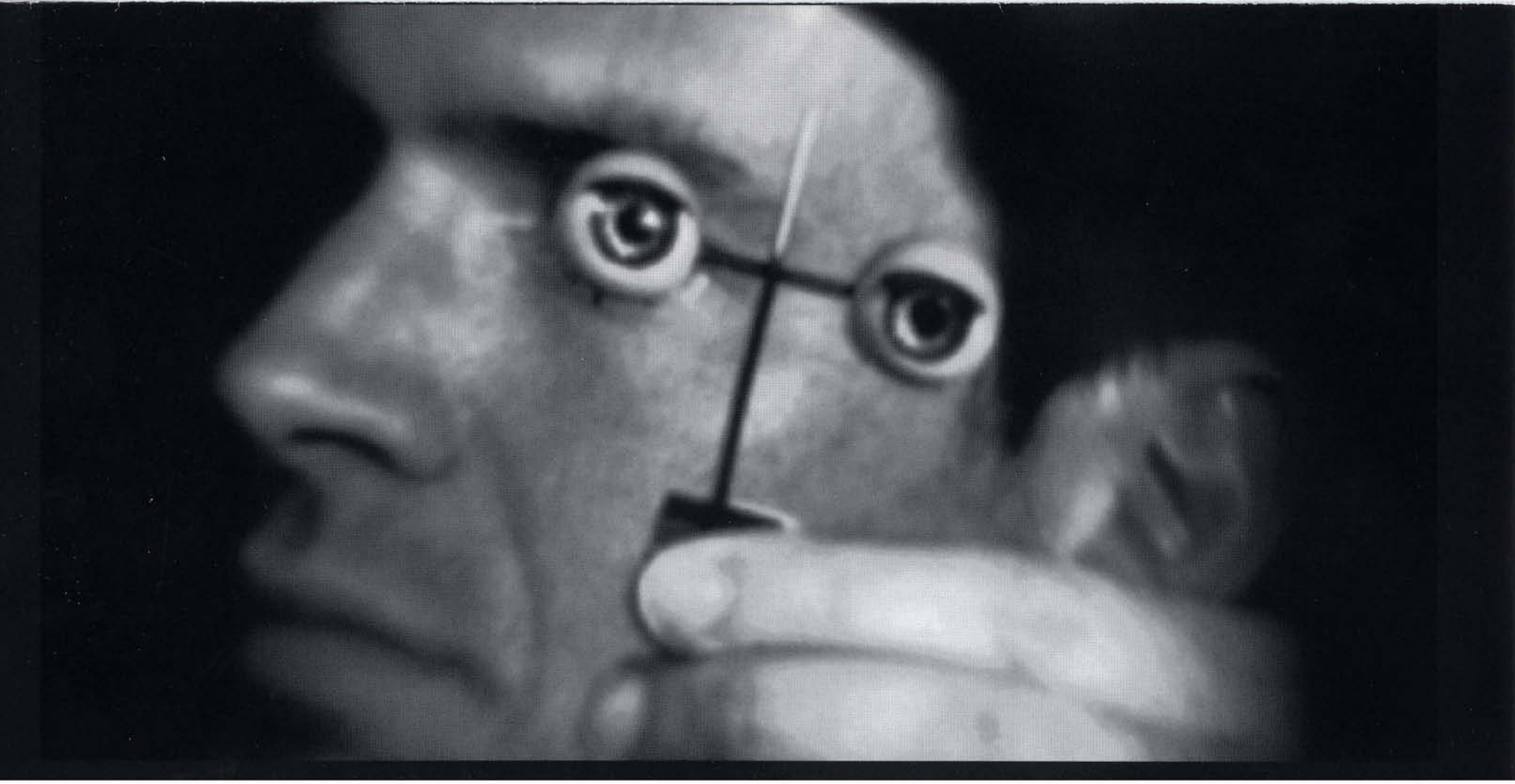


A NEW INSTALLATION BY KIM WAALE



Once my Father came into my room
while I was asleep. He sat at
the end of my bed and cried. I
was awake though and I listened
to him with my eyes closed.



STAGINGS

A New Installation by Kim Waale

April 4 - May 29, 1998 Opening Reception: 9 p.m. - 11 p.m. Saturday, April 4, 1998

Hallwalls is pleased to present STAGINGS, a new installation developed by Syracuse-based artist Kim Waale during her residency at the International Studio Program in New York. For the past two years, with the support of the New York State Council on the Arts and the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Hallwalls and the ISP have collaborated to annually award one nine week studio residency in New York to an artist from Western or Central New York. Waale was selected by a peer panel out of a group of 38 applicants from throughout western and central New York. The purpose of the ISP is to establish an international community of exemplary visual artists and to make the work visible to the New York art community. The program provides work spaces in TriBeCa and support activities to give the artists access to New York's resources and opportunities.

past in the creative process. I am interested in the phenomena of translating memories into art, recognizing the creation of an art work as an instrument to negotiate and re-negotiate the terms of an individual's past in the context of the present moment. STAGINGS, which evolved out of a series addressing memories of adolescence, especially as they pertain to the bedroom, involves the idea of collapsing different points in time and points of view into one moment. Like a photograph which registers a moment and then functions as a monument to that moment, STAGINGS revisits the fears and desires of adolescence in order to construct a monument to the adolescent within each adult."

Thank you to Amy Hufnagel and Julie Grossman for their wonderful essays. Major support for the 1997-1998 season at Hallwalls is provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Members of Hallwalls, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Cultural Incentive Funding Program, County of Erie, City of Buffalo, Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County DEC/CIP Program, the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's Artist as Catalyst artist program, and the ArtsLink Partnership. Kim Waale's residency at the International Studio Program was funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts.

Sara Kellner, Visual Arts Director
Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center

In a recent artist's statement, Waale said: "For the past four years, I have been producing art work by focusing on the role of the



INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: CONFESSION AND COLLABORATION

A "fearful symmetry"¹

A romantic piece, this installation is about wresting continuity from change by imaginatively returning to the fears and desires we gave way to as adolescents. The installation mirrors our present retrojection with the kind of imaginative projection we indulged in as teens: the adult role-playing where *Death* broke into youth, *Blood Red* seeped through guilelessness, and *Vengeance* displaced the childhood desire to please those who lorded it over us.

The viewers here are the installation. We watch ourselves as raw adolescents imitating older versions of ourselves.

Broadway Baby: "The little Actor cons another part"²

When I modeled for these shots, I played a child playing an adult. I played a child who wished to transcend her youth (racing to beat herself to the punch). In my creation of a powerful image of myself, I wanted to determine the representation of me in absolute terms, to fix it in the eyes of others. In the very process of being photographed, of course, I ceded control, first to the artist, then to the viewer: thus, a battle lost, just as, in my adolescence, I inevitably lost the power to design and embody a consummate imitation of myself.

"A terrible beauty is born"³

This is, for me, a piece about opposites colliding to yield insights about loss and about memory. The piece is about dialectical encounters: of adulthood with adolescence, of text with image, of passivity with activity, of viewing with being viewed, of the inside with the outside. But the installation is also about that greeting taking place between the static image (that's me) and the moving spectator (that's you). The ventriloquist doll not only stages the encounter of the stationary with the mobile, casting me as a chattering, clattering sculpture, but also plays a supporting role in your performance of the rendezvous between yourself and an image of yourself. There, in the public booth disguised as a private sanctorum, you become captive to watching me watch the image of you watching yourself.

Mise-en-abyme.

Kim Waale's installation is about dialectical encounters between our fear of being objectified and our sense that we can somehow master that experience, that we can turn the tables. Even when I saw how the artist maimed and mastered my image (and yours), in the end, I understood that she was not only noting the limits but also paying tribute to the powers of the Gothic imagination of our childhood.

Julie Grossman

Julie Grossman teaches English literature, women's studies, and film at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, NY. She has published essays on the performance of identity in the work of Karen Finley and Oscar Wilde, and on photography and its relation to nineteenth-century narrative.

¹ William Blake, "The Tyger"

² William Wordsworth, "ODE: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"

³ William Butler Yeats, "Easter 1916"

Michel Foucault, in his essay, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," (1984), writes about 'meditation' as that exercise of thought that activates knowing. Such contemplations call to mind a principle, a rule, or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and in this manner prepares itself to face reality. Foucault says,

one also sees that writing (and the art making practice) is associated with the exercise of thought in two different ways. One takes the form of a linear series: it goes from meditation to the activity of writing (making) and from there to gymnastics, that is, to training and trial in real situations--a labor of thought, a labor through writing (exhibiting). The other is circular: the meditation precedes the notes (sketches) which enable the reread in which in turn reinitiates the meditation.

This cycle becomes the agent of transformation for both the artist and the audience. Foucault says, "Take care of yourself. Make freedom your foundation, through the mastery of yourself." Contemporary installation art, then, if it is doing its part for the contemporary ideological continuum, offers an exchange--the option of meditation and transformation. One enters the art, totally, and within the whole of the space--we are immersed in the product, or by-products, of the artist's meditations. (Quote from the Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, 1997. Parenthetical comments layered by AH.)

Kim Waale's STAGINGS asks us to meditate both in linear and circular series, about issues of coming of age and what is vivid and masked as we 'mature.' Play is one agent of slippage as the adult remembers and reconstructs that which starts to turn blurry and vivid. Coming of age--isn't that a constant process? In STAGINGS, we gaze and read, decipher and peek, watch and feel watched, build and deconstruct. We ask ourselves, is it the artist's narrative? The artist's autobiography? Is it biography? Is it a portrait of me? Waale's work is a set of biographies, layered with the autobiography of most. (Am I O.K.)? As I look, I give identities to the theatrical characters captured in performances of horror and glee. As I look, am I performing? Which side of the stage am I on? Slipping in a meditation of my own, I wonder whether I am gazing on another, or being gazed upon. Am I being analyzed or am I to analyze? What senses are being provoked, by Waale's constructions of images, words and sculpture, to build our memory and increase awareness!

In the portrait of *Michael With Doll Eyes*, a handheld set of doll eyeballs float in place of his eye, manipulated by his fingertips, gazing straight at me. I am the subject, the object of play, being moved by the artwork into myself. The subject appears to gaze at something beyond the frame, it alludes to a performance, a private performance. I'm the audience, but I must construct my own story line with the assistance of a few props.

STAGINGS speaks visually about discovery and hiding, folly and shame, noticing and being noticed. What set of realities, which eyes, what artifice have we built to understand our actions, the actions of others, around the body and sensory stimulation? Kim Waale has meditated on these questions. In STAGINGS she presents us with a multiplex of possible narrative structures and forms. We move between word and image, white and black, linear and circular, building the staging for many possible 'plays.' We are the actors, the audience, the staging, and the directors. The installation resonates with architectural features that suggest ways to move through the space: one moves through the pristine white text room toward multiple doors with peepholes, through a door to the dark black image room where there is the literal multiplex theater. The viewer may sit on stage, watching a stage, while the ventriloquist sculptured heads recite emptiness like the anchors on the evening news. And from the stage one can watch themselves watching which in turn builds uncomfortable layers of consumption, spectacle, and unconscious assemblage.

The assemblage must be layered with that which is outside the boundaries of the installation, but that we carry as baggage inside. The setting is contemporary, post postmodern America. Americans have become the great pluralists accepting no one truth, incorporating all that suits us, discarding and morphing what doesn't suit us,

fabricating and reinforcing authenticities, exerting our buying power. Within this, the church has been replaced by the legal system as a way of ordering the folk. Consequently Americans have become engrossed in Forensic Aesthetics. By this I mean a fixation on evidence, putting the pieces together, didactically arguing a stand, building a case (be it display case and/or point of view), determining or destroying the validity thereof, collecting the proof. Our culture quickly allows for public discourse around OJ Simpson's bloody socks and Nicole's DNA, President Clinton's gifts to Monica Lewinsky and her cum stained dress, Woody Allen's escapades. All of these exist within the construct of the legal implications and charges.

Yet in March 1998 when Kim Waale builds an installation that is a meditation on teenage identity, including elements of sexuality, she is censored. Her work is considered an institutional risk because the NYS Museum wants to be a 'family' museum, and will not challenge families with this artist's artistic 'evidence' of coming of age. In Alabama, Barnes and Noble can't sell Jock Sturges' book because his photographs capture nude youth, and the *Village Voice* on the week of March 6th is hard to come by because the cover photo refers to the story about Sturges' role in the on-going 'cultural closure.' (The *Voice* was available in its racks without the cover and I couldn't figure out whether its scarcity was because the public liked the cover, or wanted to cleanse the streets of its shocking presence.) In New York City, 'Rudification' (Giuliani's city beautification plan) means that artist Robert Lederman is arrested 20 times because he writes and paints on the sidewalk in chalk, and puts 'cheap' art on telephone poles and lamp posts. In Washington D.C., the US Supreme Court will rule this spring on the NEA 4 case around the term 'decency.' As well-informed Americans, we all wait to see what the evidence will reveal to the Justices! But outside the courtroom the cultural sterilization, the reduction of individualism, and the narrowing of our collective consciousness, makes subconscious thoughts feel even more vivid.

If we call to mind these above mentioned cultural conditions, as rules or principles, and reflect on them, "whose quality of life is improved" by these new laws and social principles? I see conflict between collective and individual narrative and needs. The 90210 sitcom drama is mass-produced and consumed frequently even in its perverse pubescent narrative escapades, but the story of Kim Waale and her collaborators, their brave and daring revelations in the sanctity of the artist's studio, has a powerful truth from which the culture cowers. Waale has chosen an aesthetic of magnification and intimate photographic inspections because she expertly understands that the personal narrative has power as cultural evidence. She wants us to embrace and remember our haunting adolescent maneuverings. Within the cultural authority in the Forensic Aesthetic, Waale builds a space of alter egos and free roaming ids and we, as the participants in the installation, join into the loop of meditation layering her space with our own boundaries, limits, and personal edges. Memories and experiences of sexuality, sensuality, desire and youth are feared edges. But Waale finds inspiration in that which she fears, that near the edge, or that which she initially doesn't fully understand. She is meditating, and inviting others to join the meditation. What is the direction of our gaze, both personally and collectively in this post postmodern period? What does the eye (I) reveal? Waale is committed to revealing why she fears parts of the body, being looked at, talked at, cut, played with, tricked and spooked. These are the current limits that her memory knows, and in the Foucaultian route to self-care, she knows to keep meditating and making.

Amy W. Hufnagel

Hufnagel works in the field of arts education, particularly on initiatives that encourage innovation in education using the arts, and is an artist working with image and text. Currently she sits on the New York Foundation for the Arts Artists Advisory Panel and is a board member of the Media Alliance.

Special thanks to: Michael Davis, Julie Grossman, Rita Hammond, David Lloyd, Phillip Novak and Ann Ryan for giving themselves so completely to this project; Allyn Stewart for brochure design; Larry Rutledge for carpentry; Hugh Tift for expert advice and help; Tom Hartley, Phil Indrick, Lindsay Martin and Bob DiBartolomeo for assistance.

Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center
2495 Main St., Suite 425
Buffalo, NY 14214
716/835-7362 www.pce.net/hallwall

