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Art/Kay Larson

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In the Whitney, five ordinary video screens are allowed to simply tell the 4,000-year-old tale of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, through interviews with Arabs, Israelis, scholars, and ordinary people, their words and images sliced into stuttering fragments by Beryl Korot and synchronized to Steve Reich's music.

Everyone claims Abraham, the patriarch. The Arabs trace their presence in the desert from the Egyptian handmaiden Hagar and her son, Ishmael- Abraham's firstborn, by his concubine, the second wife; an outcast; an angry man; and a survivor. The Jews descend from Sarah's son, Isaac-the good child; Abraham's second-born, by the first wife; and the heir apparent. In this fierce explosive, archetypal tale of irreconcilable half-brothers, Reich and Korot rightly saw the emotional source (the "cave" where Abraham and Sarah are buried) of the antagonisms of the Middle East.

In form, *The Cave* is first kin to documentary television. Stripped of hubris and restored to its proper context- an art museum's video room- the tale soars. Reich's music and Korot's editing lift the biblical passages out of ordinary existence, setting them in the eternal landscape of the human mind, where people live and die for these ideas. Try it. (945 Madison Avenue, at 75th Street; through November 28.)