In Search of Dreamtime, 1980, Betye Saar. Mixed media collage on handmade paper.
Photo: Lezley Saar.
Much of my work has a dream-like quality, perhaps because I layer materials, media, ideas, images. Some of my work was constructed from a particular dream or series of dreams, like—Dreams: The flowering of.... Other work was consciously constructed to have a dream-like quality, like In Search of Dreamtime.

THE GERMINAL DREAMS FOR DREAMS: THE FLOWERING OF...

1/7/76 5:45 a.m.

I am carrying the little girl, her legs are wrapped around my stomach. I climb thru the window. Outside is my neighbor, Mrs. B. with another woman. I walk thru the yard and garden. I go to another building and climb thru the window. Inside is outside. I'm in a garden but everything is brown and sienna. I'm shocked as everything outside the window was green. I notice some bushes I transplanted are dead, dried up, or turning brown. Now, another child is with me, she's wearing a tan sleeper suit. She whispers to me, “Ask Mrs. B about the strawberries.” So I ask her. Mrs. B. points to some urns on the wall of my garden and says, “My dear, you've got strawberries, look!” I see strawberry plants with big leaves but the berries are all green. The other women start to pick them. I think “Why don't they ripen? Maybe they'll ripen inside.”

5/11/76 4:30 a.m.

In a corner of the back yard is a black woman and some kids are in a tree. I examine some roses. They are newspaper sprayed pink, but the other flowers are real. I say to T. (little girl), “Look at all the flowers. The woman says “Hi Betye.”

5/19/76 8:30 a.m.

I'm talking to the folks across the street. I see that their yard has dried plants and a dying banana tree. I walk to the upper level of my yard and see a very big vegetable garden and lots of small young plants. Against the house are beautiful shrubs with green fern-like leaves and blue flowers. I show the garden to T. (little girl). We examine the plants and pull out a tree to transplant.

7/9/76 6:45 a.m.

Later outside the house with my mother, we see a new flower bed. Look like iris at first but when I look closer the flowers are all kinds mixed up. I tell my mother, “These just grew, if I had planned it and pampered them nothing would have grown.” They were very beautiful flowers. My girls are there, too. I hear crying but it's not them.
9/12/76 9:00 a.m.

At Grandma Draugh's house in Watts, on the back porch stoop, looking at her back yard. I see how the trees have grown, the flowers too. But the vegetable garden has wilted and dried up as we've been away and didn't water it. But now the water sprinkler is going on it and most of the garden has changed to green and is healthy. Big watermelons under the leaves. Lots of little garden patches.

9/14/76 6:45 a.m.

I'm gardening, pulling weeds and admiring the flowers. I think "It's a strange garden, but it's mine."

BETYE SAAR