



Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*
Public Art Fund, through
Sept 13 (see Elsewhere).

Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*, 2004.

While many associate public art with monumental sculpture, the Public Art Fund has expanded the definition with an ongoing series of idiosyncratic, site-specific commissions. Janet Cardiff, a Canadian artist known for her sound works, turns out to be the perfect candidate for this program with *Her Long Black Hair* (2004), an audio walking tour of Central Park.

The site poses a formidable challenge for an artist, given Central Park's recurring role as the quintessential New York location, as seen in Woody Allen movies and *Love & Ovels* episodes. But we forget the publicness of this space as we immerse ourselves in the intimacy of Cardiff's narration. As we listen to her mellifluous voice, the park becomes a living theater, as if the trees, bicyclists, panhandlers and

pretzel vendors were placed there as performers on Cardiff's stage. Sometimes, the CD mentions a "woman on a cellphone" or "the Chinese couple posing for the wedding photographer," and by magic (or coincidence), the real-life versions step into view.

During the walk, participants are asked to pull out a series of snapshots found in the CD carrier. These pictures—of an unknown woman posing for an anonymous photographer in locations around the park several decades ago—are like clues in a detective story. Tantalizing us with evocative narrative, Cardiff leads us up to the Bethesda Fountain and into the Rambles. We follow, only to find out that there is no resolution; the mystery remains unsolved. Without a prize at the end of the audio-treasure hunt, we are left to savor the journey—a rewarding experience, in and of itself.—*Barbara Pollack*