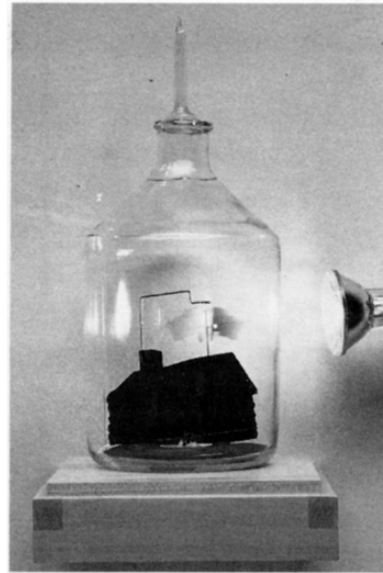


ARTFORUM

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Paul Ramirez Jonas, *Radiometer: Log Cabin with Flags*, 1996, glass vacuum, steel, ceramic paper, light, wood, 15 x 8 x 8".

PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS

POSTMASTERS

Paul Ramirez Jonas really loves history's losers. He loves them so much, in fact, that he's devoted himself to resurrecting them, to re-creating on a small scale all the stuff that didn't quite work out. In his most recent show, he focuses on two objects that met with limited success (whirligigs and radiometers), and one extravagant failure (the battleship *Maine*). The whirligigs will look familiar to whoever's spent time in the Land of American Country Colonial (read: the suburbs) or in Antique Shoppes. Reminiscent of weathervanes, they're metal cutouts in various shapes mounted on posts, usually placed on top of barns or houses, where they turn with the breeze. Jonas' versions are miniatures, coming in self-consciously "olde fashioned" shapes like laurels and silhouette busts and log cabins topped by flags, whirling away in wind produced by big white balloons attached to wood-block bases. The radiometers are basically more of the same, except that they're encased in glass jars and spin in the light rather than the wind (as photons strike the alternately black and white faces). And finally, as a kind of coun-

terpoint to all this spinning in place, Jonas has included a life-size drawing of the propeller from the *Maine*, along with a book of technical specs and a model of the ship in a bottle. The *Maine* is remarkable mainly because it took only one trip of note—down to Cuba, where it was promptly blown up.

There's been a great deal said and written about "the battlefield of history": about how the one who emerges victorious from the killing field writes the story. All of this is perfectly true, but it still leaves out the little stuff, all of the tiny events and nonevents, the blind alleys and cul de sacs, near misses and also-rans, that are the flip-side. So Jonas, in order to explore all that, gives us reproductions of the whirligigs that were popular around the turn of the century, but were never actually useful; radiometers that were never really functional, but still turn up as science projects and stoner toys; and drawings of a battleship, which in sinking helped start the Spanish-American war.

Jonas' version of history is devoid of real heroes, victims, and villains; things just sort of happen, and not necessarily for the reasons that get invented after the fact. Mostly because there aren't any real reasons for things, just an endless stream of small occurrences. It's like the old saying: "For want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of a shoe. . . ."

—MVdW