



J E A N N E D U N N I N G

b o d i e s o f w o r k

March 12 - April 10, 1991

ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS by Laurie Palmer

Lets begin with this, and make it personal: art is a solicitation, a proposition, an *advance*. When an artist pushes her work into a public arena, it is because she wants my attention; she makes herself vulnerable when she asks me to look.

Reciprocally, I am out looking; I go to a gallery or museum (or open a book). I want something too, but as a viewer I have the privilege to be wary, discriminating, not easy to please. In order to be seduced I have to be approached in a particular manner, with just the right balance—for instance—of lightness and force. In short, I am a spoiled brat, used to being catered to, and expecting to get it for free.

Jeanne Dunning positions her work within a sexualized system of power relations, but she enters the arena determined not to give herself away. She gains our attention with clean, well-lit, seemingly straightforward photographs, geared for disclosure; then, in precisely the place where she might be expected to expose or express, she turns her back to the viewer (*Heads*) and refuses to speak (*Untitled with Bulge*, *Untitled with Tongue*). But we are held in rapt attention nonetheless. What we get instead of revelation are quizzically contextless representations of parts of the body—hair, limbs, heads, noses—and, in more recent work, pieces of food—whose stranded, unexplained objecthood leaves them ripe for fetish cathexis . . .



. . . What do I want? In a context in which reading, writing, making and looking are understood as interchangeable positions within a shared creative project, I am looking for work that allows—asks—me to speak back to it, to engage in dialogue. I am not looking for an answer, for knowledge, for truth, but for connection to another consciousness, mediated by the work—a relationship with the potential to be sustained by the dynamics of interpretation. I resist Jeanne Dunning's work because of what it wants to do to me, and I thrive on the productive resistance it calls forth.

excerpted from *Jeanne Dunning: Bodies of Work* catalogue

above:
Detail 6, 1990 (detail)
laminated cibachrome

front:
Red Detail, 1990 (detail)
cibachrome mounted to plexiglas, frame

From *Heads*, 1989

an artist's book by Jeanne Dunning

The viewer asks the image to speak, and by speaking to draw him in, to convince him, to cater to him, to coddle him, to suck up to him, to desire him.

The viewer asks the image to give him the power to accept or reject, to reinforce or ignore, to forgive or condemn, to pass judgement.

If no one is looking at me and I don't speak, then no one *will* look at me. I must have a voice to have power.

Speaking without first being spoken to is a way to take power.

But if someone *is* looking at me and they know it, they're asking me to speak, they've given me power.

I have something they want.

If I speak, I'll give away that hold over them, that thing that I have that they want, that thing that I know that they don't, which is power. If I don't speak, I'll retain the power to accept or reject and pass judgement.

If someone is looking at me and they know I know it and I don't speak, they'll keep looking.



Organs Without BODIES by Matias Viegner

“... Her slickly laminated Cibachromes are a veritable pocket inventory of fetish objects: hair, feet and hands, standing in symbolically for “tongues,” “testicles” and “phalluses.” Her work is more conceptual than polemic, however, and while the body is undeniably the “whole” lying behind these partial objects, Dunning’s goal is not simply the reconstruction of the body. Her project is one in which there is no longer a myth of fragments waiting to be glued back together into a glorious, Oedipal (as delineated by Deleuze and Guattari) totality . . .

This work [in reference to Dunning’s “anti-portraits”] does not pursue some elusive feminine identity, and as such it can be characterized as post-feminist—questioning the possibility of the feminine outright without completely abandoning a feminist perspective.

Dunning’s depiction of food—peeled tomatoes, glowing oddly like testicles or early fetuses—invite a reading of the fetish as a kind of commodity. The fetish, in Dunning’s work, serves to conceal the commodity as a social product, endowing it with magical powers. This theme of concealment reappears in an image of a woman with a bulge in her right cheek, as well as in another image within which a red pepper covers the woman’s extruded tongue . . .

The two sets of images seem to be in a contest, a duel between fetishism and scopophilia. These neuroses, in traditional psychology, provide two avenues of escape from a conflicted relation to the female. By moving from one paradigmatic fetish to another, Dunning catapults dispassionate narratives into the viewer’s consciousness. But Dunning’s work refuses to be considered as part of the construction of a single narrative. Her use of mute fetish objects enforces a reticence out of the images’ seamlessness, a buoyant elegance from within a monochromatic field. Her work ultimately rejects any kind of Oedipalization; they are questions more than answers, doubts in place of assurances.”

excerpted from *Jeanne Dunning: Bodies of Work* catalogue

Elle a Chaud au Bouche, or The HOLE Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

by Barry Blinderman

When you become obsessed with an image, you are aware of its references, on one level or another. — Jeanne Dunning, 1991

Association is an inexorable process, especially when reflecting upon images that penetrate the senses more like aromas than pictures. There is something deliciously irritating and disorienting about Jeanne Dunning’s

work—like an itch one senses in a “phantom” limb. Subliminal prurience. Desire as decoy. Dunning teases the viewer into confronting socially forbidden fruits, holding our eyes as collateral against a bout of photo-foreplay. She focuses her camera—itself a fetishistic compression chamber—on fleshy vegetables and isolated body fragments, engaging us in a game of substituting one part for another and, ultimately, stranding us on the banks of an unfathomable whole. . . .

The line between inner and outer landscape is breaking down . . . The whole random universe of the industrial age is breaking down into cryptic fragments.

— William S. Burroughs, 1990

During the past week a series of enormous signs had been built along the roads surrounding the hospital, almost walling it in from the rest of the world. A group of workmen on a scaffolding truck were pasting up the last of the displays, a hundred-foot-long panel that appeared to represent a section of a sand dune. Looking at it more closely, Dr. Nathan realized that in fact it was an immensely magnified portion of the skin over the iliac crest. Glancing at the billboards, Dr. Nathan recognized other magnified fragments: a segment of lower lip, a right nostril, a portion of female perineum . . . At least five hundred of the signs would be needed to contain the whole of this gargantuan woman, terraced here into a quantified sand-sea.

— J. G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, 1970

In viewing Dunning's *Untitled Landscape* series, we find ourselves literally unable to tell an ass from an elbow. What appears to be a well-muscled stomach could just as easily be a furrowed brow; a mound of Venus an eyebrow. As in *The Seven-Percent Solution*, where sleuths Sigmund Freud and Sherlock Holmes join forces, Dunning links heightened attention to physical detail to a search that combines diagnosis in both the medical and whodunit sense. . . .

Hair, particularly the long and flowing variety, has been mythologized and romanticized throughout the ages—from Samson to Rapunzel, Mary Magdalene to Lady Godiva, from Rossetti's “fair woman of the soul” to O. Henry's *Gift of the Magi*. Yet colloquially, hair has acquired a negative metaphorical context as well: “Get out of my hair,” a “hairy” situation, “splitting hairs,” etc. We need only think of our disgust at finding a hair in food at a restaurant. Closing in on the “push-pull” of resonant images, Dunning serves up a combination punch of deconstructed feminine mystique (the artist/muse myth, the compliant female model), and follows it with a hairball chaser. . . .

University Galleries

110 Center for Visual Art, Illinois State University, Normal, IL
309.438.5487

March 12, 5-8 pm

Opening Reception and

Panel Discussion featuring

Laurie Palmer, Barry Blinderman, and Jeanne Dunning

Films and Videos

March 21, 6:00 - 8:30 pm

A variety of film and video works characterized by diverse representations of the human body will be shown. Selections include:

Un chien andalou (An Andalusian Dog) (1929, 17 min.)

Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali,

A Perfect Pair (1987, 13:30 min.)

Valie Export

I Like Girls For Friends (1987, 2:26 min.)

Julie Zando

Open Book (1971, 10:00 min.) *Pryings* (1971, 20:00 min.)

Vito Acconci

Catalogue Available:

56 pages, 26 color plates, 35 black/white illustrations.

Essays by Laurie Palmer, Matias Viegner and Barry Blinderman

Retail price: \$18.00 (\$10.00 students, faculty, staff)

Exhibitions and programs at University Galleries are free and open to the general public. Guided tours and gallery talks for groups should be arranged one week in advance. Staff members are also available for on-site presentations to classes and groups on a variety of art and cultural topics related to this and other exhibitions.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday 9:30 am - 9:00 pm

Wednesday - Friday 9:30 am - 9:00 pm

Saturday & Sunday 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Jeanne Dunning: Bodies of Work, its catalogue and programs are supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Illinois Arts Council a State Agency.

left: Neck, 1990 cibachrome mounted to plexiglas, frame