in 1986. It was the heyday of performance art at the time. I was doing solo performances and I found it very uncomfortable because previously I had just been the bass player and never center stage. I started to wear costumes to take away from the anxiety of being on my own. I was using my own pre-recorded 40-minute backing tapes and I would include other musicians, costumes and sets. I would bring the performances into a gallery like LACE for one night pop up shows. One night I was driving the second truckload of props and sets to LACE and I thought. “This is ridiculous just for one night? I must be a masochist.”

So I thought, I better start trying to do month-long shows. A lot of my artist friends were doing that and I thought that must be amazing. In the meantime, I had been making backing projections and I thought some of these films would stand on their own. The first film, which I shot in the snow, I was a snow person. There are a bunch of animals and the blue bird of happiness falls in the snow. I drag all the animals in snow discs behind me to find the bluebird of happiness. That one set the whole thing off – that was a Super 8 film. In the meantime I have done well over 20 movies not counting the projections and that set me on my way to doing shows in galleries.



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KS: How did the physical work come about?

MW: In terms of visual art, I have always done collage. Alexis Smith was my teacher. She is fantastic. I love her work. I also had Chris Burden and George Herms as teachers. I had great teachers. I was very inspired by Alexis to do collage full-time. I did collage on my first LP. Each cover was a separate collage. I did 100 special edition collages of the records and then 3 solo records. Then, I would show the records in a one night only gallery show and sell them right off the walls. That’s how I gained enough confidence. In the meantime I was a gallery coordinator at Otis, so I was putting up and taking down a lot of big shows, doing the whole thing. I thought over time that I could do these big shows myself. So, I combined all of the disciplines; the film, the collage, sometimes performance, sculpture – the sculpture has always reminded me of the props. So it comes naturally to work in a lot of mediums. I get a little bit bored with things, so I have to move along.



KS: Do you have an idea of what you will be working on next?

MW: I think I will take a big break. “The Day of Forevermore” has been three years of solid work. I will try to pursue the collages more and move them into a theatrical direction. In terms of film making, I want to return to my roots, have myself on camera and perhaps one character. This film was bigger than I had anticipated. The first part of the film was the tableau and that took nine months of planning. Then, all of the costumes and the sets took a long time to create. We shot the tableau part at Human Resources – that was the first 15 minutes of the film. I thought I could use this to raise money for the full-length feature. I wanted it to be like the Wizard of Oz where there are clearly two

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sections of the movie: on the farm and then a dreamscape of Oz. My idea was to have the dreamscape, the tableau vivant in the first 15 minutes and then the rest of the movie on the farm, except I didn't want to go black and white. So it's in a way like the reverse structure of Wizard of Oz.

KS: Where was the farm filmed?

MW: It was filmed at the Zorthian Ranch up at the top of Fair Oaks. It's an amazing, Historical ranch. You'll see some of the drone shots of the entire 38 acre property in the film. It was just the one location – four or five days of shooting. Editing took a long. The music is all mine that I had recorded in the past with my bands; *Spirit Girls*, *Fauxmish*, a new band that I am in, called *F for Freak*, and a lot of my own solo stuff. The color was done in house, and that took a long time too.

KS: Has your new band played anywhere?

MW: Yes we just had a show actually at the “Hearsay” exhibition that Wendy Sherman did downtown, at Losjocos. We played that night. We had our costumes and projection. It is more noise music. It isn't rehearsed. It's spontaneous.

KS: Where does the story for the film come from? Did you grow up on fairy tales?

MW: I think it comes from my mother being a Ukrainian-in-the-closet witch. I think everyone grew up on fairy tales, but unlike some artists I didn't want to use Grimm's fairy tales. I thought it had been done enough. So, making my own fairy tales was more interesting to me. It's also a way of making your dreams come alive. Not that I dream these things, but I think your subconscious works through film making as it does through dreams. Many times I see things in my dreams that are straight from my subconscious – that have to do with my life – and I wasn't even aware of it. So, a lot of this film is very revealing to me. My daughter Colette has been studying acting. She played my young self and I played my mother. In the movie, I carry a bit of my mother's personality, except my mother wasn't abusive or alcoholic. It's like an extreme version of my mother viewed through the eyes of myself as a teenager. As a teenager everything is amplified. You just turn up the volume in your brain and your emotions. Teenagers feel humiliated by their parents, even if they aren't in reality. I thought it would be funny that the young witch actually had reason to be humiliated by this crazy witch mother. So that's how this story was born. I started working with the monsters a few years ago, because that is a territory that male artists were working in mostly and women more recently. Monsters had been primarily male territory through the 80s and 90s.

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KS: We talked about recycling. Using the props in sculptures and recreating new work from old. Have you done that all along? Have you recycled figures from old films into new films?

MW: Yes, definitely. Sometimes I just use the heads. I try not to repeat them too much. “Recycle” is a good word. I change them out with different bodies, but this thing about making totems has really got me excited because now some of my masks I love so much I can turn into totems and they will be there forever. I am going to go through my whole costume wardrobe and will do more of those. It is a different approach than other artists as it carries a performative aspect. Things aren’t always presented as it was the first time it was exhibited. It will probably make it harder when I’m gone but I enjoy rearranging things while I’m still here.

KS: Who are your influences? I know you grew up around Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and the performance artists and the feminist performance artists.

MW: I was on a lot of bills with other Los Angeles performance artists at the time. But looking back pre-performance in terms of inspiration Ed Kienholz was an influence for sure. It was my father who took me to see *Back Seat Dodge*, which was very emotional and moving for me. I always kept that feeling with me, that art should move people emotionally. For me it shouldn’t just be something for the eyes or the brain, which also comes from my years of performance. I was working at MOCA as an installer and I got to install the Kienholz show. So that was exciting to be hands-on to all of that work. Kienholz was even more performative than we know. I was talking to a much older curator, who was around at the time, and he said that, when *Roxy* was first shown after WWII, all of the museum guards who were guarding “*Roxys*,” the giant brothel piece, had to be missing limbs from WWII. This was the instructions from Kienholz. Isn’t that intense? So when you went in you would get this feeling of WWII and the sacrifices. I thought, “Wow, this is really a performative installation” and it really opened my eyes.

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KS: Look at *Five Car Stud?* That was powerful. It was very interactive and performative.

MW: Yes! My god! You felt like you were walking in a theater set and reality at the same time. And the fascinating history of that piece was that it was packed away for 25 years by a collector in Japan. It needed a lot of restoration, so he shipped it to the Farm in Idaho and the family spent a couple years fixing it before it was shown again. In terms of lighting, Kienholz is a big inspiration. Cindy Sherman is another big inspiration. Also a lot of the musicians from the rock era of the 70s inspire me such as Bowie, Genesis – bands from that era who put on these giant theatrical stage shows. *Spirit Girls* was born conceptually from that era.



Please Join Marnie Weber on Sunday, September 11th at 7pm at The Theatre at Ace Hotel DTLA for the American premiere screening of “The Day of Forevermore.” A Q&A with the artist and an after party to follow. The opening of her solo exhibition at GAVLAK Los Angeles will be on Saturday, September 17th 6-8pm and the exhibition runs through November 5th.