

Jennifer Vanderpool
Domestic Goddess
Kalmar Konst Museum
Kalmar, Sweden
March-April 2005

Los Angeles artist Jennifer Vanderpool is a soft-spoken rebel who gracefully inhabits the frontlines of identity politics, wielding a potent combination of media culled from commercial food products with a precise yet light-hearted earnestness. Her signature materials have included but are not limited to: wax cake molds, store-bought candy, Jell-O mix, lace, wood, rocks, pre-recorded soundtracks, photo-documentation and elements of chance such as time, organic decay, and audience interaction. Santa Monica Museum of Art Deputy Director for exhibitions and Programs Lisa Melandri wrote, in 2002, “[Vanderpool balances] a critical dialogue with art history, and expansive discourse on feminism, and a pop-performance sensibility. [She] addresses edible consumer culture and its relationship to the domestic and the feminine interspersing 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.”

Vanderpool’s work holds an eclectic assortment of contradictions in steady focus, seeming to be, and in fact being, both tongue-in-cheek and deadly serious at once; because that union of opposites is an accurate reflection of the conditions under which we live. It would be all too easy to construct some kind of incendiary treatise on past injustices of gender politics. Except Vanderpool isn’t angry, she’s just interested; embracing a quiet, sensual folding in of history upon itself that does not reject the past but is grateful to it for a starting point. But what can a softly undulating indoor dessert/desert-scape of pudding mix, sand and a looped tape of birdsong teach us about the battles raging high and low between commerce and culture, pleasure and self-destruction, nature and artifice? And are we allowed to enjoy ourselves while contemplating such existential revelations? Apparently, we are. In the midst of somber political and historical symbolism, joviality is the ace up Vanderpool’s sleeve.

To that persistent psychosocial framework we may now add an additional, unexpectedly poignant Romanticism - a dimension of labor-intensivity in the form of the epic hand-made lace garment meant to take center stage in the Kalmar gallery. This is a piece of textile so rife with the work of many small hands that it positively revels in its own improbability. It resides in a space whose one end is a picture window opening onto a view of the old hospital cemetery, occupied one suspects entirely by women and children. The outdoor landscape is rustic, serene, and unsettling. And it – both the view of it and the going out into it – form an integral part of the finished work. Thus aside from the incorporation of the Jell-O sand dunes inside, the chirping birds and disintegrating cake molds outside, the

unrequited nuptial intensions of the garment, and a host of further interior/ exterior transferences that form the piece's literal and figurative in-between, there is, always, the question of the site itself. As a birthing hospital in a remote location, one intuits a place of loneliness and perhaps shame; yet the building and grounds are poised to rehabilitate their history and their future by inviting the mind of a modern woman to interpret them; no polemic necessary.

Shana Nys Dambrot
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