

VIRSERUM, SWEDEN

Jennifer Vanderpool

Virserums Konsthall

Jennifer Vanderpool's world is one of excess: in the dramatic style of the Baroque, she finds the shout of exaggeration and over-consumption a more effective vehicle for expression than a subtle whisper of the understated. Using a variety of recycled, manufactured materials, including detritus from previous works, Vanderpool crafts hyper-realistic sculptures of molded Jell-O forms, bundt cakes, and other food stuffs befitting a Willy Wonka ad and then displays them in ultra-sensory installations. Sweet becomes the sticky sweet of a stomachache; cheerfully colorful becomes brash like overhead fluorescent lighting; even the natural world is discarded in favor of garish, plastic replicas. In the Baroque era, such obviousness was both a function of populist necessity in its appeal to the illiterate and an expression of power by the aristocracy. In contemporary culture, it risks becoming one more holler in the buzzing din of our information-laden, over-stimulated society.

Despite the intensity of Vanderpool's work, she deftly manages to avoid the brink by employing carefully plotted restraint. In *Blomster*, her recent large-scale installation, self-editing translated into a well-executed design that used the Konsthall's airy, high-ceilinged space to advantage. Serpentine sections of a half-wall bisected the gallery and provided a continuous perch for Vanderpool's artificial bounty, each individual piece carefully poised on a white paper doily or cake platter as if in preparation for serving. Projected around these fantastical sculptures, multiple animated films featured decadent desserts twirling in a kaleidoscope of indulgence. And above them, duct tape rosettes and bedazzled Styrofoam bouquets mimicking cake decorations hung on long strings of multi-colored yarn. The effect on the viewer was bewildering and disorienting, a sensory purgatory located somewhere between euphoric sugar high and nagging toothache.

The cornucopia of fakeness coming from all directions was akin to being in a supermarket of unending options. Ranging from bundt cake to cupcake, the sculptural variety became lost in the anonymity of con-



Top and above: Jennifer Vanderpool, *Blomster*, 2009. Mixed media and animations, installation view and detail.

veyor belt goods. And although the cupcakes and molds had an alluring quality, they bordered on the grotesque as objects of gluttonous desire. For underneath the Candyland-landscape lies a distinctly American food fetish, and Vanderpool makes a subtle commentary on obesity, eating disorders, and the sticky relationship between consumption and ownership. In *Blomster*, she created a scene of domestic bliss run amok, extracting

the mechanisms of identity and gender—one ingredient at a time. By re-appropriating the historically feminine pursuits of craft and baking to create a commentary on consumerism, Vanderpool uses the sculptural installation as a site where gender, sex, and food overlap in a curious play between aversion and craving, over-indulgence and restraint.

—Heather Jeno