

Dani's Papers

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Arts Commentary

Jane Martin, Defining Moments Revealed

by Marion Wolberg Weiss

For those who have seen Jane Martin's current exhibition at Guild Hall, it would seem as if all her works are defining moments, regardless of the media or the subject matter. From soaring waves to a woman's journey, Martin's images are at once lyrical and precise, where a moment is captured in time and space.

Martin's life is somewhat like her images, with experiences signifying both stop-motion and movement as they evolve into other realms. It's a life that is directional and arbitrary, conscious and unconscious. Even so, one thing is for certain: Martin's life and work are still developing. In a nutshell, every step this artist takes is a defining moment, a crossroad in itself.

Martin was off to a good start when she left Huntington, Long Island for France, where she spent several years studying painting with a small group of students. Barely in her 20s and feeling isolated at times, she absorbed enough for a lifetime.

Martin's second period of aesthetic development came when she discovered that film was art. (She says that recognition came from seeing the movie *The Night Porter*, no doubt a defining moment.) Her deep penchant for film led to her acceptance in a one-year intensive film program at New York University. Upon completing it, Martin became a teacher's assistant at NYU, and worked in the film industry, most notably with Al Pacino, working as assistant editor and experimental editor on Pacino's self-produced film, *Local Stigmatic*.

Martin was asked to shoot and edit a film about AIDS by Gregory Colbert, the



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well-known artist of the piece "Ashes and Snow." For this defining moment, she went to Uganda, "almost getting killed," as she put it, in the shooting process. It was worth the effort, however, when she found herself in Paris, where she lived for eight years.

Returning to New York in the early '90s, Martin continued with her film pursuits, directing and producing her documentary *Silent Sentries*, about water towers perched on the roofs of Manhattan. It was a film she obviously



Jane Martin

still feels strongly about. "The idea of water towers hasn't changed in 100 years, but most people do not know where they get their water supply. I was able to tell the story entirely by visuals," she said. "It was a way of shifting people's attention because they are used to walking around with their heads down. I employed different meth-

ods to get them to pay attention." Asked to characterize this way of working, Martin was her usual, distinct self. "Art is non-personal flowing through the personal (myself)," she said. "My work is poetic, not conceptual."

Such a description makes sense when we consider that Martin works in a way where she has "no control of anything." Discussing her Guild Hall exhibit, she said, "I set up things like fog, wind, a backdrop and asked the model to respond. All those things you can't control. In post-production, it took me two weeks in Photoshop to find one image/frame. (That's one out of 30 frames per second.) This video still is another way of grabbing attention."

Martin's titles are also provocative. The name of the current show, "Reckoning and Rapture," is a good example. While the artist suggests that there's an advancing and retreating involved in her images, such literal and figurative dynamics signify awareness (reckoning) and bliss (rapture). In this way, Martin can capture the audience's attention as well as her own. What a surprise for everyone.

Jane Martin's exhibit will be on view at East Hampton's Guild Hall until Jan. 18.

Photo by Nathan Best