

Smith, Roberta.  
"Art Reviews: Janine Antoni at Sandra Gering Gallery"  
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**Janine Antoni**

*Sandra Gering Gallery  
476 Broome Street  
SoHo  
Through tomorrow*

"Licking and Lathering," Janine Antoni's entry last summer in the Venice Biennale's Aperto section (an "open" exhibition devoted to the work of young artists) is now her second one-woman show at Gering. The piece consists of 14 portrait busts of the artist mounted on classical pedestals. Seven are cast in white soap, seven in brown chocolate: all are reshaped by the methods of the work's title.

Arranged in parallel rows in a smaller space, the sculptures make a stronger impression than they did set in a circle beneath the looming expanses of the former rope factory where Aperto is staged. (Among other things, their aromatic power is much increased.)

The work's primal materials and processes pile up a series of related contrasts — purity and filth, hygiene and food, housekeeping and sex — that all evoke distorting female stereotypes and obsessions. The actual distortions of the sculptures' heads and features, brought about by the artist's licking or lathering, sometimes evoke other art, as in the soap portrait whose partially obliterated features recall the impressionistic sculpture of Medardo Rosso. But mostly they are more grotesque and a little painful to see, as when Ms. Antoni gives herself an unattractive overbite, an exaggerated ski-jump nose or the appearance not only of blindness, but of eyelessness as well. In one statue, the features are completely erased.

The resulting forms are surprisingly effective as sculpture, in part because their processes are so eccentric and also so legible, especially in the case of the relentlessly licked chocolate. But the main power of the piece stems from the implication that the most crippling forms of distortion come from within.

ROBERTA SMIT: