

MARNIE WEBER
By Annie Buckley
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MOUNTAIN VIEW MORTUARY & CEMETERY



ALTADENA Row upon row of white marble tombs and a sprawling graveyard provided an apt setting for Marnie Weber's exhibition "Eternity Forever," sponsored by the Pasadena-based nonprofit West of Rome Public Art. The show laid to rest the Spirit Girls, Weber's rock band and masked muses, who have provided inspiration for her multimedia work over the past several years. Since their 2005 debut, the Spirit Girls and friends including circus bears and ghost-clowns have appeared in Weber's performances, collages, films and sculptures. As their story has grown, so has Weber's expansive practice. Though she has at times collaborated with musicians and students and commissioned marble sculptures, her idiosyncratic vision and handmade esthetic have remained consistent throughout and are evident in the 17 cut-paper-and-photo collages and a new film, *The Eternal Heart* (all 2010), shown at the Mountain View Mortuary & Cemetery.

A lively one-night-only performance kicked off the exhibition. A host of costumed characters, including a garrulous ghost wielding an axe, led tours of the graveyard, followed at the mausoleum by the theatrical arrival in an antique Cadillac of the Spirit Girls. As guests wandered through the labyrinthine tombs inside the mausoleum, bewilderment gave way to delight when they stumbled upon a dimly lit stage in a narrow area beneath an arched ceiling decorated with images of

saints. Here the Spirit Girls performed the film's score and a raucous, culminating concert.

The Eternal Heart was projected onto a large screen behind the stage. As it flickered to life, a dark-haired woman in a flowing white gown (Weber, uncharacteristically appearing without a mask) served yams to an aged father figure, a hulking man with an artificial yam-shaped nose. The tale unspooled with the logic of reverie in grainy sepia tones interspersed with frames of stylized white-on-black text, like a silent film. "Fear not your dreams or they will quickly become your nightmares," read one screen. The tone hovered between nurturing and spooky, situating the story in a kind of mystic surrealism.

The unframed collages, each approximately 4 by 2 1/2 feet, hung in the mausoleum's disused gallery. In them, images of the Spirit Girls and other characters are pasted onto atmospheric digital photos taken in various graveyards; girls and ghouls lounge on mossy headstones or meander through leaf-strewn plots. In *Roses Are Red*, a Spirit Girl in a brilliant red dress stands behind a rosebush, a red hat placed at a rakish angle over her blond wig. The girl's lower body has either evaporated into thin air or merged with the roses. Indeed, transformation is a constant for Weber. A few weeks after the opening, she performed among the tombs with a new noise band.