

ARTFORUM



Esther Solondz, *Stay*, 1994,
Mixed media, 19 3/4" x 6"

BOSTON

ESTHER SOLONDZ

GALLERY NAGA

Esther Solondz's series "Incarnation," 1994-95, represents the artist's first attempt to blend text and image. Her mixed-media portraits, which begin as silver prints mounted on board, mix spiritual and material concerns through a complex layering of beeswax, earth, gold leaf, plaster, and paint.

Her most ambitious and largest work, *Touch Me*, 1994, is a neatly arranged collection of original and rephotographed portraits of beloved family members, covered in wax and framed in handcrafted wood and wax frames. Six square, framed portraits – some more visible than others- were combined with three old-fashioned glass bottles and arranged in three evenly spaced rows. Juxtaposed with images of the living, which included Solondz's infant niece, young son, and her self-portrait, were the visionary floating heads of deceased relatives. The central rectangular portrait of her father (a silver print made from a closeup of a photo taken before the war) is the most riveting image in the group. After painting the lips and cheeks to add color to the monochrome image, Solondz applied layers of yellow and brown pigment as well as dirt. Only the face was clearly

visible, encased beneath a translucent layer of wax. The words “touch,” “touch me,” and “me” were handwritten on several portraits, a testament to the impossibility of physical contact.

Gold Particles, 1995, a memorial to her late father-in-law, combines a full-length naval portrait with five small squares of gold and white wax mounted vertically on the wall. Like a reliquary, one of the perfect gold-dust squares contains a smaller, barely visible version of the head and shoulders depicted in the photograph itself. The image of him as a vital sailor is preserved beneath the yellowing wax that covers him.

Although some of the works may seem somewhat heavy-handed, and others rather opaque, *Stay*, 1994, is beautiful in its simplicity. The smallest work, it contains a tiny photograph of a young stag disappearing into the woods (signaled by a painted-in tree). Toned with browns and greens, this sylvan image with its fabricated scraps and holes looks as if it had been damaged and then repaired. Inscribed on the deer is the word “stay,” above which hangs a pair of girl’s T-strap shoes encased in multiple layers of milky wax mixed with plaster. In this way, *Stay*, subtly addresses the impulse to freeze time and our inescapable mortality.

- *Francine Koslow Miller*