

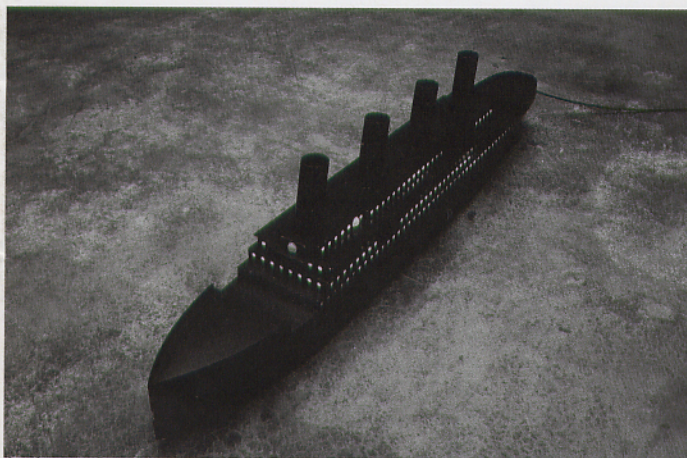
issues.

Art

NEW YORK e-MAIL

SUN OCT 7 00 22:10:55 FROM DAVID HUMPHREY

Lewis deSoto at BILL MAYNES, 9 September–9 October
Claude Wampler at POSTMASTERS, 9 September–9 October
Daniela Steinfeld at SARA MELTZER, 9 September–9 October



Artists often promote a fluid world in which people exchange properties with objects. Their works feign indifference, but cunningly conscript viewers into their skewed dramas. Paul Valéry writes, "As the steamship plunges down and sinks slowly, with all its resources, machines, lights, and instruments . . . the mind descends to sleep in the night and in the netherparts of oneself, with its own equipment and possibilities."

Lewis deSoto's robot oceanliner *Ship* (1998) likewise steams into a dreamy night of floating analogies and personal associations. DeSoto's person-sized black boat cruises the waterless ocean of the darkened gallery like a silhouette, its tiny windows lit up from within. *Ship* is camouflaged in the colors of night and spews a self-enveloping fog from its bottom. The oceanliner acts lost but is guided by a sonar system that prevents it from hitting walls or becoming trapped in corners. It wanders the empty gallery with a lumbering slowness, while dragging a powercord leash. Glowing interior lights and an apparently intentional, if hesitating decision-making process lend the miniature Titaniclike boat a sense of agency, as though it had a life within. If the mind is like a steamship, as Valéry proposes, deSoto figures it in the dark, awake during business hours but dead at the pull of a plug. His oceanliner stand-in for the mind is a floating hotel—a ship of fools—stowing transient beings throughout its lux-

urious hull. Within, sleep is not a catastrophe of will but an achievement of surrender and drift.

DeSoto's use of the robot to promote confusion between the animate and the inanimate is reversed by Claude Wampler's use of her own body as a living mannequin. As heirs to Surrealism, both artists inherit an interest in the uncanny, with its capacity to restage inaccessible memories or traumas in everyday settings. Wampler's elusive art takes us by surprise and frustrates our ability to scrutinize its details. If we get too close to the vitrines of *ACT I–IV* (all works, 2000) included in her exhibition "Painting, the movie," motion detectors cause their mixed-media constructions to disappear. The nasty objects lie behind LCD glass that electrically switches between opacity and transparency. As we move toward the artworks, they become blank, gray rectangular solids on pedestals. Suddenly, as we move away, they blink back to life again, becoming carnage-filled vitrines. (The detectors can be fooled by viewers who choose to move up close and remain perfectly still.) Severed body parts, rendered with lurid artifice in various low-tech media including paper, paint, and hair, violently reorient themselves within the glass. These severely edited bodies are augmented with a sense of political menace.

ACT III painting 3 (curse) contains a faceless, blood-spattered stuffed doll on its knees, with arms tied behind its back and head bowed to fit within the constraining vitrine. We too must stay perfectly still to get a close look at this tortured doll. Wampler burlesques conventional product display by heightening the commodity's inaccessibility. Her rhetoric of deflection and solicitation seems to bellow, "Please look, no you can't, okay, but don't move!" We are teased, denied, then rendered an accessory in a story of crime and aversion.

In *performative ulterior generosity*, the back wall of the gallery is composed of glass that, when clear, reveals a

