

A THOUSAND WORDS

Malerie Marder TALKS ABOUT *AT REST*, 2003

I started the piece by thinking about how the subconscious can have physical manifestations in the body that you can see if you look closely enough; how desire can be manifested without anything sexual happening, or any discomfort; how rest is a transient state between sleep and wakefulness, and wondering what the difference is between those states. I was going to do the piece only if it made sense, if I could find a voice in it. That was the challenge; but that's always the challenge. It slowly started to come together.

Part of it I shot in Rochester, New York, where I grew up. I went back and stayed in the house across the street from my old house. Some I shot in California, although I didn't want the video to look like it had been shot there; some was shot in France; and the rest in England. I wanted the environment to be kind of old looking, with the compositions evoking a strong sense of place, a classical feel, and I wanted the rooms to echo that. I wanted something more connected to my past. Emotionally but also visually, it's late afternoon, my favorite time of day. In England it feels like that all day long, and the same with Rochester.

I thought about the body as an instrument, like breath as a bellows, and about types of breathing. Diaphragm breathing is more reflexive than chest breathing. That's why I start off with the baby in the beginning. Innocence is regained when you're sleeping like that. There's a lack of self-consciousness.

With a photograph you can create a shot and then take it. With video it's just not the same thing. I couldn't fall asleep in front of the camera and then move it around. I couldn't film myself, since I was using a very small setup, really just me. If there had been a bigger production, with a crew, it would

have seemed like people were acting. At one point, the guy who's sleeping with his wife was dead asleep, and didn't recall I was there when he first woke up. A lot of people fell totally asleep. Some were just lying there, but most really fell asleep. The couple with the man asleep on his wife's chest, he's completely out. It's a little sweet seeing people like that.

How impulses can move from restfulness to anxiety was something that interested me throughout. Sometimes, because in parts the footage speeds up to twenty times its normal rate, these states of restfulness don't really convey restfulness. Regular breathing becomes hyperventilation. Ordinary twitching looks more like Tourette's. I didn't want a jarring juxtaposition of anxiety and rest. Even though there's that unsettled aspect to the video, I hoped to draw people into a trancelike, meditative state. I wanted to move in and out slowly, ebb and flow, give the whole piece an arc, even if in an unconventional sense. I knew I wasn't making a documentary, I knew it was constructed, but I really wanted to make everything as believable as possible.

Narrative was one of the things I thought about most, probably. I wanted to make a braid to weave everyone together. The big question was: Should there be a main character? I wrestled with that. There's something very calming about being in water, which is why there are water sections in there. Water provides a buffer, slows everything down. Those sections are more dreamlike. But I didn't want to give it an overt narrative. The video is slightly more narrative than my photos, but at the same time I didn't want it to read as a scripted thing.

When I was thinking about the sound track, I knew I wanted each person's

breathing to express a personality, individuality. I sent Jonathan Bepler a rough edit, and he liked it. I realized as soon as we started talking that Jonathan was perfect. The first day we worked together he was running around his studio working up different breathing patterns and heart rates to record, and I'm sitting in front of this microphone breathing, changing rhythm, thinking "What's my motivation?" I reedited while I was in New York with Jonathan a little bit. I added some footage, reshoot

some things I wasn't happy with. And I included shots of Jonathan and his wife, who's pregnant in the work.

Underlying the piece is how we edit out our own mortality, speed up time, and speed up that approach of death. Maybe there's an inherent contradiction in that: avoiding death by not thinking about it, even as it inevitably comes closer. I don't want to sound too grand, but there's something in that thinking that's emotional for me. □

In her staged photographs Malerie Marder prizes nothing if not awkwardness. Ever since she first started exhibiting her photos, in the late '90s, Marder has explored the psychosexual undertow of her own intimate relationships, frequently shooting herself along with family and friends in close quarters (including pay-by-the-hour motels) and, usually, undressed. She flirts with prurience, with ideas of privacy and surveillance, eroticism and pornography, but seems more satisfied when approaching the complications of love or being in love. Marder has directed her naked father in front of a fireplace, collected friends in a public bath, and even paired her then boyfriend with her mother au naturel in a photograph titled, straightforwardly, *My Mother and My Boyfriend*, 2000. The most intractable detail of *The Marder Sisters*, 2000, an image in which Malerie and her sister Carrie stand naked holding hands, turned slightly toward each other, is the glint off their matching gold Star of David pendants. Like a pea in the princess's porn stash, that little charm irritates an otherwise banal nude, stubbornly distilling the neurotic and erotic through an accessory.

If the issues raised by Marder's photos can be unnerving, her first video work, *At Rest*, 2003, has a more soporific effect. (She will debut the video in February at Salon 94 in New York, a new project space.) Marder edited videotape shot over two years into nearly thirteen minutes of friends and family (still naked) in various states of repose: couples asleep in bed, a child resting on a plump pillow, a woman relaxing in the tub. *CREMASTER* composer Jonathan Bepler produced the sound track, transforming organic sounds like breathing and heartbeats into a rhythmic, meditative whir. "I think in a way that for the first time I'm exploring the body," Marder says. "Before, I thought about things like privacy and eroticism. This time my approach is more psychological, spiritual."

—SIOBHAN MCDEVITT



Malerie Marder, *At Rest*, 2003,
stills from a color video, 12 minutes 20 seconds.

ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2003 \$8.00

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



**NEW ART
NEW ARTISTS**
A SPECIAL REPORT

WINTER PREVIEW
40 SHOWS WORLDWIDE

HUYGHE/PARRENO

