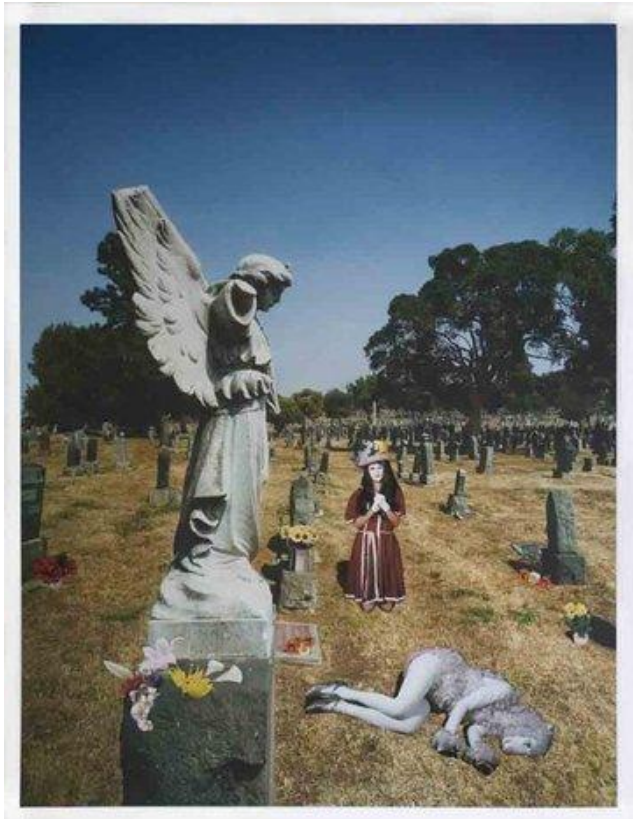


Artifacts | Ghost Dance

Culture, Women's Fashion

By *LINDA YABLONSKY*

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Courtesy of the artist. "A Prayer for the Fallen Lamb, 2010," by Marnie Weber was set in Evergreen Cemetery in East Los Angeles.

People in the art world love an off-site exhibition. A decrepit theater, an abandoned warehouse, an old church, a darkened cave — anyplace that isn't a white-cube gallery — only adds to their adventure in art, and the more underground it is the better. Try six feet under.

Marnie Weber's "Eternity Forever" is not your usual underground exhibition. In fact, the Los Angeles-based artist and musician may be the first to show her work in a tomb. It is the century-old Mountain View Mausoleum in Altadena, Calif., an overlooked cousin to the storied Forest Lawn, where Hollywood legends are laid to their final, fligid rest.

The Spanish-style, cathedral-like mortuary at Mountain View, nestled against the San Gabriel Mountains, has been in movies and television shows many times. But tourists don't go there to pose for snapshots among the headstones in the arboretum of a cemetery across the road, where the most famous grave is probably that of George Reeves, television's original Superman. Mountain View has something that Forest Lawn does not: an art gallery dedicated to temporary exhibitions. Situated on a mezzanine above the barrel-vaulted main hall, it was put there by the building's architect, Cecil E. Bryan, who built 80 mausoleums across the country before his death in 1951, and whose remains are interred above the entrance.

“People who work there sometimes smell pipe smoke in the gallery, and think it’s his ghost,” Weber says. He didn’t attend the sold-out performance that opened her show a little over a week ago, to which she brought her own ghosts, thank you. They were the now-retired Spirit Girls, the six-member drone-rock band that Weber has fronted since 2005, playing their farewell concert to 500 living souls.

In the fictional construct of Weber’s videos, the band died in the male-dominated music scene of the 1970s, before it had a chance to top the charts. Since then, the band has appeared in four Weber films, the members’ faces covered by white death masks. (Another one, “The Sea of Silence,” is currently on view in a nightclub-like installation within “The Artists’ Museum,” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.)

“I’ve been walking over there for years,” Weber, 50, says of Mountain View, which isn’t far from her studio.



West of RomeA film still from “The Eternal Heart.”

It was on one of those walks that she discovered the long-neglected gallery. “To me it didn’t scream rock concert/film screening,” she recalls, adding that she likes it when the world of the living and the dead match up. So when Emi Fontana, the Italian-born founder of West of Rome Public Art, the show’s presenter, asked where Weber would like her show to go, the mausoleum ranked number one. Its owners were entirely agreeable.

“All along I thought, this can’t be happening,” Weber says. “It was very eerie playing electric music and seeing the guitar amplifiers backed against the crypts.”

The setting couldn't be better for a work like "Eternity Forever," a dreamy, half-hour film with a woo-woo soundtrack. It features a gaggle of ghouls dressed in old-fashioned Halloween costumes (as roosters, rabbits and bears) who accompany Weber's flame-haired, silent-movie-era ingénue in a procession to the Other Side.

"It's about releasing one's demons and befriending them," she says. The video is playing on a monitor in the center of the gallery; Weber's new photo collages, which feature the Spirit Girls and other figures from the film, hang on the surrounding walls.

She shot "Eternity Forever" in super-8 and 16-millimeter film, to replicate the look of black-and-white silent movies from Hollywood's past life. Title cards say things like, "There is no love without madness," and place eternity in the heart. For Weber, who was born in Connecticut and spent part of her childhood moving with her family around Asia, occult practices are just another way to see the world. But she's an artist; she doesn't do séances or channel voices from beyond. She started playing bass guitar in punk art bands as a teenager and later made collages for the covers of limited-edition records for groups like the Party Boys as well as one, "A Thousand Leaves," for Sonic Youth. She appears in that collage as a hamster.

After five years with the Spirit Girls, however, Weber is moving on to a new noise band — better for waking the dead. "I thought it was time to let go," she says of the Girls. "But I thought they deserved a big sendoff."

"Eternity Forever" is on view through Dec. 20 at the Mountain View Mausoleum, 2300 Marengo Avenue, Altadena, Calif.