

## Eternal Return



Left: Marnie Weber, *The Eternal Heart*, 2010, color film in Super 8 and 16 mm. Production still. Photo: LeeAnn Nickel.  
Right: Marnie Weber, *Eternity Forever*, 2010. Performance view, Mountain View Cemetery and Mausoleum, Altadena, CA, November 11, 2010.

**JEAN GENET** famously spoke of a theater among the graves, one that embraced the cagey void of death through the equally mysterious undertaking of art and cast a bit of shadow on “a world that seems to be moving so merrily towards analytical clarity.” On a recent Thursday evening, Marnie Weber conjured Genet’s sublime vision in the shadowy corners and marble hallways of the Mountain View Cemetery and Mausoleum, a sprawling gothic necropolis in the sleepy suburb (sorry, Genet, not your preferred *Urb*) of Altadena, California.

*Eternity Forever*, a kind of funeral for Weber’s band the Spirit Girls, comprised film, performance, collage, and rock concert and was also the latest edition to West of Rome Public Art’s “Women in the City” series. The ritual began with a nocturnal graveyard stroll featuring a cadre of ghouls wearing costumes of Weber’s creation: Three lantern-carrying crones greeted the visitors; a mutant chicken and a snowy-fleeced lamb crouched behind headstones; and a masked gravedigger led the way while muttering about the boneyard’s inhabitants and shadowboxing with the night. The parade prepared viewers for happenings at the main stage, a proscenium erected in the mausoleum’s grand vaulted hall, which had no doubt been chosen for its superior acoustics and dramatic lighting.

Vaguely old-timey parlor music (that slipped into atonality) beckoned the night’s nearly five hundred guests into the main chamber, where they gathered under the sepia flicker of *The Eternal Heart* (2010), a film that centers on the dreamy, quasi-linear parable of Sweet Peaches (a heroine played by Weber), her crotchety father, and the demons released from her lonely heart. Each event in Peaches’s story—her endless sweeping away of dust, her conversations with a taxidermied deer, her frenzied *danse macabre*—contained mystical significance, meanings that begged not for analytical clarity but for blind faith. At its halfway point, the film switches from a grainier film stock to sickly saturated color that is punctuated by lyrical, materialist touches (sprocket holes, scratched celluloid) fashioned by Jennifer West, who served as Weber’s editor. Poetic intertitles and a quixotic live score—performed by Tanya Haden, Brian Randolph, Debbie Spinelli, Dani Tull, Sachiyo Yoshimoto, and Weber—lent themselves to the work’s aura of enigmatic longing, byzantine obscurity, and homespun witchiness.

As the credits rolled, the musical orchestration shifted gears and the Spirit Girls appeared to perform their final “live” set. The group’s look—matching pinafores, shawls, straw hats, gloves, and white masks à la Franju’s *Eyes Without a Face*—belies their driving synth-rock sound. So it was no surprise that as the music reached its crescendo, their frontwoman (Weber) reappeared dressed as a cross between Leda, the swan, and a glam rocker. The show, suffused with a dynamic femme energy, spilled over the stage into the crowd, past the columbaria, culminating in a procession that ended at a surprisingly functional art gallery located at the heart of the mausoleum. (There, a series

of related collages served as a picture-perfect tribute to the girls.) Cathartic and neurotic, reverent and wicked, Weber's performance faced the void—even if it meant donning a mask.