

John O'Brien Essay

Jennifer Vanderpool's art practice is articulated on two intersecting plans of activity which form a unified investigation into the motives and, even more specifically, into the motifs of craving. Her assembling of elaborately devised groups of aggregate sweets into chains, piles, lines, loops, sequences and geometric patterns, creates a fragrant bracketing of post minimal and process art work techniques and formal procedures. At the same time, her shift from the stability of industrial materials and/or the un-cultured materials of art povera to the multi-hued, identical modules of consumer goods in the form of candy gives a critical impetus to the work while retaining a game-like canniness. Are these pungent little bits of sugar and spice simply meant to be a new component in the shifting of material indexes that artist can draw upon in their ceaseless installation vortex, or is the intromission of consumer delicacies a lateral move intended to draw a parallel between installational proclivities and unbridled consumer yearnings? The artist's viewpoint regarding this ambiguity emerges rather clearly in her video work, which forms the second part of her overall project. In these filmed loops, simple rituals are acted out in which desire and self obliteration are brought into gentle but clear juxtaposition. Repeated cycles of events such as a woman munching on petite fours (one tiny little corner at a time, thank you) or someone sitting in a corner and devouring a box of cakes side by side with someone covering their legs up with sand from the beach push the game playing into an altered direction. Far from simply dilly dallying in the candy aisle looking for choice morsels, the viewer watches as the artist moves the activity of consuming these tidbits from the funny to the excessive to the perilously obsessive. Many forms of contemporary art practice have the viewer in the position of someone being the active agent in a setting that comes to its final fruition only after the viewer imagines or acts out an outcome. Vanderpool's presentational slyness emerges from the way in which the viewer is keyed to one set of expectations when looking at the dainty and beautiful array of small modular sculptures only to find those expectations reversed in the tough playacting of the filmed work. It is hard to say outright that Vanderpool has judged consumerism and even self annihilating forms of consumption to be a evil version of spinning dervish. Her work unpacks the question of where to locate the point at which yearning turns against its source and becomes something altogether other. She does this with meticulous lucidity, without an excess of sentiment (neither pitying or cloying) and, in doing so, hands the matter over to each of us personally to mull over. The panorama Jennifer concocts is rooted in the interlocking perils and pleasures that the ever expanding sea of stuff surrounding us carries along in its stead.

John O'Brien

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