

CLAUDE WAMPLER

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In the continuous live performance that forms the core of Claude Wampler's installation, "Painting, the Movie," Wampler—arms outstretched, body bound, and face frozen in a grimace—slides on a mechanized track toward and away from the viewer. Sounds of thunder accompany the rhythmic sequence.

Wampler's movement in *performative ulterior generosity* (2000) is determined by a motion-detector. Hidden behind a wall-sized pane of LCD glass, framed to appear from afar like a minimal painting, the artist waits for us to activate her transformation from object to performer. Her bizarre *mise-en-scène* derives from a particular sequence found in Kurosawa's 1954 *Throne of Blood*, an epic tale based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

However oblique the reference (Wampler makes no effort to simulate her source), anyone familiar with the film or the play will understand the ghastly expression and strangely elaborate robes Wampler wears to incarnate Lady Macbeth. The fact that Wampler has acted with the likes of Richard Foreman and trained in the rigorous art of *Butoh* is evident in the melodramatic yet highly controlled movements through which she enacts her role. Simultaneously animate and phantasmic, her performance cannily evokes the cinematic body.

A series of sculptures seems to offer additional narrative fragments. Sitting on pedestals in vitrines made of the same motion-sensitized LCD glass, these kitsch-like objects include a bloody ankle, a cut-off ear, a knife, and a toenail. Reversing the logic of the performance, whether we see them or not is dependent upon our stasis. As you advance toward one of these objects, the glass clouds over; only when you are completely still does it momentarily reappear.

With the effect more intriguing than the objects themselves, the true subject of Wampler's sculptures—our desire to apprehend them—becomes clear. The voyeuristic longings that propel this inverted peepshow also allude to gendered issues of visibility and invisibility. Wampler often incorporates sculptural objects, drawings and paintings in her performances, which attempt to collapse distinctions between



CLAUDE WAMPLER, *performative ulterior generosity*, 2000, installation detail. Courtesy Postmasters, New York.

visual and performance art. These elements function as integral parts of a larger whole in which the artist's body is both a conduit for, and just another element of a compound meaning.

In the iconoclastic tradition of Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export, Annie Sprinkle, Karen Finley and Pipilotti Rist, among others, Wampler defies existing art categories. Her performance works are peculiar enough to be inventive, and aware enough to participate in a significant history. *Colorado Voodoo* (2000), a digital video shown in a room outside the installation, is a particularly good example. In it, Wampler is shot from behind writing and rewriting the names of various women artists across the surface of eggs, which she then ceremonially tosses into a river. The ritualistic, trance-like nature of her repetitive gestures echoes her performance, though a sense of intimacy, and not spectacle, draws us in. And while Wampler's provocative spectacles have gained her considerable notoriety, it is the kind of concentrated energy in this moving, enigmatic work that will more likely sustain her career.

JANE HARRIS

