



**Running Away**

by Marnie Weber

95.75"x75.75"  
collage on light jet print  
2007

courtesy of the artist  
Photo: LeeAnn Nickel

# Modern-day Witch of L.A.

A Profile of Marnie Weber by Ariane Fairlie

*"When your subconscious is creating dreams it creates images & juxtaposes them."*

Marnie Weber is a modern-day witch of Los Angeles. Her diverse artistic practice spans music, video, performance, costume design, and, of course, collage. Her mythology is spellbinding as you become acquainted with her strange characters and domain. Ghostly dolls, clowns, and animals such as bunnies, bears, and mice are all returning roles in her grand narrative. Weber's imagination is refreshingly youthful; she is prolific but seemingly unencumbered. Driven by longing and romanticism, she delves deeply into her childhood to feed her production.

Weber's engagement with collage coincided with her career in the alternative rock scene, performing with The Party Boys and Perfect Me in the 80's and afterwards making two solo albums: *Woman with Bass* (1994) and *Cry for Happy* (1996). She began her collage practice by creating a limited edition of 100 handmade collages, distributed on one side of her LP album covers. She says the experience was like a boot camp to understand collage. Since then, she has created album covers and promotional posters for many musical acts, most notably the cover for Sonic Youth's *A Thousand Leaves*.

Her current musical pursuit is Spirit Girls, a theatrical concept band whose members are four spirits who have suffered untimely death and return to earth to communicate through their music. Their music video, *A Western Song*, combines spooky synths, American Western traditions, and carnival culture. The girls frequently appear in Weber's collage work in identical white masks. The artist describes the masks as vessels into which the spirits project their characters. Although their hair and body distinguish



*Pink Sofa*, from "The Getty Series" by Marnie Weber. 43"x53"; photographic collage; 2000. courtesy of the artist.

the girls, it is their eyes that are the most compelling.

Themes of containment and the awareness of an exterior force are present in all of Weber's work. She sets her compositions up as a stage, and the viewer is always conscious that someone outside of the scene is pulling the strings. What really enforces this impression of the puppeteer or spell-caster are the eyes of the doll players as they stare out at you from behind their placid masks. The viewer has a sense that the characters are going through the motions they are instructed to do, but somewhere within they are still present. Their look is entrancing, pulling you into their fantastic world, until you, too, are spellbound, subject to Witch Weber's whim!

The dolls speak to Weber's relationship with the subconscious. She sees collage as a medium that can most closely reflect the way the subconscious works. It is like a dream state: "when your subconscious is creating dreams it creates images and juxtaposes them in a different way, the subconscious grabs things and later on you see a deeper meaning or psychology for the people involved," says Weber. It is with this same strategy, juxtaposing images in a search for meaning, that she explores collage. Weber's intuitive sense has strengthened through collage. "It's taught me to trust my gut feeling, you know when something's right and if you go too far. I'm able to recognize that feeling in other aspects of my life. I've learned to trust my subconscious more."



*The Great Circus Fire* by Marnie Weber. 40"x50"; collage on archival pigment print mounted on Sintra; 2008. courtesy of the artist and Praz-Delavallade, Paris. Photo: LeeAnn Nickel

*The Great Circus Fire* (2008) is a quintessential work. Weber photographed herself as the various costumed characters, as well as a miniature circus tent that she built and burned. She then assembled them with elements and images of animals to create the collage scene. "The girl is so placid but the tent is on fire behind her. In the story, she is channeling spirits so she doesn't know about the tent, it's a combination of drama and visuals... psycho-drama and surrealist qualities."

Much of Weber's work plays between boundaries of light and dark, humour and tragedy. Partially because of their strangeness, the characters are difficult to take entirely seriously. Her recent collages feature nomadic dolls finding themselves in myriad situations: funeral processions and graveyards, burning carnival tents, atop a haystack, and an autumnal scene where a horse pulls a cart of teddy bears. The gypsy dolls travel by many means. One sharply humorous but poignant moment is in *Running Away* where the rooster's leg appears as a prosthesis for the girl who rides it.

Spirituality and the Feminist movement are two of Weber's major concerns.

The artist has said in interviews that she often uses animals as spiritual alter egos. The mouse in *A Thousand Leaves* is obviously of a timid nature, but another interesting connection Weber makes is between rabbits and femininity. She finds them to represent the victim

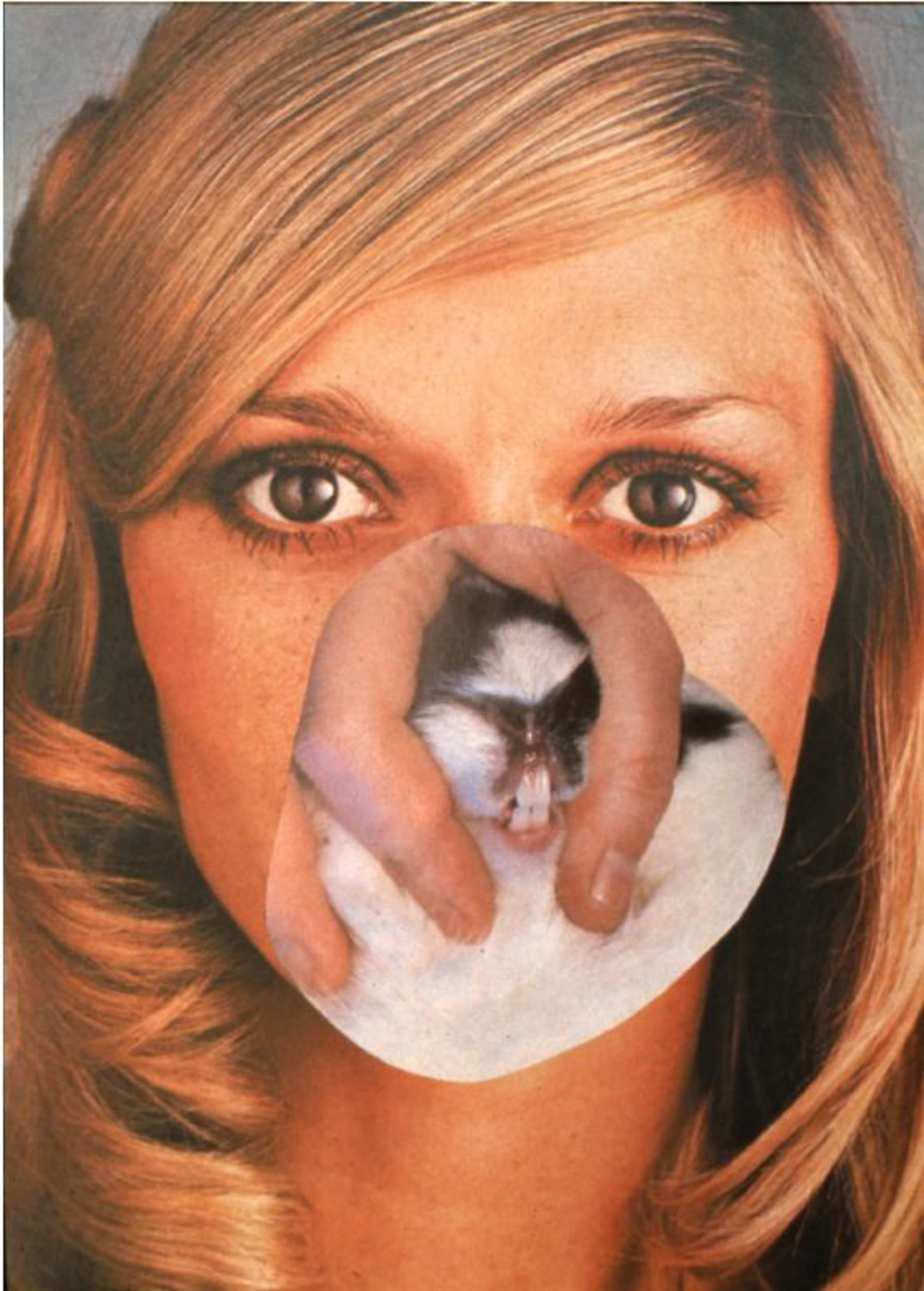


*The Trophy Room* from "The Dollhouse Series" by Marnie Weber  
36"x48"; collage on photography; 2002  
courtesy of the artist

as well as life and fecundity. *Bunny Teeth Lady* demonstrates this comparison by silencing the female character with a distressed bunny held hostage by three fingers. The image is disturbing, but the viewer can't help being amused by the woman's outrageous buckteeth.

The collages of "Getty Series" continue to use women and animals, this time in a lavish French Renaissance setting. The animals are presented in collection, likewise with crowns and Fabergé eggs, creating scenes of opulent overabundance. *Pink Sofa* plays wittily once again with the feminine role by having women's breasts mimic the leafy pattern of wallpaper and textiles common to the era. Weber wants an image to be visually stunning, but inside it must be loaded. "A successful collage has something strange, weird, and magical, but also needs psychological intrigue beneath the surface, that uncanny moment within a dream."

Weber's work definitely has that magic in character, narrative, and atmosphere. Her strange way of play is fun and theatrical, but what really captures the viewer is her ability to portray those feelings beyond words. She maintains just the right balance of sad and silly essential to her exploration of the human condition. Her search is ultimately for what lies underneath, and somehow through guise and spectral realms she has learned to access what is masked below.



*Bunny Teeth Lady* by Marnie Weber  
10"x8"; paper collage; 1998  
courtesy of the artist