

Janine Antoni: Performance and Its Objects

Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick



Fig. 1: Janine Antoni, *Slumber* (1993), performance with loom, yarn, bed, nightgown, EEG machine and artist's REM reading, dimensions variable. Photo: Ellen Labenski, at Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York (1996), © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

When we first met Janine Antoni, she was a captive in her own installation at the SoHo branch of the Guggenheim Museum. One of six finalists for the inaugural Hugo Boss prize in 1996, she performed *Slumber* (1993), sitting by day at a room-sized loom, weaving the undulating lines of an electroencephalograph recording drawn from her sleep in the museum. Chatting amiably with anyone who had the nerve to approach, Antoni industriously produced a long, sinuous blanket, which then would provide cover during the nocturnal portion of her residence. At this

point, the reputation of her works as canonical examples of third-wave feminist practice had yet to be established. In fact, third-wave feminism in the artworld was just taking shape generally and fomented intense debates about the goals and methods distinguishing artists of the boomer and post-boomer generations. At this juncture, Antoni's work garnered an unusual amount of disparagement for not explicitly stating a didactic political standpoint. Instead, the artist engaged with a subtler politics by investigating the ideologies of materiality, embodiment and relational processes. *Slumber*, a low-key yet unnerving work, brought together fairy tales and myths of endless labor, reconsidered the stereotypical place of the feminine in dreams and craft, foregrounded the intrusive surveillance of women by medical technology, and framed the museum as a living space. Yes, she occupied the installation for the duration of the performance, but it was a deliberate gambit that alternated between agency and self-objectification. The perpetual cycle of day/night, sleep/wake, active/passive, person/object defied easy resolution or interpretation—we were transfixed.

Antoni's vulnerability and commitment were striking. Not only did the performance encourage spectators to talk with the artist as she worked, with all of the unpredictability that a New York audience might bring, but she also slept in the museum. Being watched during the nighttime hours by the eyes of (probably male) security guards added another level of tension to the performance. Her bodily presence countered the traditional ocularcentrism of the white cube gallery and bravely claimed space in the then predominately male domain of museums and art history.¹ In looking at the photos or reading the description of *Slumber*, one understands well enough the concept motivating the work. Yet, visiting Antoni in the museum, observing her concentration in weaving the blanket, connecting with her in (albeit brief) conversations, and imagining what it must be like to be so intimately exposed by living in the museum 24/7 brought a dynamism to her installation unique among the works by her fellow award finalists.² Despite the performativity infusing the assembled works, the live dimension of Antoni's piece sustained a relationality palpable in the experiences of both the artist and the audience.

At the time, we were independent curators residing in New York researching and preparing for a project based on the concept of "living display," a term we proposed for artworks that operate at the intersection of an exhibition and event.³

¹ See Fisher (1997).

² Besides Antoni, the finalists that year included Laurie Anderson, Matthew Barney, Stan Douglas, Yasumasa Morimura and Cai Guo Qiang. Barney, the lone white male, won the \$50,000 prize.

³ We interviewed artists and curators such as Marina Abramovic, Ann Hamilton, Suzanne Lacy, James Luna, Carolee Schneemann, Danny Tisdale, Marcia Tucker, Martha Wilson, and Papo Colo and Jeanette Ingberman, among others. See our interview with Ann Hamilton (Fisher and Drobnick 2019) and Drobnick (2009).

Such works incorporate the performance of live individuals in scenarios evocative of bodies in sculptures, installations or other static *mise-en-scènes*. Relative stillness and affective presence form the basic principle, as opposed to performances that rely upon action, narrative, storytelling, monologues or the use of a proscenium. Living displays harken back to traditions such as medieval living creches, Renaissance royal entries with living architectural elements, and Lady Emma Hamilton's "attitudes" that staged live versions of classical sculptures in the eighteenth century. The most popular precedents of living display are *tableaux vivants*, prominent in the nineteenth century, often as a form of aspirational or moralizing entertainment. In the same era, exploitative displays of human beings were presented in carnival sideshows and colonial showcases, exposing a darker, more problematic side to this exhibitionary practice. Our curatorial project, *Counter-Poses* (1998), aimed to rethink the ideological and political assumptions of the genre of living display by commissioning contemporary artists to create challenging and self-reflexive variations.⁴

In the interview below, the focus on *Slumber* and *Loving Care* (1993) aligns with our interest in living display, yet the discussion also touches on a broad range of Antoni's work in other media. *Gnaw* (1992), *Lick and Lather* (1993), and *Butterfly Kisses* (1996-99) may seem more related to sculpture and drawing, but turn out to be germane because they were indicative of a nascent phenomenon in gallery performances of the 1990s. This decade witnessed, on the one hand, media-oriented and highly publicized productions by Vanessa Beecroft and Matthew Barney that reasserted spectacle and the body's role in commodity culture. On the other hand, projects by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Santiago Sierra set up social situations to engage the audience in liberatory or antagonistic exercises of power. An alternative path emerged at this time, too, one that could be called the post-performative. Post-performative works resist the conventional framing of events as "a performance" and are, instead, embedded in the flux of everyday life. Rather than a medium that one specializes in, performance becomes just another tool that acknowledges that artistic practice itself is inherently performative.⁵ Works like Antoni's *Gnaw*, *Lick and Lather* and *Butterfly Kisses* integrated performance as a method immanent to the process of their making. Particularly striking about these works is how commonplace gestures and behaviors, such as eating, licking, bathing and blinking, became key components of the creative act. In Antoni's corporeal practice, body parts not conventionally associated with art making -- teeth, tongue, eyelashes -- serve as the means of production. Further, the artist foregrounds how materials themselves perform. Chocolate, lard, soap and mascara are endowed with agency and transformative potential that certainly affect the artist, and to a degree the museumgoer via their sensory aspects (some of the

⁴ See Drobnick and Fisher (2002). See also two special issues of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* on the theme of living display: 7.2 (2018) and 8.1 (2019).

⁵ See Drobnick (2016).

works could be easily smelled several rooms away). These works presciently demonstrate how performance would evolve in the post-performative era to encompass the aesthetic exploration of practice, the body, materiality and the senses.

This interview was conducted in 1997 in New York City, and continued in 1998 and 2019. In a candid discussion about her process and experience of making and performing, Antoni touches upon topics that continue to resonate today: subjective inquiry, feminist agency, relational interactions and self-reflexive creative practices. More than twenty years later, Antoni's early works provide relevant touchstones for considering how material and conceptual strategies intertwine in feminist post-performative art.



Fig. 2: Janine Antoni, *Loving Care* (1993), performance with Loving Care hair dye, natural black, dimensions variable. Photo: Prudence Cumming Associates, at Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London (1993), © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Jennifer Fisher: Your sculptures often engage performance and process. How did you become interested in using performance and the body in your work?

Janine Antoni: I wasn't really interested in performance, but in the meaning of the making. I was trying to bring attention to how objects make their way into the world. Certain objects hold their history on their surface better than others. *Loving Care* was a performance where I mopped the floor with my hair. I thought that leaving relics—the bottles of hair dye and strokes on the floor—would be enough information to figure out how I had made the piece. But people didn't get it. Even though I left the plastic gloves that come with hair dye, people thought I did it with my hands, or used a mop or a paint brush. People didn't come to the conclusion that I thought was obvious.

My fear in doing performance is that too much emphasis will be placed on me as a person, when I want it to be placed on the activity. So of course being a woman, and having my body at the centre of the work—especially given how women have been objectified throughout art history—is to put myself in a pretty dangerous position. And there's an erotic element to my work which makes it that much more dangerous.

Jim Drobnick: What do you mean by dangerous?

JA: That I will be objectified, that the meanings I try to put across will be superseded by the desire to look. These kinds of questions are probably the most important ones to ask. I try not to tell the audience how to feel. They have to question their own desire.

The most important part of *Loving Care* is that as I'm mopping the floor the viewers are being pushed out of the room. There is a desire to see, and an inability to see. It becomes incredibly awkward as people are being pushed into each other, even tense because I'm kicking my feet as I move backwards. The last time I did the performance the crowd started to organize themselves. One guy took it upon himself to say, "Okay everybody, stand back against the wall so we can all see." I was flabbergasted. I am so used to the curator trying to control the crowd. I gave them instructions: "Whatever happens, don't intercede in any way."

The activity in *Loving Care* makes me feel vulnerable, but I am empowered by reclaiming the space. I am in control even though what I am doing seems pretty out of control. The fine line between these two positions is where meaning is made. Think of a mother who has mopped the kitchen floor and sends the kids out to play until it is dry. During that time the kitchen becomes her domain.

JD: You've received criticism for this piece, mostly because it seemed to be complicit with the denigration of women.

JA: A lot of the criticisms of the piece have been written by people who haven't seen the performance or who have just seen photographs, where that tension was not experienced. The photographs become misleading in that way. The piece begs the question, it doesn't give an answer. I don't think the answer is that simple and I'm not interested in preaching. What is important is making a piece as an experiment into a question.

JF: There's an aspect of the indexical in all of your work—teeth imprints, hair strokes, eyelash marks—a leaving of traces of activity. There is a performative element to your objects. How do you see the relationship between the objects and performance?

JA: That's why it was such a big deal for me to actually mop the floor. I think that the power of the work is really in your imagining the activity. There is an implicit narrative but there is also space for you to construct it. In other works there's also a performance aspect. In *Slumber* there's a sleep component. I sleep in the gallery at night, but the audience does not see this, they only know about it. There's a relic left to tell the story. So all three things happen. Depending on when you come in, you get different sets of information.

There are a series of pieces that were important in my development as an artist: Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed*, Joseph Beuys with the coyote in *I Like America and America Likes Me*, Mierle Laderman Ukeles' dance of the street sweepers, *Ballet Mechanique*, Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being*, and Chris Burden's *Shoot*. These are strong pieces for me, yet I never saw them. At most, I've seen some kind of blurry black-and-white photograph that documents them. What's powerful for me is that I re-created them in my mind. They've been passed down to me through a kind of oral tradition.

With *Slumber*, I was thinking about doing a piece which was really about some people witnessing and retelling: a fairytale retold over and over again about the woman weaving, whether it's the Lady of Shalott, Penelope or Rumpelstiltskin. I was thinking about relics and how they are like props that tell stories. It is as if you're coming in to the scene of a crime and piecing the evidence together.



Fig. 3: Janine Antoni, *Slumber* (1993), performance with loom, yarn, bed, nightgown, EEG machine and artist's REM reading, dimensions variable. Photo: Javier Campano, at Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (1995), © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Fig. 4: Janine Antoni, *Slumber* (1993), performance with loom, yarn, bed, nightgown, EEG machine and artist's REM reading, dimensions variable. Photo: Javier Campano, at Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (1995), © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

JF: How does the manner of relationship work with a piece such as *Slumber*? I'm thinking especially about the relationship between the nighttime "sleeping state" when you're not present to the viewer, and the daytime performance when you are present in the space, speaking with visitors and weaving.

JA: I wanted to focus on the relationship between sleeping and waking. Again I ran into the problem of not wanting to be objectified. One way to avoid that was talking to visitors. As soon as someone came into the room, I would say, "Hi, how are you doing?" They had to deal with me as a person. I put myself in this incredibly vulnerable position. Here I am, part of the work, making the work, and really in the middle of my creative process. People were shocked that I addressed them. They generally didn't know how to handle it. Viewing is normally felt to be safe because the artist isn't there and you can be very critical or objective. Then all of a sudden the artist is there, looking at you and saying, "What do you think?"

People don't know what to say. They want to have the "right" thought, but before long we are having a conversation.

An interesting thing about *Slumber* is that I've done it in many cultures around the world. Each culture has a totally different take. *Slumber* became like an experiment where I took the same information into different cultures and got different reactions. In London they were keen for literary references. Some responded by quoting Shakespeare. In Zurich they were into the psychological aspects of the piece, the unconscious, Jungian archetypes. In Spain I was concerned because I couldn't speak Spanish. How was I going to communicate? I prepared dialogues of explanations, but ultimately the audience didn't care if I could speak Spanish or not. They came up right behind me, touched me and touched the strings, and somehow we communicated. In Philadelphia a lot of students came. Some would visit all the time. There's always somebody who comes repeatedly, which is interesting because then I become their captive audience. It was fascinating to see all these different responses. While I thought I was telling a story with the piece, people came to me with their stories instead. They would tell me their fears of sleeping alone, their dreams, their interpretations.

JF: Other pieces, such as *Gnaw* and *Lick and Lather* also present the relics of performative situations. There is something about your absence that fetishizes your presence.

JA: I thought that if I wasn't there in the work, it would make people pay attention to the object. But what happened is that the minute I removed myself, people became more interested in me than ever. It totally backfired. Certainly that happened in *Gnaw*. Doing extreme actions makes people much more interested in your personality and where you're coming from. If you look at popular culture right now, people are obsessed with personal stories.

JD: The literature on your work often neglects to acknowledge this aspect of audience relationship. Most often it is framed in terms of circularity.

JA: It's really about the viewer witnessing a relationship that I'm having with myself. *Slumber*, for instance, is about delving into the unconscious at one level and yet keeping it as a physiological recording on another. The piece is really circular in its structure. I sleep in the bed. On the first night my dreams are recorded on the electroencephalograph. I weave the pattern of the printout into the blanket. Then I get in the bed and sleep with my dreams this time transformed into the blanket. The viewer's placement in this scenario is very important. I want the viewer to be aware that they're looking in on me having an experience with myself. This locates them on the outside, which allows me to work with sexuality without the cultural trappings imposed on women's bodies. I felt it is time for us

to deal with sexuality from a female perspective, so to sidestep these trappings I engage the autoerotic.

JF: There's something significant about the fracturing of the primacy of the eye by talking to people in *Slumber*. With your work there is a move to a haptic context that foregrounds the sense of touch and a different kind of affective engagement.

JA: I situate *Slumber* in the physiological because all the electroencephalograph does is tell you that the body reacts in a certain way when it's in the dream state. That seemed to make a lot of sense in my work because it's always, as you say, situated in the physical. In thinking about working with dreams and looking at psychoanalysis and surrealism, I came to the conclusion that plenty of exploration has been done of the unconscious from that angle. The biggest resistance I've had in *Slumber* is that people can't accept the fact that I refuse to expose my dream content. For me the whole installation is a dream image. If I'm telling you about my dreams, then you're on the outside witnessing a story that happened to me. So I decided to stay with a physiological approach because it brings you back to the body and sleeping, which is an everyday activity that everyone can relate to.

JD: Do you find that the circularity and auto-eroticism works against an audience reading it as political?

JA: Wow! I hope not.

JD: Because, if it's seen to be simply circular—or just involving your own pleasure state—how does the work engage a political dimension? I bring it up because a review in the *Village Voice* judged *Lick and Lather* as being devoid of rebellion, an opinion I found unwarranted.

JA: It's startling to assume that the "personal isn't political." I wouldn't say that at all. The ways that I choose to deal with myself are incredibly specific when it comes to women, clichés of women, and definitions of women. I start directly with particular assumptions defining women and women's activities. Then I work backwards from the clichés in order to call them into question. In that way, I'm dealing with the political. I'm interested in language and the form in which I can communicate feminist content. I think the work really is about self and identity: to choose to speak—or not to speak—but most importantly to redefine one's self within one's experience of the world.



Fig. 5: Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather* (1993), one licked chocolate self-portrait bust and one washed soap self-portrait bust on pedestals, edition of 7 + 2 APs + TP. Bust: 24 x 16 x 13 inches (60.96 x 40.64 x 33.02 cm) (each, approximately). Pedestal: 45 7/8 x 16 inches (116.01 x 40.64 cm) (each). Collection of Carla Emil and Rich Silverstein and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (John Caldwell, Curator of Painting and Sculpture, 1989–93, Fund for Contemporary Art purchase). Photo: Ben Blackwell, © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.



Fig. 6: Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather* (1993), seven licked chocolate self-portrait busts and seven washed soap self-portrait busts on fourteen pedestals. Bust: 24 x 16 x 13 inches (60.96 x 40.64 x 33.02 cm) (each, approximately). Pedestal: 45 7/8 x 16 inches (116.01 x 40.64 cm) (each). Installation dimensions variable. Photo: Lee Stalworth, at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (1999), © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

JF: Yes, the choices are political then.

JD: And the processes are political too, even if they are not didactic.

JA: On one level we can talk about process, which is the more obvious level, and then we can talk about language and how one chooses to speak.

JF: The relationship with the audience is always political. In what we discussed so far regarding *Loving Care*, it involved getting the audience out of the room. How you do that using particular gestures is much like children watching their mother. They may not be directly told what to do, but they are implicitly directed by the nature of her activity. It's a distinct way of exercising power.

JA: The decision to deny is certainly a dimension of the political. I feel like people want me to be more aggressive and angry. Many times people project their desires onto the work rather than being present with the work and listening to what it's saying. Because I bring the body to such an extreme position, the work hits a psychological extreme as well. People want my work to be more sensational than it is, more extreme. They want to talk about the pain of my body, which for me was important at the level of control. I bring myself to a physical or psychological edge, but then I stop.

My works are not about a woman out of control. It is important that there's a tight structure that allows for these activities. There is a fine line. The process I use in *Lick and Lather*, licking and washing, are both really loving acts. Yet at the same time, I'm defacing images of myself that are cast in chocolate and soap, respectively. So there is a tension that is frightening, but hopefully compelling. It's not about self-loathing or self-abuse, which appear in a lot of critical readings of my work. I got the same kind of criticism with *Gnaw*, that it wasn't extreme enough. But that's because people were assuming that it was about an eating disorder. While it certainly addressed that, it wasn't the main thrust of the work.

JD: There are also differences in feminist strategies and methods of criticism. So it would be unusual if there wasn't disagreement among the feminist community or generations about the work.

JA: We are struggling to define ourselves so we must disagree. The more positions the better, but we have to remember that we share an ultimate goal. The thing that people have tended to miss was my humor. Dealing with these topics with a sense of humor is so important because it shows self-consciousness.

JF: Let's assume for the moment that *Gnaw* is about bulimia. What's difficult and ambivalent about the work is that instead of representing the condition or

decrying that it's provoked by societal pressures and causes great suffering, you embody it, although within certain parameters. You enact the very state and bodily processes of bulimia. That's a courageous but also problematic position.

JA: I think it is too. Because I enact it, people actually want it to emerge autobiographically out of my life. Of course it's coming from my experience of the world, but they want it to be in a literal way. In terms of my thinking, I approached *Gnaw* sculpturally, very traditionally. I wanted to make a figurative sculpture, but in a contemporary manner. I wanted to talk about the body without representing the body. With this work I'm really interested in the idea of body knowledge; that we understand the world through our physical experience of it. I thought, "Here's my mouth. That's a tool." When you see this work, I want you to have an inherent understanding and physical response. I do extreme things in order to bring attention to the viewer's body. Immediately. Physically. I'm putting you in that place where your physicality and your experience become your tool for understanding the work.

I am particularly interested in the discipline it takes for me to do these extreme things. When it hurts, I stop. In *Butterfly Kisses*, for example, I do sixty winks a day; that's when I start to feel physical repercussions and then I stop. I do sixty the next day. It's like doing exercises in the morning. The repetition and the ritual are important.

JD: Even though these actions may be based on formal concerns, or art historical concerns, because they're physically extreme, they tend to bring on the motivation to psychologize and project intentions.

JA: That's an interesting place to start. But I'm more concerned with how curiosity operates on a gut level, whereby an audience asks: "Why the hell did she do this?" That kind of engagement tells you so much more than analytical thinking. When we analyze an object in the world, we compare it to known objects that are like this object. But this keeps us away from what is unique about the object. I want you to empathize with the object, the process of its making, which puts you in a subjective rather than an objective position. I guess that's where the psychological intensity comes from. It's too easy to stand on the outside of the work and project all this stuff onto it. With a subjective position, an empathy or trust emerges that feeds into the understanding of the work.

JD: So, in essence, your real material then is the artist-audience interaction.

JA: Right.

JF: That's where the politics of the work becomes evident.



Fig. 7: Janine Antoni, *Butterfly Kisses* (1993), Cover Girl Thick Lash Mascara, 1124 winks per eye; diptych, 22 1/8 x 15 (each) (56.2 x 38.1 cm (each)). Photo: © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

JA: I put as much weight on the formal aspects of making an object – this interest in the language of things—as I do on what I’m saying. They’re inseparable.

JD: With *Butterfly Kisses*, for instance, you could just attach false eyelashes to a pencil and no one would ever know.

JA: Exactly. But I believe that something happens through that process that makes it different. The audience’s belief in the fact that I do these things is crucial. This is one reason not to fake it. The decisions come out of the process of making and that’s important. It’s not like I have an idea that I want to communicate to the world and then I think, “What will I make to communicate it?” Instead, I try to give myself an experience that will explore certain questions that I’m interested in. They are going to affect the result. If I get an answer, I hope it will be interesting for the viewer.

What I think about first is the structure and creating certain parameters. I know ahead of time it will have a certain meaning; that licking a chocolate cast of myself will evoke certain meanings, for example. But then I get really involved in the process of licking, I become subjective, and lose touch with those kinds of concerns. Something happens that I can never predict. I have to create a safe place for this to happen. If I give you a rational frame and then in the centre I do something that follows a different logic, something more intuitive or instinctive, the body's wisdom supersedes the rational.

JD: It sounds like self-confirmation is contradictorily mixed with exploration — is that an important aspect of your practice?

JA: Yes. In *Butterfly Kisses*, for example, I can only put my eye in on the paper in one way because of the physicality of my face and the wall. You can tell that the right side is stronger. The reason for that is that I'm right-handed. When I put the mascara on, more goes onto this side. This may seem like too much detail, but it is in this detail that the piece is made. There are all sorts of things that happen in the physical making of the work that I couldn't anticipate. While biting on the chocolate cube, I can only bite in a certain way because it's really difficult to bite into a flat surface. Were I to do it in another way, something else would happen. Those details articulate my body in the process of making for the viewer.

JF: Your work foregrounds what I would call the immanent dimensions of the aesthetic, where significance is generated out of an integrated and embodied process. In terms of the audience, the conceptual underpinnings that you pose provide a safe place for something else to happen. In this sense, the role of belief has compelling implications in terms of an ethical practice.

JA: I try to make a tight conceptual foundation that roots the work art historically, socially and physically. Giving the viewer an entrance into the work is accomplished through their own experiences.

JF: I want to ask about your experience in making the work. What was it like to taste the chocolate and the lard?

JA: Physically, the lard was much easier to bite than the chocolate. It doesn't really taste that bad but psychologically it's quite disgusting. On the other hand, chocolate is physically a really hard substance. In the process, assumptions quickly twisted on themselves. Chocolate — something that's desirable — became really undesirable after I'd tasted a lot of it. It's interesting to me that when you bring something to an extreme, it can flip on itself.

JF: Did your sense of taste change over the course of making the piece?

JA: I desire chocolate much more than before, confirming that it's addictive. So that was surprising. I was never so interested in chocolate except for the fact that people have such a strong response to it as a kind of ultimate food. After taking something to that extreme, the process wasn't about eating in the end.

JF: It can be read as a kind of primal fight for food.

JA: That sort of aggressiveness has psychological ramifications. I think about babies and how they put everything in their mouth. "The bite," then, can be experienced as a way of knowing. There is also the idea that in the process of knowing something you often destroy it. So there is an edge to such intimacy. In getting involved in something, you change it for better or worse.

JD: It also changes you.

JA: That's the critical thing for me. Until the object has changed me, it's not finished. *Gnaw* changed me. It was about bringing my body to an extreme, but also my emotions and intellect as well. There is a moment when the object makes you — when it takes over or tells you how it wants to be made.

JD: That brings me to ask a question about the object's ability to transform one's sense of self. The beauty industry has been a significant thematic in your work. Much has been written about how the beauty industry inculcates a contradictory relationship between women and their bodies. While it heralds the body as a means to salvation and becoming beautiful, it also pathologizes the body with tortuous regimens. What is your relationship to the beauty industry in light of this contradictory process?

JA: It's incredibly complex. I don't think that trying to obtain a cosmetic ideal is necessarily bad. Cosmetics have been around forever. Each culture uses them differently. My mother and I don't wear makeup for the same reasons. So it's not really a question of whether or not women wear cosmetics, but rather how and why. We're attracted to things physically, whether they follow a stereotype or not. It's one of the realities of being and I definitely wouldn't want to deny physicality. I think my work is about a search into that. It is a love-hate relationship to the object, an enactment of that struggle. My relationship to process is about the denial of the primacy of the object, despite the fact that I'm an object maker. I want my work to be more than a relic, to have an integrity in and of itself.



Fig. 8: Janine Antoni, *Gnaw* (1992), 600 lbs chocolate cube and 600 lbs lard cube gnawed by the artist, 45 heart-shaped packages of chocolate made from chewed chocolate removed from chocolate cube and 150 lipsticks made with pigment, beeswax, and chewed lard removed from lard cube, 24 x 24 x 24 inches (60.96 x 60.96 x 60.96 cm) (each).
Photo: © Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

JA (cont.): If you open any fashion magazine, you'll see the contradiction that you're talking about—an advertisement for lipstick juxtaposed against a story about bulimia. What is interesting to me though is how we've lost the connection to things and where they come from. We come into contact with all this stuff in our everyday lives. We have no idea what it's made of, or who made it. I'm trying to give the viewer a history of how you look at this lipstick. In *Gnaw*, the lipstick appears in a cosmetic case like you would see in Bloomingdale's. It is displayed in a desirable way with mirrors and marble. Then you realize that it's made out of that lump of lard that's been all chewed up and spit out. Lipstick was originally made from lard. Hopefully you can't look at lipstick in the same way ever again. Just as the lard has been mediated by my body, so too has the chocolate.

The thing about lipstick is that it is something that you put on to make yourself attractive. You desire the chocolate, you eat the chocolate, and the result of

that is you become fat. You take the fat and make it into lipstick to make yourself desirable. Again, it is a circular process—which is absurd and hilarious. In turn, the chemical in chocolate mimics what your body produces when you're in love, a time when you might receive a gift of a heart-shaped box of chocolates.

JF: There's something about the recovery of lost connections that you talk about. I was intrigued when you used the word "love" in relation to the heart-shaped box and the biochemistry of feeling in love. Could you elaborate on this state of love?

JA: Love is such a corny word, but it is becoming more of an issue in my work. By love I mean relationships, communication and interconnectedness. There are moments in my life that encapsulate a kind of connection that I am interested in, like sitting down on the subway and feeling the remaining heat of another person's body. There is a sense of familiarity and comfort, but also repulsion in that you have gotten a little too intimate with someone you do not know. I'm interested in the viewer having this kind of response in front of an object, which draws out empathy.

For me, my objects are surrogates for the relationship I want to have with the viewer.

Biographies

Janine Antoni is known for sculptures, performances and installations that use her body as a source of meaning. She has exhibited at numerous major institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, New York, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Mattress Factory, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Reina Sofia, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Magasin 3 Handelshögskolan, Hayward Gallery, and Sammlung Goetz. She has also participated in international events such as the Whitney Biennial, Venice Biennale, Johannesburg Biennale, Gwangju Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, S.I.T.E. Santa Fe Biennial, Project 1 Biennial, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, and documenta14. Publications of Antoni's work include *Moor* (2004), *The Girl Made of Butter* (2001), *Janine Antoni* (2000), and *Ally: Janine Antoni, Anna Halprin, Stephen Petronio* (2016). The artist lives in New York and is represented by Luhring Augustine Gallery. For an overview of her work, see <http://www.janineantoni.net>.

Jennifer Fisher has published on exhibition practices, affect theory, and the aesthetics of the non-visual senses. Her writings have been featured in anthologies such as *Linda Montano* (2017), *Caught in the Act II* (2016), *are you experienced?* (2015), *The Artist as Curator* (2015), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Culture* (2013) and *The*

Senses in Performance (2006). She is the editor of *Technologies of Intuition* (2006). She is a professor at York University, Toronto.

Jim Drobnick has published on the visual arts, performance, the senses and post-media practices in recent anthologies such as *Food and Museums* (2017), *Designing with Smell* (2017), *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions* (2017), *The Multi-sensory Museum* (2014), *Senses and the City* (2011), and *Art, History and the Senses* (2010). His books include the anthologies *Aural Cultures* (2004) and *The Smell Culture Reader* (2006). He is a professor at OCAD University, Toronto.

Fisher and Drobnick co-edit the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, and they form the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult (www.displaycult.com).

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