

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2006

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy POSTMASTERS

Two kinds of time—cinematic and oneiric—pass in Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's recent exhibition, "Directed Dreaming." In the show's centerpiece, the multimedia installation *Dream Sequence*, 2006, two rotating platforms each contain a series of dreamlike scenarios built using tiny figures and train-set-style buildings and trees. As the platforms turn, a series of cameras and mirrors project images of the miniscule film sets on to the gallery wall, to the accompaniment of a whooshing oceanic (or possibly uterine) sound track. Each projection has one element that remains unchanging as the shots of the dioramas scroll by: a plastic doll—a man in one and a woman in the other, presumably representing the artists—superimposed in the foreground, slumbering away in bed.

Thus it appears that the artists themselves are dreaming these scenes into existence. The images they conjure appear both intensely personal and politically current, drawing on intellectual and artistic developments such as psychoanalysis and Surrealism. In the nocturnal landscape, one scene slides into another, scale shifts, eras overlap, and the extraordinary is bracketed by the mundane. Jennifer's terror-inflected nightmare of the charred carcass of a bus sitting on a deserted highway near an apparently abandoned airplane is gradually invaded by a group of sprightly, oblivious golfers. Elsewhere, a dog standing on a dresser floats through a flooded post-Katrina landscape that morphs into a suburban swimming pool. Kevin's dreamscape, on the other hand, contains a war in what looks like the contemporary Middle East that is suddenly taken over by medieval Crusaders, and the dreamer's vulnerability is evinced through such anxiety-inducing/delightful situations as finding himself a tiny student towered over by what look like gorgeous Amazonian teachers. At one point, a large door appears in the woods, evoking the passage from one state to another.

Dream Sequence locates and explores points of access to trauma in a focused and affecting manner that distinguishes it from the aestheticized disaffection found elsewhere. Here is a demonstration of a pair of minds attempting—but not quite managing—to process and assimilate challenging events by using a format that offers no possibility of the kind of closure associated with linear narrative, a format that repeats and dissolves rather than moving forward and resolving. As the platforms spin, elements of the landscape move out of the foreground and reappear as backdrops for other dreams, never quite letting go their hold on the dreamers or on us, their spectators.

The watcher and the watched feature prominently in the exhibition's other major work, *Double Fantasy II (sex)*, 2005, which draws on a technique familiar from the McCoy's earlier works—the interweaving of the artists' own histories with the history and conventions of cinema. Here, a series of tiny tableaux, in which the same figures appear multiple times and are filmed by multiple cameras, allow the artists to examine romantic and sexual fantasies and the way they are fueled by popular culture. Though the order in which these scenes are projected is fixed, linear time still somehow seems to have been cut and shuffled, cause and effect interchanged, with the dreamer watching and participating almost, it seems, simultaneously. In the artists' earlier work, such as the "Traffic" series, 2004, this randomness was essential to the creation of a special kind of cinematic time, in which separate physical realities merged into a single narrative; in *Double Fantasy*, however, the conceit pales next to the concentrated and complex engagement of *Dream Sequence*, which exerts its pull from the other room.

—Emily Hall



Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, *Dream Sequence*, 2006, mixed media with continuous two-channel video projection, each projection 10 x 25'.