

Jennifer Vanderpool
Please Take Small Bites
Santa Barbara Temporary Contemporary
Santa Barbara, California
April - May 2004

Lisa Melandri

e s s a y

Jennifer Vanderpool's process-bound installations involve the viewer in a multi-sensory experience. Constructed with the clean, simple, often repetitive compositions of minimalism, her chosen medium, the evocative mass-produced products of America's sweets industry disrupts the expectations of high art and the gallery. Employing such recognizable foodstuffs as Marshmallow Fluff, Snowballs, and Twizzlers, Vanderpool's oeuvre references the formal solutions of Carl Andre and Donald Judd and engages the materiality of Eva Hesse and Janine Antoni, balancing a critical dialogue with art history, an expansive discourse on feminism, and a pop-performative sensibility.

In both video work and site-specific installation, Vanderpool addresses edible consumer culture and its relationship to the domestic and the feminine. Her materials are from the supermarket, their assemblage no different than the weekly trip to fill the refrigerator. In video documentation, Vanderpool steps to the checkout with hundreds of bags of candy or bulk ingredients, interacting with cashiers, reacting to fellow shoppers. This ceremonial buying introduces the performance and time-based element that is then continued in her installation process. Both precursor and integral to her gallery work, the shopping intersperses a sincere appreciation of the soothing effects of a ritualized, familial activity with an ironic commentary on cultural assumptions about women's work and appropriate female behavior. Though Vanderpool carefully plans her pieces, mapping composition and charting the time it will take her to lay them out, she also privileges the inherent and changeable qualities of her media. No matter how compulsively controlled each installation is, like hand-knotting over 1,000 gummy bears or tying the troublingly titled Warheads (a green watermelon-flavored candy) end to end to create a fifteen-foot rope, she cannot foresee how her organic and friable materials will age, what residue they will leave, how their color and smell will fade or intensify, and how their surfaces will harden or liquefy. Vanderpool embraces this uncertainty, and offers the viewer a chance to look at familiar goods in the new light of their evolving physicality. She also delights in the sensory overload they provide, particularly their often-pungent odor, for some exceedingly pleasant, for others, sickening. Admittedly fascinated by these particular products, the seductive colors, fetishized surfaces, and forbidden lure of foods not allowed in her childhood diet, Vanderpool exploits their visual characteristics but is well aware of their associative nutritional values (or lack there of). Placing 400 sticks of blueberry licorice end to end on the

gallery floor may reference Andre's firebrick pieces in placement and trajectory, but she is quick to point out that they collectively contain 12,900 calories, and 1,330 grams of sugar. Vanderpool's complex and critical relationship with her medium is further elucidated in such performances as *Please Take Small Bites*, in which she eats one bite from each of 300 petit fours, at once disciplined and binging, both dainty and obsessive. Although Vanderpool's food works began with large-scale abstract "paintings," her current installations make use of less defined grounds, the entire space of the gallery or the often even larger canvas of the outdoors. In a series of numbered, untitled works, Vanderpool activates the exhibition space, her medium pooling in corners, comprising footprints or targets on the floor (as in *Untitled Number Four: Gummy Worms*, on view in this catalog), slithering throughout the gallery. In controlled, geometric patterns, slick, dense puddles, and powdery mounds, Vanderpool creates haptic space in which the idiosyncrasies of the gallery or plaza are revealed through the work itself. In both form and content, Vanderpool combines serious social comment with whimsy to provide a complete experience. Through sight, smell, memory, and spatial awareness, Vanderpool keeps us captivated, our whole bodies becoming the perceptive organs that navigate her alternative Candyland.

Lisa Melandri
Santa Monica, 2003