

## REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

### NEW YORK

#### Janine Antoni at Luhring Augustine

Though there is a resigned stoicism to the posture of the two limestone boulders stacked one above the other in the sculpture *and*, the rather stupendous heroics to which this work testifies are not immediately apparent. But as an artist's statement explains, the long, rusty steel pole projecting sideways from the top rock, wrapped with soiled white tape at one end and attached to a vertical steel axis at the other, served as a spoke for what is in effect a lumpy millstone. For more than five hours a day over three summers, Janine Antoni, a circling Sisyphus, pushed the steel pole—and the 800-pound boulder—in an endless orbit; the only evidence of her grueling labor is a powdering of limestone dust on the bottom rock.

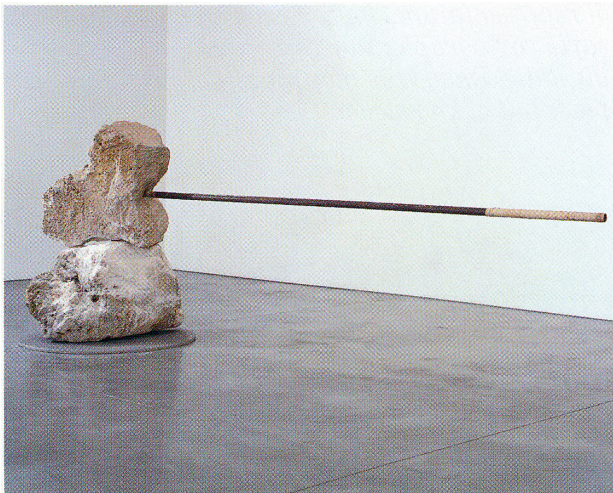
If rueful thoughts of Minimalist sculpture (Rückriem, Heizer) are the first that come to mind upon seeing these imposing stacked rocks, they are reinforced by a second sculpture, *Cradle* (think Serra's early films). Antoni cut the massive rusting steel bucket of a construction truck in half, leaving one part intact, melting down the other and recasting it as a series of nested tools. Cradled inside the maw of the remaining half, these clean, new black implements include a farm

tractor bucket, three varieties of shovel, and two of spoon, ending with a baby spoon whose handle curves tenderly under the bowl of a soup spoon.

There were also two color photographs on view. *Coddle* is an artfully composed oval image in which the artist embraces her own leg as lovingly as the Madonna does the infant Jesus in traditional representations. But visual grace and discretion don't mitigate the discomfort induced by this cross-wired carnal narcissism, an unease that increases exponentially with *Mortar and Pestle*. This grotesquely enlarged close-up shows one person's tongue touching another's unblinking eye. An ecstasy of synesthesia, or an act of almost unviewable cruelty? In her statement, Antoni says with surely disingenuous simplicity, “I want to know the taste of his [whose?] vision.”

Together, the four works in this show, meant as a coherent installation and titled “Imbed,” suggest a continuum of effortful activities, from brute labor, heavy construction and farmwork to childcare, social intercourse (of a peculiar intensity) and, finally, rapt self-contemplation. It is a list that significantly expands the range of mostly intimate behaviors—licking, weaving, dancing—elaborated in Antoni's previous work. That art-making occupies a place on this spectrum, and at the same time lights up all over it, is only one of the engrossing paradoxes in this show.

—Nancy Princenthal



Janine Antoni: *and*, 1997-99, two 800-pound limestone boulders, steel rod, 64 inches high; at Luhring Augustine.