

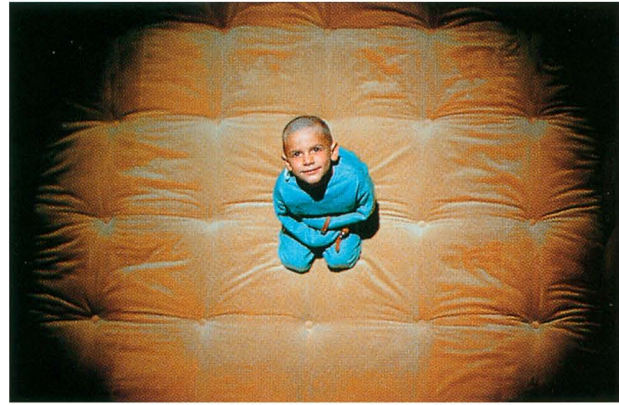
Art in America

March 2000

Maria Marshall at Team

The stuff of dreams and nightmares has long provided source material for artists and other spinners of tales. Montaigne thought that it required an artist to sort dreams out and understand them. Maria Marshall has no such intentions. For this 34-year-old British artist, fears and night sweats take shape in raw, unexplained mini-tales featuring her own children, whom she imagines in dangerous, even life-threatening, situations. Perhaps it was her own childhood as an Iraqi Jew born in Bombay and educated in England that fueled ruminations on odd behaviors and feelings of displacement. In her much-discussed New York debut last season at Team, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a Cooker*, she filmed her two-year-old son performing the unlikely act of taking a long, slow drag on a cigarette. She enjoys disjunction, and she's also very clever with film technology.

The concrete ramp at Team descends into a darkened, low-ceilinged space that was divided into three rooms for Marshall's wall projections. In the first film, titled *I did like being born, I falled out of the air, I put my wings open, then I flied*, a boy is seen floating on his back in what looks like a black-and-white home movie of a first swimming lesson. The loud sound of water crashing and the extended length of time that the child's head is underwater soon suggest something far more menacing. Shot on 8mm film and, like each of the works here, transferred to laserdisc and running less than two minutes, this piece heralds the intense claustrophobia of each of the films.



Maria Marshall: Film still from *Don't let the T-Rex get the children*, 1999, laserdisc; at Team.

In the second room, *Don't let the T-Rex get the children* is a lingering close-up of an angelic-faced boy, shot from above, this time in lush 35mm. In one long, slowed-down reverse zoom shot, the camera reveals a shaved-headed youth tied in a straitjacket, seated in the middle of a padded cell. It's a spectacular moment, displaying all of Marshall's prowess with the camera and with metaphor.

The final film fragment, shot in super 16mm and called *Once up on*, is a speeded-up shot of schoolyard activity. Editing makes morning recess look like a frantic battle zone with bullies and pranksters rushing to and fro. The soundtrack is a child reciting a made-up fairy tale about a "big, bad pig who huffed and puffed" and, when he couldn't blow the little wolves' house down, exploded it with TNT instead. Marshall's attempts at humor are welcome, but do little to counter the terror she deals in.

Marshall is herself a trickster. Digital manipulation is what makes her children seem like they're smoking, or drowning, or abandoned in a cell. She knows how to put technology in the service of the image she desires. It might be said that she's part of what amounts to a new British cinema, along with contemporaries Sam Taylor-Wood, Gillian Wearing, Jane and Louise Wilson and Steve McQueen.

—Michael Rush