

# Art in America

## Simon Lee and Claire Lestevan at

### Smack Mellon Studios

Simon Lee's projection piece *Soupe du jour* (2001) filled a 40-foot-wide screen all the way across the back wall of Smack Mellon's cavernous space in DUMBO. On each of the five vertical sections that made up the image, silhouetted shapes, colored geometric forms, flowers, furniture, twigs, toylike figures and indistinct shadows floated aimlessly through a viscous, horizonless space. Images seemed to pass over, or bump gently into, one another. The scale was at once vast and microscopic, as if you were watching enormous shadow-puppets or microbes in a drop of pond water. The most intriguing aspect of the whole display, however, was the way the imagery conveyed a visceral sense of being "live," not filmed. Something about the random, unhurried, nonrepeating flow of imagery told you that it was unfolding in real time. A trip up to the mezzanine, where the projectors were, confirmed the intuition. There, a long Plexiglas trough, filled with water and illuminated from below, was chockablock with floating plastic gewgaws, gently stirred by small pumps. Overhead projectors caught the imagery at strategic points and threw it up onto the screen. Two sets of five projectors alternated every few minutes with a jarring clack. The knowledge that you were not imprisoned in a video loop but witnessing a playful, real-time performance was strangely exhilarating. I stuck my finger in the water and stirred the performers into action.

Claire Lestevan's pinhole-camera photos and video (which is

indeed a loop) gave this viewer a similarly unconstrained sensation. The photos, exhibited downstairs on a yellow wall, were horizontal vistas of urban crossroads and a French soccer stadium. Taken on a cylindrical negative from four pinholes simultaneously, the images are continuous but distorted. The pinholes register as four small black dots on the horizon of the image. As with Lee's work, these pieces suggest Oriental screens. The abrupt perspectives and the way the image of a given feature (like a tall building or a bridge) recurs, each time from a different point of view, makes you feel lost in the image, as if you were constantly reorienting yourself in an unfamiliar landscape.

Upstairs, Lestevan's video pushed this feeling even further. She shot it with a simple device whereby one digital camera could register simultaneous images from two pinholes set at 90 degrees to one another. Placed on the corner of a crosswalk in DUMBO, with the sound mike on, the camera captured a bizarrely dreamlike sequence of the passing traffic. Shot at very low resolution, the imagery jerks along in digital stop-action, as in a primitive cartoon. Pedestrians walk in one side of the frame, disappear into a scary black fog in the middle,



**Claire Lestevan:** *DUMBO Crossroads*, 2001, camera obscura photographic print, 47 by 95 inches; at Smack Mellon Studios.

**Simon Lee:** *Soupe du jour*, 2001, overhead projectors, tank, pumps, mixed mediums; at Smack Mellon Studios.



then lurch into the other side of the frame. When a school bus goes by with its engine roaring, the effect is apocalyptic-terrifying and mesmerizing at once.

Both Lee and Lestevan have used up-to-date technology in conjunction with the crudest imaginable "production values" to remake real time and space in ways that many an expensively produced video installation completely fails to do.

— Robert Taplin