

Amanda Merrill
Critical Writing: the Arts in NYC
June 17, 2004

A Escape into Solitude Accessible to the World (890 words)


Like many children, Yael Kanarek loved Disney movies. They allowed her an escape from reality into a magical fantasy world made of visual imagery, cinematography, music, language, and movement. The films did not satisfy her, for as soon as the closing credits rolled across the screen the fantastic world disappeared just as quickly as it had arisen. Kanarek spent years trying to create an imaginary world of her own through visual art, but her paintings left her unsatisfied as well. When her apartment overflowed with unknown paintings that had never reached a gallery, the artist turned to new, rapidly-developing medium to store and showcase her work: the internet.

In 1995, Kanarek began to post bits of her fantasy world on the internet, and www.worldofawe.net was born. The web-site is an interactive project that combines various art forms such as visual art, literature, music, cinematography, and dance with modern technology. The literary manifestations of the world (the Journal entries) introduce the viewer to the central theme, a story of a traveler who passes from the physical world of NYC through a portal to the imaginary Sunset/Sunrise, a magnificent desert terrain that Kanarek originally depicted in her paintings. Technological advancements ensure that the artist can continually update the story and add multimedia art forms that pertain to and enhance the writing, thereby eliminating the frustrating knowledge that the imaginary world will soon come to an end.

The most recent addition to the project is a series of short films that use dance as a visual interpretation of the traveler's passage from the physical world into the virtual fantasy. To make this section, Kanarek collaborated with Evann Siebens, a dance filmmaker. The three films not only render a visual interpretation of the traveler's journey, but also suggest psychological perspectives behind the artist's desire to create such a world.

The first section takes place in the "real" world at a specific location, which the title informs us is 419 E 6th St in Manhattan. A metal gate guards the address, locked by a heavy chain. People walk along the sidewalk, but no one seems to notice the traveler, who appears genderless and hides in a dark hat and over-sized dark glasses. She's in a crowded city but feels alone. Her movements appear almost mechanical and do not follow her own timing but rather are initiated by the viewer's click of the mouse.

The second clip, entitled "In Between Worlds," signifies the traveler's transportation and is glaringly different from the rest. In between worlds the traveler is stripped of her protective clothing and is completely naked. She seems to be unaware of her nudity and does not try to hide it, but the audience sees her as vulnerable and exposed. She is also trapped: though there is no time or space in the portal, a dotted outline of a cube surrounds her. The cube has no visible walls, but the traveler does not attempt to escape. Instead she crawls, infant-like, around in circles within the cube. She has no control and is at the mercy of the viewer, who



determines her direction with the mere budge of the computer mouse. Suddenly, her face encompasses the entire screen, and we find ourselves face-to-face with her. Though her eyes gaze right through us, she is no longer the androgynous, faceless figure from the journal but a woman no different from the rest of us. She holds up a hand, yearning for human contact. We instinctively reach for the screen to provide the comfort of human touch, forgetting for an instant that touching the screen will do nothing at all. Some sort of boundary exists between us and this solitary traveler.

The final clip finds the traveler in *Sunset/Sunrise*, the essence of Kanarek's imaginary world. The traveler once again dons her protective clothing and eyewear, but she no longer needs audience interaction. Time does not exist here, for no matter what direction she faces, her shadow is always behind her. She is content dancing about the digital landscape, performing repetitive movements that are not intended to entice an audience, but rather to explore movement fundamentals such as spacial and body awareness. Some of her movements suggest that she is looking for something or journeying towards something, presumably the treasure, yet she seems to know that the hunt is futile because the treasure continuously relocates and therefore will always elude her. Instead, she seems at peace with herself. At some points, replicas of herself dot the landscape, mimicking her movements. She moves with them, acknowledging that they are sides of herself, but sometimes she dances slightly out of sync, acknowledging her individuality. This section is the *World of Awe*, the ideal escape that blends music, art, dance, and technology into a comforting arena of solitude and self-acceptance.

The *World of Awe* is the imaginary, mystical escape that Yael Kanarek cultivates within her mind, allowing her the same escape she once sought in Disney movies but perfected by establishing that it will not come to an end. Though computer technology allows her to share her imaginary world with others, it is still entirely creation, for no guest book or message board invites viewers to add their input. Kanarek creates an escape from loneliness by accepting and embracing it, finding comfort in a timeless world of music, art, and movement.