

Art in America

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Claude Wampler at Postmasters

Claude Wampler has drawn from many forms of post-Dada performance in her short but significant career. Her stage action is often aligned with the slow, extremely precise gestures of that monumental Minimalist, Robert Wilson. Since the mid-'90s, she has presented almost a dozen works in venues ranging from Thomas Healy Gallery and P.S. 122 in New York to festivals in Brussels, Amsterdam and Austria. For her latest performance, at Postmasters, she

strapped her dancer's body onto a movable throne.

Inspired, she says in gallery notes, by Akira Kurosawa's 1957 film *Throne of Blood*, Wampler's performance installation was a dance of illusion and deception in which sculptural elements played a major role. In the main gallery were four pedestals supporting small transparent boxes which harbored mysterious objects that looked like body parts. But as you got close to the boxes, they suddenly became opaque and their contents obscured. As you stepped away, the transparency would return (thanks to discreetly placed sensors), and you could see things like a bloody stump of flesh, two bones or a clump of bloody hair. They indeed might have been part of a Kurosawa set.

Set into the middle of the gallery's far wall was a sizable glass rectangle that could have been an old mirror, a dim light box or possibly a painting. It provided an inverse illusion: as you approached, Wampler became visible beyond the transparent wall. The rectangle, it turns out, was an LCD panel sandwiched in Plexiglas and rigged with sensors. As you neared it, lights went on behind it and Wampler (who spent six hours a day in the gallery) began a routine. Dressed in an elaborate knock-off of a Japanese noblewoman's dress and with a sadistic-looking dental contraption holding her mouth open in a perpetual fake smile, she traversed the space beyond the wall on the diagonal in very minute steps. Back and forth she glided, as in a dream state.

The effect was unsettling, something like watching one of Madame Tussaud's wax characters suddenly come to life. Clearly Wampler is toying with time—cinematic time, painting time, viewing time. Her reference to Kurosawa's film (a Samurai version of *Macbeth*) does not appear central to her piece. She could probably have achieved her ends with a Bergman or Fellini starting point, for what she's after is nothing less than a rejuvenation of the "art" portion of "performance art." She knows the form has too often degenerated into confessional monologues, and she wants to rescue it. That she succeeds may be some kind of miracle.

—Michael Rush

Claude Wampler: View of *Performative Ulterior Generosity*, 2000, mixed mediums, 36 by 62 inches, from the installation "Painting, the movie"; at Postmasters.

