

SUSAN KAE GRANT

NIGHT JOURNEY



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MAY 16 - JUNE 22, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS

SUSAN KAE GRANT
*FROSTED GLASS ENCOUNTER**

**This phrase and those in italics below are the words of Susan kae Grant and are drawn whole from the exhibition's audio component.*

"I need a secret"

For an artist who draws heavily on autobiography as a point of departure and inspiration, what intimate realm remains when the events and character of her life have already been extensively mined? When she shows her audience something true through the questions her own life raises, where does she turn when she has seemingly exhausted her primary subject? In the case of Susan kae Grant, it is to the dream state, to the wild rides of sleep where the imagined and the real collide without a compass.

"Not anchored by a bed"

If dreaming feeds, processes, and provides ballast to our waking life, is it possible, or advisable, to expose its contents to the light of day? Or are dreams necessarily submerged, unclear, and beyond any precise summoning? Grant concludes that dreams, for her, are only partially accessible. They are unanswerable but inspiring, incomplete but powerful; they are a tantalizing font of imagery to which vivid connection recedes at the very moment a dream gives way to consciousness.

"I don't remember how he got in"

In search of heightened access to her dreams, Grant initiated a project that enlisted the cooperation of sleep science. In a University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center sleep lab, the artist submitted to an elaborate network of electrodes and the scrutiny of researchers who repeatedly awoke her from REM sleep with interrogations about the nature

of her most recent dream. Grant's accounts were recorded over many nights during 1993 and 1994, and from the resulting transcripts she collected select phrases and images. These fragments were to provide the basis for her next photographic series, a series about remembered dreams as an avenue to the unconscious.

"Hands clutched tightly"

Night Journey was created and continues to evolve. Grant has undertaken a cycle of shadow works that will number one hundred when complete. The first were cast onto billowing floor-to-ceiling scrims of silk suspended and layered together, breathing one image onto another, an ever-changing shadow world viewers could physically enter. A soundtrack animated the environment (as it does here): provocative phrases from the sleep lab interrogations uttered in Grant's own voice, loud then soft, words layered like the images, parallel then discordant, edgy clues to the flesh behind the ghostly, ageless silhouettes.

"I am the participant and the observer"

In this exhibition, Grant's elongated dark hour tableaux, her delicate shadow plays that hearken back to childhood imaginings, fairy tales and nightmares; Victorian spirit worlds and the lurking Nosferatu of F.W. Murnau; are printed in four black inks onto forty-four inch high paper sheets half again as wide. The transparency of the images on cloth are exchanged for the opacity of rich, hand-torn paper imprinted with lush ebony forms. The forms are often human figures engaged with props and set upon filmy backgrounds. Branches, leaves and curtains punctuate a smoky negative space that the artist terms an "envelope of light." The players float,

sometimes alone, sometimes in relation to each other or a chair, a bird, a magic lamp. They seem to reach in and out of the picture frame like unmoored phantoms, advancing their drama in a thick, luminous liquid.

Night Journey, 2002.
Archival Iris Giclée print. 22" x 44"



"There is an understanding"

In *Night Journey*, dreams are both Susan kae Grant's subject and her source. But they are not the literal, objective subject they are for her sleep scientist colleagues, nor are they a direct source, as a dream was for Jasper Johns in 1955 when he painted *Flag*. This now iconic work was wholly conceived by his unconscious the night before he took up his brush. Many other artists, writers, composers, and filmmakers, have plumbed their own dreams for ideas, images, stories, and song, as they have also sought to approximate the qualities of dream world experience in their art. Ancient cultures whose boundaries between conscious and unconscious states are less strictly drawn have entire artistic traditions significantly reliant on hallucinatory aesthetics neither real nor utterly fantastic. Grant, a product of the Freudian era, comes to dreams self-consciously, drawing from their content and character carefully, asserting her artistic discipline on their primal lack of order to both relive and contain their fascination.

"She sits straight up"

Grant began by wanting to both address and access her dreams. "Where do I go at night?" was the question that took her to the sleep lab. Could she access a part of herself otherwise unavailable, unexamined? And could she take what she found and use it to continue her work as an artist, lengthening the trajectory of a life's work based on life story to include her unconscious self, using memory as the bridge? *Night Journey* is just that, a journey from darkness into light and back again. It tells her story, a shared story, it poses searching questions that both stump us and define us. What are we doing? What just happened?

Are we giving or taking? Are we oppressed or dominating? Do we accept or let go? Are we filled with fear or yearning?

"No one ever finds the room"

To create this work, Grant ultimately resolved that the dreams she uncovered in the lab would be the inspiration for her images but that they would not be illustrated. Likewise the visceral, sexual phrases that spilled from her lips as she was interrogated just seconds out of REM would be used unaltered in the audio, and would advise only the conception of scenes from her shadow theater. The language would have taste, smell, touch, the images would be seen but silent, they would be illusions without precise meaning, but evocative of meaning, rich with symbolism—they would be as dreams, elusive, like the thread of their memory. The visions of *Night Journey* return us to a world of ineffable states remembered from somewhere, a familiar, inescapable place impossible to know.

"Afraid because we found each other's secret"

Trudy Wilner Stack
Curator of Exhibitions & Education
Center for Creative Photography
The University of Arizona,
Tucson, Arizona
May 2002

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Night Journey, 2002.
Archival Iris Giclée print. 22" x 44"

SUSAN KAE GRANT

Resides in Dallas, TX.

EDUCATION

1979 M.F.A., 1976 B.S., The University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Night Journey*, Women & Their Work Gallery, Austin, TX.
- 2001 *Night Journey*, Houston Center for Photography, Houston, TX.
- 2000 *Night Journey*, 5501 Columbia Art Center, Dallas, TX.
- 1997 *Radioactive Substances*, The Anchorage Museum of Art and History, Anchorage, AK.
- 1992 *Vestiges*, The Emily Edwards Gallery, Southwest Craft Center, San Antonio, TX.
- 1989 *Photographs*, Relay Zone Gallery, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, KS.
- 1987 *Recent Work*, DW Gallery, Dallas, TX.
- 1986 *Autobiographic Dramas*, Dillingham Center, Ithaca College, Ithaca, N.Y.
- 1985 *Photographs*, The Photographers Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
- 1982 *Autobiographic Dramas*, S.U.N.Y. Buffalo Fine Arts Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.

SELECTED EXHIBITS

- 2002 *Discoveries of The Meeting Place*, Fotofest 2002, Houston, TX.
- 1999 *Invitational Book Arts Exhibition*, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 1997 *Book As Art, Innovative Structure*, The New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM.
- 1996 *Self Evident: Photography Explores Democracy*, Nathan Cummings Foundation, New York, N.Y. (Catalogue)
- 1995-1996 *Digital Dramas, Computer Generated Photography + Videos*, Touring Exhibition, Houston Center for Photography, Houston, TX (Catalogue)
- 1995-1996 *Science and the Artist's Book*, (Touring) Washington Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC (Catalogue)

- 1995 *Fact and Fiction: Animal Visions For the 21st Century*, The Light Factory Photographic Arts Center, Charlotte, NC.
On *Beyond the Book*, Forum For Contemporary Art, St. Louis, MO.
- 1991-1995 *Photographic Book Art in the United States*, (Touring Exhibition)
- 1993 *Self-evidence: Self-Portraits in Prints and Photographs*, The New York Public Library, N.Y., N.Y.
- 1993-1994 *Re:Framing the Past*, Recent Work from Texas Women Photographers: (Touring Exhibit) Organized by Women & Their Work Gallery, Austin, TX. (Catalogue)
- The Art of the Book: Recent Acquisitions in the National Art Library*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England
- 1990-1993 *Book Arts in the USA*, Curator: Richard Minsky, (Touring Exhibit)
The Modern Art Museum, Sao Paulo, Brazil
The Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
The Binational Center, Bogota, Columbia
The National Gallery, Senegal
The National Gallery, Harare, Zimbabwe,
The National Museum Gaborone, Botswana
The National Library, Antananrivo, Madagascar
The Center For Book Arts, N.Y., N.Y.
- 1991 *Self-portraits of Women in the 80's*, The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan
- 1987-1990 *Mothers and Daughters*, (Touring Exhibit) Aperture Foundation, N.Y., Burden Gallery, N.Y. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE., Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH.
- 1990 *Women View Women*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX.
- 1987-1989 *An Active Process, Artists' Books*, (Touring Exhibit) North Vancouver, B.C., Victoria, B.C., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Alberta, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2000 *The Stars of Tomorrow*, *FotoMAGAZIN*, page 55, published in Germany, Editor, Manfred Zollner, October
- Dreams Come Alive*, Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, cover page, by Terry Lee Goodrich, May
- Dreams: Susan kae Grant*, Telecast, Texas News 5 at Ten KXAS-TV, May
- In *Dreams, The Met*, Dallas, Texas, page 31, by Bret McCabe, April
- Nocturnal Confessions, Dallas Observer*, Dallas, Texas, by Shannon Sutlief, April
- Susan kae Grant, Genie Shenk*, The *Dallas Morning News*, Friday Guide, Dallas, Texas, by Mike Danie, April

SELECTED COLLECTIONS:

- Arts of the Book Collection, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- Center For Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ.
- Columbia University, New York, N.Y.
- Detroit Public Library Rare Book Room, Detroit, MI.
- Frito Lay Corporate Collection, Dallas, TX.
- Graham Nash Collection, Pasadena, CA.
- Phoenix Public Library Rare Book Collection, Phoenix, AZ.
- Texas Instruments Corporate Collection, Dallas, TX.
- The J. Paul Getty Museum Artists' Book Collection, Malibu, CA.
- The International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.
- The Minneapolis Art Institute, Minneapolis, MN.
- The New York Public Library Spencer Collection, New York, N.Y.
- The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Collection, Miami Beach, FL.
- The School of the Art Institute Artist's Book Collection, Chicago, IL.
- The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan
- Victoria & Albert Museum National Art Library, London, England



Cover Panel: *Night Journey*, 2002. Archival Iris Giclée print. 22" x 44"

This Panel: *Night Journey*, 2002. Archival Iris Giclée print. 22" x 44"

Back Panel: *Night Journey*, 2002. Archival Iris Giclée print. 22" x 44"



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Now celebrating its 24th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,658 artists in 208 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 225 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the

National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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