

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

514 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 Tel. 212 941 0012 Fax. 212 929 3265
info@lennonweinberg.com www.lennonweinberg.com

Mary Lucier

Last Rites (Positano)

March 18 – April 22, 1995
Tuesday-Saturday 10-6

Last Rites (Positano) is Lucier's most personal work to date, although the subject at its center is not herself but her mother Margaret Glosser. A few years before her mother died, Lucier recorded a lengthy account of her youth in a midwestern town and her experiences in Europe in the mid 1930's. Living a peripatetic bohemian life in the company of her German husband (correspondent, con artist, cad), they settled for some time in the then isolated and primitive fishing village of Positano after the birth of their daughter, Lucier's older sister. With the help of a local Positanese woman, Margaret began to make a home and a life for herself and her child, eventually became disaffected with her life there, and returned to the United States a young divorced mother before the outbreak of World War II. Margaret subsequently remarried and spent the rest of her life in the small Ohio town where she was born, and where, in 1944, Mary Lucier herself was born.

In Margaret's narration, the idea of Positano has almost mythic resonance as an icon of exalted but ambiguous status. Positano came to signify both the fulfillment of an American romantic longing and the ultimate failure of that ideal to sustain a productive and rewarding life. It represented happiness and misery, adventure and peril, an ending and a beginning – personal drama played out against a backdrop of the rising wave of Fascism and impending cataclysm.

The spoken narration is juxtaposed with video recordings of three "witnesses". Mary Lucier found reflections and other perspectives on these events and memories in interviews with her mother's brother Samuel, her own sister Jessie, and through a series of almost miraculous coincidences the very Maria de Lucrezia who had been Margaret's housekeeper and confidante, and the child's godmother, sixty years ago.

Last Rites (Positano) is based on the original narration and interviews, edited and processed through frequency shifting and tuned resonance filtering, to create a "chorus" of pitched voices and ambient sound. Speakers and monitors respond to the viewer's presence, whose own movements affect the cycles of storytelling and create conversations among the voices and images. Parallel narratives will become interwoven according to audience movement, allowing for the voices to "sing" in solos, duets, trios and quartet, and creating a counterpoint of spoken text and "musical" figures. Completing the installation are several fixed elements – an ongoing projection, clusters of antique furniture and photographs.

The responsive system is intended to facilitate a constantly changing dynamic structure and musical texture determined by audience interaction rather than by a set of decisions predetermined solely by the artist. Ultimately, the work is not merely a biographical portrait, but an investigation of relationships between people and places, memory and history, youth and age, as well as reconciliation of the ideal with the real, the past with the present.

Although a major installation by this highly-regarded and well-known artist, *Noah's Raven*, organized by the Toledo Museum of Art, has been seen recently in Miami and Portland, and another, *Oblique House*, was presented in Rochester, a large-scale installation of Lucier has not been on view in New York City since *Wilderness* and *Asylum* were shown at the Greenberg, Wilson Gallery in 1989 and 1991. A pioneering video installation done 1973, *Dawn Burn*, was recently acquired and shown by the San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art in an exhibition "Beyond Boundaries: Art of the Sixties and Seventies." *Dawn Burn*, using now-obsolete technologies, underwent conservation and digital re-mastering by the museum, a necessary process if works from the early years of video art are to remain viable and visible. Video technology has come a long way since that time, and the current digital processes of laserdisc and computer allow for tremendously more complex compositions with much greater ease and spontaneity than the old standard of videotape. Lucier puts these enhanced capabilities to sensitive use in *Last Rites (Positano)*, and continues her exploration of the expressive power of this challenging medium.