

## ARTFORUM

OCTOBER 1995 \$7.00 SFr 15

INTERNATIONAL



Mary Lucier, *Last Rites (Positano)*, 1995, mixed media. Installation view.

## MARY LUCIER

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

Through a rich interweaving of different media, Mary Lucier's *Last Rites (Positano)*, 1995, reconstructed a distant moment of her recently deceased mother's past. Lucier transformed the gallery into a dramatically lit, cavernous space, and filled it with speakers, video monitors, her mother's furniture, and photographs. The result was less a testament to the loss of her mother than to the mechanisms of memory itself.

At the center of *Last Rites* was a narrative of adventure, romance, and tragedy: Lucier's mother, Margaret Glosser, an Ohio native, traveled abroad as a young

woman, met and fell in love with a bohemian German writer named Wolfgang, settled in the Italian fishing village of Positano, bore a child (Lucier's older half-sister), and finally left her husband just before the onset of World War II to return with her daughter to Ohio, where she settled and remarried. Lucier's installation—a cross between a memorial service, a courtroom trial, and a really strange dream—reconstructed this period in her mother's life.

In three separate areas of the gallery, a speaker suspended from the ceiling played a different section of Glosser's taped recollections of her European romance. Her furniture (either hanging from the ceiling or resting on the floor), along with numerous photographs, helped to ground her somewhat unsettlingly disembodied voice.

The videotaped testimonies of three "witnesses" to Glosser's youthful adventure—Glosser's brother, her daughter by the mysterious Wolfgang, and an Italian friend from Positano, each of whom appeared as a talking head on a suspended video monitor—were shown in slow motion to emphasize the speakers' facial expressions, giving them the uncanny look of people floating in a dimly recalled dream fragment. Both the monitors and the speakers were wired to motion sensors so that any attempt to stop and focus on a narrative produced a frustrating silence, perfectly capturing the necessarily partial and fleeting nature of memory. In another evocation of a long-forgotten time and place, overlapping images of flowing water—its rushing sound sometimes interspersed with the music of Italian church bells resonating in the distance—were projected onto a wall of the gallery to form a triptych of sorts.

Lucier's thematic consideration of memory's imperfections was echoed in her choice of media: her work foregrounds the inability of memory and technology alike to re-create experience. Yet *Last Rites* revealed these shortcomings to be not a curse but a blessing. For Lucier, memory, like artmaking itself, is a poetic response to what remains just beyond our grasp.

—Jennifer P. Borum