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*Susan Jewett*

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## Jane Martin: Moments of Inner Ecstasy

By JANET GOLEAS

The drive to Jane Martin’s studio curls through walls of pine trees and towering cedars that are so dense that underneath their canopy it seems to always be nighttime. But in a clearing ahead stands the artist’s house and studio, bathed in sunlight. Sitting squarely among 26 private acres of woodlands that sprawl toward the wetlands and salt marshes of Accabonac Harbor, the minimalist structure is on the estate of New York’s famed uber-designer, Ward Bennett, who died at 85, in 2003. Ms. Martin lives and works in his former studio.

The artist emerges with her signature hair cropped into a painterly mix of black-and-white peaks. Inside her living space, a large room is divided into separate areas that double as bedroom, office, workspace, and library. Equipped with a high-tech computer, a gigantic professional printer, and a modest wood-burning stove, the anomalies here abound. Loaded bookshelves and walls of abstract paintings and photographs further indicate that this is not your run-of-the-mill country home. The main room yields to a small kitchen and a working studio equipped with an ancillary work booth that is hermetically sealed inside tight plastic walls.



Jane Martin captures the ferocity of nature in her piece “Rogue Wave #1.”

The studio is bursting with images of roiling surf, misty woodlands, nudes, and parts of nudes that are mounted on panels and stacked in various degrees of completion. Some of the images depict explicit places or things, others are distinctly abstract, and still others hover between the two. Ms. Martin’s process, a complex system in which the artist locates images inside video stills, allows her to isolate fragments of time – the moments in between moments – that resonate for her with a specific ambience and truth of tone.

“I’m looking for a moment of inner ecstasy and when I find it, it’s always a surprise,” she said.

Working in five distinct mediums – painting, photography, film, video stills, and video installation – has provided wide latitude in her methodology, but the results share in the incisive instants of pure vision for which Ms. Martin’s art is known.

“I work within a lot of circumstances I can’t control, so I fill things up with an intention and, at some point,

something shifts inside. I never have a preconceived notion of exactly what I’m looking for.”

Ms. Martin’s artistic trajectory has been steady, but, growing up in the suburbs of Long Island, she never dreamed one could actually live as an artist. When her academic standing paved the way to an honors program that included regular visits to New York City, she found a lifeline through theater, art museums, and film. Though her vision was still in development, it became clear in her teenage years that the artist was emerging.

“When ‘Water Lilies’ had their own room at MOMA [the Museum of Modern Art],” she recalled, “I remember – that was overwhelming. Something would shift in me and I could just sit there, dropped into a meditative place.”

An inveterate spiritualist, Ms. Martin is nowhere more unique than in her unwavering insistence that she locates the “moment of ecstasy” in her art.

In a world that is dominated by market fluctuations and Smartphones, Ms. Martin thrives on the quietude of her woodland studio.

“I think I’m working on a counterpoint to the frantic pace of everything,” she said. “In my art, I get to slow it down.”

In her video stills, she pores over thousands of images on her Mac computer in search of the one that expresses a perfect visual moment. The results are sensual and seductive, often marrying the quality of ambiguity with precise fractions of pictorial content.

Ms. Martin, who began as a painter, turned to filmmaking after living in France for several years. When she returned to New York, she enrolled in the film department at New York University and began taking courses. Her success in the film world was substantial and she eventually returned to France, where her keen eye and the attitude of a perfectionist were terrific assets in shooting and editing documentaries, industrial films, and high-profile interviews with film industry giants such as Oliver Stone and Steven Spielberg. After eight years of living in Paris, she returned to New York in the mid-1990s.

Her award-winning film “Silent Sentries,” which will be screened in the Artists on Film series at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center tomorrow at 7 p.m., was begun exactly 20 years ago. In the 23-minute documentary, Ms. Martin’s camera cascades through New York City focusing on the ubiquitous water tanks that dot the skyline like so many wine barrels or bales of hay. Instead of using the standard voice-over to describe the use and function of the water tank, she deliberately employed a dialogue of misinformation supplied by random city residents.

“I think they’re unsightly,” said one onlooker. “I don’t know what they are,” said another, “but they should be covered up.” The dialogue continues while she films various rooftop configurations. Meanwhile, workmen in muscle shirts collapse and then rebuild a standing water tank as the sun sets into an orange horizon. The film was purchased by PBS, and has been broadcast frequently on various public television stations.

The documentary is poignant and poetic, and, like an ode to New York, it is filled with the gritty romance of city life. It is also, not surprisingly, filled with metaphors of water, a preoccupation that continues to dominate Ms. Martin’s work today.

“Everything seems to revolve around water in the world today,” she said. “It has a relentless quality and capturing that power is inherent in my work. But the other side is soft and sensual. The surface of water can be quite expressive, but then you dive underneath and inside there’s an incredible inner stillness.”

In the body of work Ms. Martin has developed over the years, she has moved toward striking a balance between the ferociousness of nature and its stillness as well as the vicissitudes of the art market, technology, and the noisy world that exists outside. The combination of city life and the film industry became too much for her, and, after living on the East End part time since 1999, in 2004, she moved to Springs full time.

Relative to other residences she has lived in, her current abode is raw and somewhat unconventional. Though she watches as many as 200 independent films a year, she has never had a working television in her adult life. Bear in mind, however, that in the South of France she lived for two years without hot water, heat, or electricity. But in East Hampton, in her oasis within an oasis, Ms. Martin is content to chat with visiting deer families — she even has names for each of them — and delights in the little birds that nibble seeds from her hand in the quiet of her backyard.

It is clear that Ms. Martin thrives on the community of artists by which she is surrounded as well as the seclusion that defines so much of her life. As we walk down the long path that curves over the eelgrass and marshlands at the edge of Accabonac Harbor, she admits that sometimes maintaining the level of solitude she seeks is challenging, but its affect on her artistic process is tremendously significant.

“It’s always a surprise to me,” said Ms. Martin of her artistic process. “I come up with these ideas and I’m never quite sure what the destination is, but the journey is incredible.”