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## Lewis deSoto: Paranirvana (Self-Portrait): On View April 17 – July 31, 2016, at Santa Barbara Museum of Art

SANTA BARBARA , California -- 24 February 2016



Lewis deSoto, "Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)", 1999–2015. Painted vinyl infused cloth, electric air fan, 4th in a series with color variations. Courtesy of Chandra CerritoContemporary. (Work in progress)

([ArtfixDaily.com](http://www.artfixdaily.com)) Lewis deSoto's multi-media works are informed by the artist's long-standing interest in anthropology, history, mythology, and religion. All are engaged in the artist's forthcoming solo exhibition—an installation featuring his monumental scale, inflatable sculpture, *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* (1999–2015). Inspired by the 12th-century



Buddha at Gal Vihara in Sri Lanka, and conceived in the wake of his father's death, this work serves as not only a representation of universal life, death, and supreme consciousness; but also, embellished with features similar to the artist, a self-portrait.

The 26-foot-long *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* is activated—or rather brought to life—with an industrial fan, which inflates (inhales) when switched on at the beginning of the day, and deflates (exhales) when switched off at closing. As such, the work provides allusions to the spiritual breath (*Prana*) in Hindu philosophy, prevalent in the common practice of yoga. Enormous yet ephemeral, witty yet also thought-provoking, *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* rouses reflections upon existence, loss, and spirituality.

*Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* exemplifies “the humorous and revealing meeting point of technology, religion, and biography...By placing his own face on the figure of the Buddha, deSoto connects the divine being to the physical person in a manner that suggests a great sincerity and sensitivity, melding West and East, past and present...There is a certain level of absurdity to the idea of creating a self-portrait of oneself as an inflatable Buddha, yet it is an absurdity that plays into the tradition of humor and levity in Buddhist thought.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Presented in the Museum's historic Ludington Court, this work was specially commissioned by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA). This is the fourth *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* that deSoto has created, each differing in color. The newest version—black with silver paint—debuts at SBMA and is scheduled to appear in conjunction with the exhibition, *Puja and Piety: Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist Art from the Indian Subcontinent*, a major exhibition of approximately 160 works, primarily drawn from SBMA's permanent collection and dating from the past two millennia, that examine the relationship between aesthetic expression and devotional practice.

Born in 1954, Lewis deSoto grew up in San Bernardino, California. He is recognized for his photography, sculpture, and mixed media installations that incorporate video, sound, and performance. The artist's Spanish and Cahuilla (Native American) heritage are often subjects of his work; as, for example, in his constructed, fictional automobiles with titles such as the “1965 DeSoto *Conquest*” (2004), and the “1981 GMC *Cahuilla* (2006).” The artist studied Fine Art and Religious Studies as an undergraduate at the University of California Riverside, and received a Master of Fine Arts from Claremont Graduate University. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions at various institutions including the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio; Culver Center for the Arts, UC Riverside; Palm Springs Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, San Diego, CA; Omi International Art Center, Ghent, New York; and Robert and Francis Fullerton Museum of Art, CSU San Bernardino, CA. He has been a professor in the Department of Art at San Francisco State University since 1988. His recent book, *EMPIRE*, features photographs and essays that investigate the landscape of the artist's native birthplace in Southern California.

*Lewis deSoto: Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* is organized by Julie Joyce, Curator of Contemporary Art, for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

**Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.**



Lewis deSoto, "Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)", 1999–2015. Painted vinyl infused cloth, electric air fan, 3rd in a series with color variations. Courtesy of Chandra CerritoContemporary.

**Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm, Chase Free Thursday Evenings 5 – 8 pm**

**805.963.4364 [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net)**

[\[i\]](#) Stephanie Hanor. *Lewis deSoto: Paranirvana (self-portrait)*. 2002: Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA.

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