

ARTLIES



#30 Spring
Free

Anne Wallace

SALA DIAZ

SAN ANTONIO

by John Ewing

When writers resort to the word *dream-like* to describe art, it often signals a polite but dismissive drift into babble. Art with a non-realist palette, disjointed narrative, or surreal imagery can be too easily corralled into the all-purpose category of dreams, which becomes a convenient place to park art when it isn't clicking. Rare, however, is the work that actually justifies the term as it applies to the inner workings of the dreaming mind. A fine example is San Antonio artist Anne Wallace's installation, which filled Sala Diaz with video, sound, drawings, and sculptural elements. The cumulative effect of these diverse media simulated, in an uncanny parallel, the strategies of dreams, creating a sort of waking "tour of the unconscious" for gallery visitors.

A large video projection, *Dream*, greeted viewers at the gallery entrance, setting up Wallace's art-as-dream analogy. To a soundtrack of birdsong and outdoor noises, the opening image is a still pond reflecting an inverted landscape and near-twilight sky. Naked and pale, the artist appears from off screen and dives, the slow-motion arc of her body mirrored in the dark water just before breaking the surface. The image dissolves into a wide undersea shot of a scuba diver in the murky, green distance. To the heavy sound of regulated breathing, this found footage of a diver swimming amid tropical fish and rocks is intermittently superimposed over handheld video images of the artist's childhood home, exterior and interior, shot at night. Blending the ocean floor with doorways, halls, bedposts, and stuffed animals conjures a common dream of swimming through familiar domestic spaces. As the soundtrack imperceptibly shifts from scuba regulator to hospital respirator, a hand reaches to turn on a bedside lamp. The scene is flooded with light, then abruptly goes black.

Additional works in adjoining rooms tease apart these elements (image, sound, family, artist) in order to recombine them into ever-deeper unconscious

amalgams. In a small closet, a monitor plays 1950s home movies filmed by Wallace's mother. The silent, black-and-white sequence mixes happy scenes of the artist and her siblings at the beach, and other locales, with jerky footage of cowboys roping and branding cattle. In another closet across the room, two small audio speakers emit the simple phrase, "Are you awake?" Whispered by children, this question is directed at specific people ("Lili, Stewart, Frannie, Alex, Anne") and swathed in the ambient noise of passing cars.

Wallace's use of sound reflects her increasing interest and proficiency with this technically difficult medium. Conscious viewing is subtly directed by the more porous and primal faculty of listening. Dependent on where the viewer is focused, Wallace's sound acts as both subject and background, permeating and connecting the gallery spaces while merging seamlessly with similar sounds outside the gallery. Bathing her images, recorded by various hands and reflective of different eras, media, and perspectives, the soundscape creates a dynamic relationship between the individual pieces irrespective of their temporal origins, a unifying effect that mimics the non-linear, dreaming mind.

Also in the room, a group of hospital IV bags, hanging from the ceiling in front of a window, drips water onto contact microphones, which carry the thumping sound to hanging speakers in the gallery's hallway. Here, small watercolor and ink drawings record a hospital scene that includes the figures identified in the previous room. These simple, urgent works note the artist's observations and feelings as she keeps a bedside watch over Lili, her terminally ill sister.

Preparing the viewer for this moment, Wallace seems to suggest that

sense, memory, family, grief, and dreams have united in the unconscious and come out where they must, the artist's journal. Of course, interpretations are supplied with conscious effort, be it that of the artist or the viewer. Held in tandem with the dream itself, neither narrative obviates the other. Like the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind, art and interpretation here inform a larger whole. ○

Anne Wallace
Video Still from *Dream*, 2001
Courtesy of the artist

