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Send in the Claude

Blanket, the Surface of Her

By Claude Wampler
P.S. 122
(Closed)

BY STEVEN DRUKMAN

The title of Claude Wampler's 80-minute performance—*Blanket, the Surface of Her*—is issued as a directive to other artists, but I figured she was up to something on her own. It was billed as a “challenge” to eight visual artists to use her (and not their visual medium) as their real-life canvas for one 10-minute work, but I knew the challenge really sat on Wampler's shoulders. After all, it is her impish persona—too coy and colorful to blanch into pure tabula rasa—that has made her past performances so appealing. Wampler has played sexy love scenes with her pooch, fondled the posterior regions of unsuspecting patrons, and even farted in a Tokyo toilet to shake up her spectators. She seemed too intuitively playful—cagey yes, John Cage-y no—to surrender to an experiment as purely Fluxus-like as *Blanket*. Usually, Claude just Flux with our heads.

Wampler has pitted her body against temporality before: she retained an enema while singing a Journey song for P.S. 122's last benefit. And there was the requisite bodily function in *Blanket*, as photographer Richard Kern urinated “through” Claude in Track #2. This was a seamless segue from Track #1, where Claude removed black rectangles from her eyes to reveal a pupil-less set of

contact lenses. This eerie stare of inky, tumescent marbles has come to be Claude's signature, and indeed the first three segments seemed less like other artists' work than vintage Wampler: striptease, micturition, jerky spasms to a synthesized beat, and cameo appearances by her Pomeranian, Cake.

By the 30-minute mark I wondered, should I care if she violates these eight artists' pledges of “In Claude We Trust,” tampering with their “pure” intentions so she can exercise her ya-yas? This question was gorgeously addressed in Track #4, which stands as the evening's *mise en abyme*. Photographer Romain Slocombe required Claude to circle in a wheelchair while a “nurse” projected slides of mutilated accident victims in rehab. Against the anesthetized torpor of Claude's wheelchair revolutions—head propped in a neck brace, mouth agape—we hear recorded narratives about a virgin whose honeymoon with her impotent husband ends in a car crash. Claude, playing the bride who never tastes the pleasures of sex, gazes back at the audi-



Claude Wampler in *Blanket*: fluxing with our heads

ence to show that fate often exercises the cruelest art in the most “pure” of human bodies. Gather your ya-yas while ye may.

And oh, she does, in Tracks #5 and #6. Dressed in black, Claude recites a text written about Victor & Rolf, the ampersand-bound duo from Ams-

terdam who maintain that “art and fashion are similar if not identical impulses.” (Dolce & Gabbana + Gilbert & George = Victor & Rolf?) Dressed in black and doing her best spokesmodel, Wampler sends up the seriousness of their mock-serious credo. Track #6 shows Richard Foreman's direction at its best, with Claude trying to bend spoons à la Uri Geller. These segments were utterly hilarious, making Tracks #7 and #8 a bit of a buzzkill. Julia Sher asked Claude to read from a history about slavery, because only an artist from such a privileged position could have the luxury to *relinquish* this freedom. Claude still tried to have fun with it, I think: she sat and read half-naked, and we heard whispered phrases like “grab my ankles” or “pin my arms,” complicating the master/slave binary of the book.

This forced piety wasn't helped by the ear-splitting Track #8, with Aphex Twin's car-alarm cacophony drowning out the chanson Wampler began to sing with piano accompaniment. But such is the risk of a work like *Blanket*—you're only as good as the artists speaking through you, and more often than not, Claude is just . . . better. **V**