

LIPS UNSEALED

Confidences
From Contemporary
Women Writers

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Mary Ellen Rooney is a photographer, freelance professional journalist, press officer at Lincoln Center and has recently had an exhibit, *Wise Women*, based on photographs and interviews of women between 65 and 96 years old that has been shown in New, Boston City Hall and a Beacon Hill gallery. After spending an extraordinary month on a remote motu in French Polynesia with Jean-Michel Cousteau's Project Ocean Search, Ms. Rooney stayed two weeks in Tahiti where she wrote "Papeete." Although it began as a piece of journalism

on Maupiti, she says her psyche would have none of it and "dream-like sequences, mercurial impressions, colors and sounds emerged." She says she wrote this piece as a gift to herself.

from Papeete

... I HAD stopped flying around down there, playing with the weightlessness. I had gotten over the thrill of turning like the fishes and somersaulting like a baby seal. I had slowed down. Gotten quiet within myself and looked. I had come to know the ancient lidless eyes of the Moray eel, the prehistoric soul who peers at the passerby from his rock lair. And at night I had gently pulled aside a rock to see the parrot fish sleeping, sometimes in pairs, while their large-orbed nocturnal brothers, the golden soldier fish dominated the reef in darkness.

In the subterranean world of silent images I would discover parts of myself. Often it was enough to touch a piece of reef just enough to stay in the territory like a little gobi fish and just stay there and be returned to another, deeper day. At first I thought, it's like the womb, which it was, only better because as far as I know there were no movies in the womb, only heartbeat and some sound. But there were no schools of scissor tailed jacks whisking by to some destination nor flying rays on a promenade. No giant carpets of sea anem-

one with their friends the parrot fish living safely among fluid tentacles. No the womb was never this good.

As we headed for a formation in the reef I began to feel the surge. We were in shallow water, at least it was more shallow than before and I was having trouble staying down. I grabbed a bright orange piece of coral. The thought flashed through my mind that there was something about this coral to watch out for. The wristlet on my glove slipped in a surge and I felt stinging on the inside of my wrists. Nothing showed but afterwards I remembered fire coral. A small battle scar considering that by the time the dive had ended we had counted thirty grey reef sharks. When they came through, everything else down there disappeared. The energy down there changed when he slit the water. I came to Papeete to be where I wouldn't just be waiting, where I could write, withdraw. I don't know if I knew what was coming...