Rematerializing the Art Object

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by

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Dedication

To Patricia O'Neill Bradley and Eric Scott Bradley. Together, wherever we go.

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Abstract

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Rematerializing the Art Object examines Eleanor Antin's *The Eight Temptations* and *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*. *Temptations* re-presents Antin's diet for *Carving* in a formal language of camp, mocking the dominant avant-garde culture and inspiring a less idea-based interpretation. Section one contextualizes *Carving*'s formal qualities within a broader aesthetic history of photography and sculpture. Section two focuses on how Antin creates an amalgam of Renaissance and Baroque imagery in *Temptations*. Section three argues that Antin constructs a camp adaptation of the diet reducing the impact of an overly emotional woman and the seriousness of conceptualism to a cliché. Throughout, the thesis centers on the formal and aesthetic manifestations of Antin's humor. A performance within a performance, *Temptations*'s parodic art history denounces pragmatic photography and empowers Antin as an artist and as a woman.

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Introduction

A predominant theme of Modernism in art history is the notion of self-referentiality and increased self-awareness. Artists have reduced this concept through the appropriation of the iconography, compositions, and style of their predecessors. Whether Robert Rauschenberg erases a de Kooning or Pablo Picasso dismembers Diego Velásquez, the practice of appropriation persisted throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Eleanor Antin pursues a similar vehicle of expression in her 1972 photographic essay *The Eight Temptations* (Fig. 1).

Temptations reaches back into the annals of art history, casually appropriating composition, form, color, and drama from painting traditions of the Italian Renaissance and the Baroque period. Antin's pulsing gestures flow elegantly among the eight photographs as she rejects the procession of food set in front of her. The banana, milk, and sardines tax Antin's reserves and launch her into an absurd, anxiety-riddled ballet fraught with the perils of desire, sin, and indulgence. To begin to understand the context and cause of her suffering, we must turn to *Temptations*'s sister project: *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (Fig. 2).

Also produced in 1972, the tenor of *Carving* differs remarkably from *Temptations*. Over the course of 38 days, Antin produced 148 photographic nudes that documented her ten-pound weight-loss. Four rows of 37 black-and-white photographs depict Antin against a white doorframe in her home.[1] Her flesh gradually melts away in the daily episodes, just as a sculptor might chip away at a block of stone until the desired image appears through a veil of dust.

Both *Carving* and *Temptations* revolve around Antin's 38-day diet. Yet, each presents the process of losing weight through a vastly different lens: the former deals with austere conceptual

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[1] It should be noted that Antin neglected to photograph herself one day when she was out of town.

documentation, while the latter engages with warm theatrical camp. Undoubtedly, *Carving* and *Temptations* contextualize and define one another, but *Temptations*'s exaggerated gestures and blank facial expressions do not readily lend themselves to comparison with the stark documentary photographs. Where *Carving* shows the progress of Antin's diet, *Temptations* enacts her tedious and draining process. On the surface, *Temptations* may seem like a subset of the *Carving* project: a tongue-in-cheek account of dieting, artistic process, and conventional standards of beauty. However, the means by which Antin molds her photographs bring to light her creative practice, along with a conscious recognition of viewership and a shrewd commentary about her own artistic milieu.

Critics and historians such as Martha Buskirk, Howard N. Fox, Deborah Marrow, Peter Plagens, and Arlene Raven have emphasized the performative aspects of *Carving*, treating the photographs as documents and dismissing *Temptations*. Interpretations of *Carving* as a conceptual critique of the male-dominated art world and beauty industry obfuscate the photographs' aesthetic richness and depth. The majority of the criticism concentrates on the performance rather than the composition, arrangement, and medium of the entire work. This interpretive angle likely stems from the utilitarian approach a number of conceptual artists took to the camera, such as Victor Burgin, Bernt and Hilla Bechers, and Douglas Huebler. For many Conceptualists, the photographs function as documents, indexing a performance. In contrast, I propose that while *Carving* does indeed trace the artist's diet and weight loss, the formal qualities of the photographs resonate with a broader aesthetic history of photography and sculpture. The photographs correspond to an archival style prevalent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but Antin takes care to craft her images with an eye to the past. In fact, Antin deliberately subverts what Harold Rosenberg referred to as the "movement towards de-aestheticisation" by

couching her diet in both documentary aesthetics of the 1970s and the pragmatic photographic

practices of the nineteenth century.[2] As aesthetic objects themselves, *Carving* adopts a flexible

humor—more so than the mainstream criticism would lead its readers to believe.

In the second section, I explain how *Temptations*'s art-historical anachronisms fuel an

interpretation of *Carving* not as documentary but as an aesthetic project in and of itself.

Temptations exaggerates the absurdity of *Carving* thereby diluting the gravity and intensity of

the socio-political implications of the diet. Likewise I would argue that in *Temptations*, Antin's

interest and awareness of the art-historical past upstages what many critics take to be her primary

concern: the objectification and victimization of women.

Finally, the third section focuses on the parodic language of *Temptations*, indicating

Antin's irreverent attitude to her own work. By mocking the complicit role she plays in the

dominant avant-garde culture with *Carving*, Antin highlights the dubious nature of intended

meaning. As self-portraits, *Carving* allows Antin to present herself through an avant-garde

conceptual feminist lens as well as one of self-deprecation and camp in *Temptations*. I argue that

the humorous tone of *Temptations* suggests Antin did not intend for her month-long

photographic ritual act solely as an objective record of the temporal and ephemeral performance.

The idea behind *Carving* overshadows Antin's attention to materiality, while *Temptations*

illuminates a playful and ironic appropriation of the overlapping history of photography and

sculpture. While the look of *Carving* may attribute objectivity, documentation, and authenticity

to Antin's diet, the exaggerated tone evoked by *Temptations* dismisses the gravity of the

performance opting instead for theatricality and comedy.

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[2] Harold Rosenberg, "De-aestheticization," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander
Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 221.

Therefore, *Temptations* re-presents Antin's diet for *Carving* in a language of camp, mocking the dominant avant-garde culture and inspiring a less idea-based interpretation. The work opts instead for an evaluation based in formalism and art-historical iconography. Antin's ludic sensibility suggests that there are stronger notes of irony in literally dematerializing herself while simultaneously making a sculptural series of photographs.

Carving: A Traditional Sculpture (1972)

In the early seventies, the Whitney Museum of American Art contacted Eleanor Antin to submit a sculpture for the upcoming biennial.[3] Aware that the museum likely expected a three-dimensional object or something relating to her recent work *100 Boots*, Antin nevertheless began performing and photographing what would be *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972). Dieting for over a month and losing ten pounds, Antin photographed herself daily with an automatic timer. Each day she made four black-and-white images, capturing herself from the front, back, and both sides. The final 148 pictures hang sequentially, the four photographs from each day aligned vertically in thirty-seven columns. In addition, Antin included a label at the bottom of each column with the date, hour, and her weight at the time the photographs were taken. The Whitney rejected Antin's submission, telling her that *Carving* was conceptual art and not sculpture.[4]

The discourse around *Carving* over the past forty years has echoed the Whitney Museum's initial understanding. The work is understood primarily as a conceptual statement on the issues of societal standards of feminine beauty and the objectification of women. In this chapter, I propose to look closely at *Carving*'s aesthetic and physical form and not just the idea behind it. While Antin's performance, or diet, determines the changing shape of her body, the photographs are more than mere documentary byproducts of a performative practice. Her use of black-and-white film, grid layout, panoramic views of her nude body, in addition to the work's scale and title, make conscious references to several tendencies in the history of photography and sculpture.

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[3] Marsha Tucker (curator) and Helene Weiner (assistant)
[4] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

Carving's attenuated rectangular grid stretches across the gallery wall with smaller elements constituting the band of photographs. In contrast to the granular and dark reproductions available in print and virtual media, the installed photographs capture crisp, clear portraits of Antin's nude figure (Fig. 3). Seen at a distance, the detail available in each image is difficult to register. Yet, by drawing near the photographs the overall network of photographs bleeds past the field of vision.

The work's scale thus emphasizes the prominence of the photographs in space and Antin's sculptural treatment of her body, but poses a challenge to reproduction. Print and digital editions of *Carving* are usually fragmentary: either excluding some of the 148 prints or capturing the installation of the grid of photographs from a severely foreshortened angle and distorting the level of detail. For instance the installation shot in MoMA's exhibition catalog, *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today*, captures only the last seven days of Antin's diet (Fig. 1). Alternatively, Antin's LACMA retrospective catalog depicts seventy-two photographs in the frame by placing the camera close to the wall and shooting laterally across the work (Fig. 4). Although this method shows a larger portion of the installation, the image of Antin's body fades as the work recedes into space. The third approach, a straight installation view, preserves the overall shape of the work but sacrifices the level of individual detail among each photograph (Fig. 5).

In person or in reproduction, *Carving* must be seen through a series of steps and vantage points. In the late eighteenth century, Gotthold Lessing outlined how individuals process visual

art and literature differently in terms of his model of temporal reception.[5] He proposed that a viewer sees visual art instantaneously and consumes the object as a whole *synchronically*. In contrast, a reader or listener absorbs text over time *diachronically* through a sequence of consecutive steps. The intellectual milieu of postmodernist and post-structuralist philosophy may allow us to consider a transitive relationship between Lessing's synchronic and diachronic binaries. Although an object may be *seen* in an instant, the viewer requires time to translate the perceptual experience into concepts accessible in language. If we consider abstract painting, for instance, a viewer requires time to study the depicted forms themselves in order to grasp the role of the relationships among the work's lines, colors, and shapes and how these inform the subject matter of the work.

Carving presents a similar case: like the freestanding sculpture Antin attempts to imitate, her photographs must be viewed from multiple angles. The virtual installation show becomes the overall synchronic view, but does not convey the experience of being in the gallery. However, by supplementing the straight synchronic view with the lateral and direct details, the reproductions simulate a diachronic process necessary to view this work. Furthermore, like the viewer, whose temporal steps of seeing and understanding are necessary to process the visual and conceptual components of the work, Antin undertook a diachronic process in creating the work. Each of the 148 photographs marks a specific moment in time; when exhibited as a whole, they represent a larger sense of the unfolding of time and space.

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[5] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry: With Remarks Illustrative of Various Points in the History of Ancient Art*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1874), PDF.

Each photograph records a unique stage in the gradual diminution of Antin's body.[6] The textual information that Antin provides reveals the physical (and sculptural) changes that the viewer's eye cannot detect. Her time-stamps constitute a narrative dimension for the entire photo-performance. Once again, Antin offers her viewer three different avenues of information. The diachronic presentation of information prompts a curious viewer to consider the criteria he or she bases their knowledge on to form a synchronic vista of *Carving*. Thus, the artwork itself synchronizes what was a diachronic process. The temporal element required for Antin to produce *Carving* and for a viewer to consume it poetically reemphasizes the tangible material and the sculptural subject matter of the photographs.

CONCEPTUAL AESTHETIC

The physical prominence of *Carving* contradicts the tendency toward dematerialization observed by Lucy Lippard, a period in which concepts took precedence over material properties or historically established aesthetic concerns.[7] Yet, *Carving* is superficially related to the look of conceptual art in its serial rhetoric and textual data. Benjamin Buchloh has described conceptual art as developed by artists rejecting conventional practices and opting instead for "a matter of linguistic convention" which served as a critique through "both a legal contract and an institutional discourse (a discourse of power rather than taste)."[8] The serial rhetoric and textual

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[6] While the weight-loss is the main aspect of the piece, the incidental details like her glance are more immediately noticeable.

[7] "Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized.'" Quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972... (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also: Alexander Alberro's discussion of a reductivist trajectory that he singles out as one of four major precursors of conceptual art in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), xvi-xvii.

[8] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 117-119 http://www.jstor.org/stable/778941. In

data of the photographs that constitute *Carving* make it a photo-conceptual project in the legacy of Minimalism.

Like Antin, artists Douglas Huebler and Victor Burgin employ a similar aesthetic of minimalist seriality and with modular units of text and photographic images—but with very different aims.[9] In 1971, Burgin created *Performative/Narrative*: sixteen black-and-white photographs with accompanying text (Fig. 6). Showing four objects in varying states of rest—a lamp turned on or off, a desk with open and closed drawers—Burgin's work bears a superficial visual resemblance to *Carving*. Huebler's *Variable Piece* follows a similar formal program (Fig. 7). Beginning in 1971, Huebler set out to document "the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner."[10] Here the artist's impractical and seemingly arbitrary project attempts to expose the camera's weakness as a simple tool rather than as a means for the composition of an aesthetic image as in Antin's *Carving*. Where *Performative/Narrative* and *Variable Piece* utilize photography as the record of an event, evidence of the world outside, *Carving* employs the same technology to display a contemporary sculptural image of herself informed by the early history of photography.

Unlike Lippard's account of an anti-aesthetic conceptual art movement, Buchloh's historical interpretation of early conceptual artists offered a stylistic description of the work as the "aesthetics of administration."[11] The "aesthetics of administration" is characterized by a

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Buchloh's essay, he discusses Edward Ruscha's photographic fold-out panorama *Twenty Six Gasoline Stations*; Robert Barry's *One Billion Dots*, On Kawara's *One Million Years*, and Douglas Huebler's life-long exercise to photo-document everyone alive entitled *Variable Piece*.

[9] Graham Coulter-Smith, "When Photography Took Centre Stage: Aspects of 1970s Conceptual Photography," Artintelligence, April 27, 2008, http://artintelligence.net/review/?p=706.

[10] Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 83.

[11] Buchloh, 119.

prevalent look, a generalized aesthetic trend of conceptual art in its use of language, photography, and a predominantly grey palette.[12] Tony Godfrey concurs with Buchloh's observation:

> The initial role of photography in Conceptual art was to document actions or phenomena…The naive view that underlies much early photography by Conceptual artists was that the camera was an 'opinion-less copying device'…It was a way of pointing at or indexing something in the world.[13]

Conceptual artists were substituting both the aesthetic of mass-produced consumer culture, which pervaded Pop art and the industrial fabrication of Minimal sculpture with bureaucratic and documentary visual and textual language. Harold Rosenberg proposed that conceptual art's "movement towards de-aestheticization" was "both a reaction against and a continuation of the trend toward formalist over-refinement in the art of the sixties, and particularly [against] the rhetoric that accompanied it."[14] Buchloh argued that the text in works like Burgin's *Performative/Narrative* allows Conceptualism to introduce a discursive dimension into the formalism of Minimal art. The combination of text and image, as Alexander Alberro pointed out, provides viewers with contextual information separate from the materiality of the exhibited object.[15] The conceptual photograph beginning in the mid-sixties was therefore meant to serve as the surrogate for the artists' ideas or actions.

      Antin's photographs reflect the "style" of conceptualism used by artists like Burgin and Huebler and articulated by Lippard, Buchloh, Miller-Keller, and Alberro. Conceptualists'

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[12] Sol LeWitt, Andrea Miller-Keller, and John B. Ravenal, *From the Collection of Sol LeWitt: A Traveling Exhibition Organized and Circulated by Independent Curators Incorporated, New York* (New York: Independent Curators, 1984). Quoted in Andy Grundberg and Kathleen McCarthy. Gauss, *Photography and Art: Interactions since 1946* (Fort Lauderdale: Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, 1987), 136.

[13] Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 303-306. Godfrey notes that the statement about cameras being an "opinion-less copying device" was spoken by Donald Karshan in 1970.

[14] Rosenberg, 62-67

[15] Alberro, xvii.

attraction to the banal and institutionalizing aesthetic, to which Alberro referred, reflect their interest in eliminating, or at least challenging, conventional methods of measuring an object's aesthetic quality or value.[16] The grid structure in which Antin places the repetitive photographs that record her performance echo the visual language used sincerely by some conceptual artists, as in Bernd and Hilla Bechers's typologies (1967-1973), or ironically by other, as in Edward Ruscha's gasoline stations (1963) (Figs. 8, 9). The small size of Antin's photographs, her emotionally detached posing, and the black-and-white printing, evoke a similar documentary or archival style. However, *Carving*'s photographs are not incidental details that buttress an overarching idea or concept.

As Cherise Smith observed of first-generation conceptual artists, "the reliance on such documentary-style remainders is evidence of their prioritization of the idea behind, and action involved in, the making of an object over its final or physical form."[17] Sol LeWitt, too, saw a kind of tension between the process in which the artists conceive *and* realize the work. He noted, "If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance."[18] Antin consciously inverts the aesthetic paradigms of conceptual art that rejected formal analysis and technical skill as a talent. The very act of photographing her performance signifies the value she places on the physical proof of her actions. Rather than emphasizing the changing shape of her body by photographing herself on the first and last days of the diet, Antin's repetitive poses tediously map her process in over one hundred prints. Although Antin works with conceptual strategies, she does not necessarily prioritize her idea or performance over the photographs. She does not negate the work's aestheticism (a common

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16 Alberro, xvii.

17 Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 214.

18 Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 83.

conceptual practice), but uses black-and-white film to deliberately create a documentary aesthetic and arranges herself within the composition looking to the appearance of sculpture for a model.[19]

Though *Carving* may bear a resemblance to "dematerialized" conceptual artworks, the number of photographs necessitates a large-scale, thus giving weight to the materiality of the performance, concept, and sculpture. The categorical paradox seems absurd when one considers the dematerialization involved in the work is that of Antin's body. The coy suggestion that her documentary photographs and dematerialized waistline mark her as Conceptual is further incongruously labeled as *traditional sculpture* referring once again to the physical aspect of the work. In doing so, Antin points to a historical juncture between documentary photography and sculpture—and to her photographs as aesthetic objects that occupy that space.[20]

SCULPTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

While the comprehensive view of her body might seem to stress its changing shape, the elongated layout complicates a synchronic comparison between the multitude of photographs from the first and last day. Antin's weight changes too slowly for the naked eye to notice. She gradually sheds the layers of flesh from her body as if working in relief, her thinner figure only gradually emerges.[21] *Carving*'s black-and-white film bathes Antin's nude body in grayscale, recalling the tones of marble sculpture. Instead of placing emphasis on the physical manifestation

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[19] Alberro, xvii.

[20] I will return to this point later. Antin relates the history of photography with the history of sculpture, but in doing so she compares the conceptualist aesthetic with that of nineteenth century photographic practices.

[21] Giorgio Vasari describes a similar method of sculpting and carving as "a gradual issuing forth from the block, like a figure that emerges as it is raised little by little from a tub of water." Georgio Vasari, *Vasari on Technique*, trans. Louisa S. Maclehose, ed. G. Baldwin Brown (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 151.

of her weight loss, Antin's panoramic view strengthens the thematic link between her grid of

self-portraits and the traditional academic method of documenting sculpture. Looking at the

canonical photographs of Polykleitos's *Doryphoros*, one sees how the advent of photography

allowed for the study of works of antiquity in the round (Fig. 10). The images of the *Doryphoros*

reproduced here capture the sculpture both from frontal and lateral angles. These multiple

perspectives chosen by the photographer resemble Antin's documentation of the sculpting of her

body in *Carving*.

Antin's interest in the multilayered interpretations of sculpture in *Carving* as well as the

historic relationship between three-dimensional objects and photography is evidenced by her

capturing herself in grayscale, in the round, as well as in the physical prominence of the

photographs. These photographs collapse the iconographical gap between the aesthetics of her

conceptual contemporaries and the nineteenth century photographic legacies of sculpture,

anatomical documentation and motion studies. *Carving* touches on the nodal tissue that connects

the two art-historical subjects, each of which shade subjective and objective interpretations of

Antin's performance, photographs, and sculpture.[22]

In a group of essays from 1850 to 1853, the French critic Francis Wey denounced any

potential art-historical discourse or aesthetic relevancy to the daguerreotype because the print

"resisted the requisite hierarchy of compositional elements."[23] Wey recognized the quality that

conceptualists would be drawn to a century later, namely that the photographic image seemed to

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[22] At the time that Antin produced *Carving* photography was not an established art-historical subject, few scholars studied the field until the early 1960s. She does however continue to demonstrate an interest in historical photos in future projects such as *Angel of Mercy*.

[23] Margaret Denton, "Francis Wey and the Discourse of Photography as Art in France in the Early 1850s: 'Rien N'est Beau Que Le Vrai; Mais Il Faut Le Choisir'" *Art History* 25, no. 5 (November 2002): 623-624, doi:10.1111/1467-8365.00348. Cited in Geoffrey Batchen, "An Almost Unlimited Variety: Photography and Sculpture in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

suppress individual creativity and eliminate the mark of the Romantic artist. At the turn of the century, the camera's indiscriminant eye heralded skepticism in artistic communities because of its *lack* of malleability and resistance to composition. As a result, photographers tended to treat the technology as a vehicle for capturing an objective impression of reality. Moreover, the daguerreotype and the calotype (or talbotype) provided the technological solutions to the nearly four hundred-year quest for exact facsimile, simulating three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional plane.[24]

Photography's influence also impacted didactic drawing and the study of sculpture. Geoffrey Batchen suggested that the commercial success of images of sculpture signaled "the incorporation of art production into capitalism and of the gradual breakdown of state control over art making."[25] The inert nature of sculpture made it an ideal candidate for early photography, which required long exposure times. Images of sculpture likewise linked photographers to familiar modes of representation and a burgeoning bourgeois market of consumers interested in reduced-scale copies of art works.[26] Contemporary sculptors were able to publicize and advertise their work without the necessity of academic validation from the salons.[27] Rather than relying on handmade drawings, graphics (e.g., etchings or engravings), sketches, or only memory, artists could now refer to portable and fairly accurate images of their objects of study. Beyond the commercial benefits of the marriage between the photograph and sculpture, the new recording device influenced art historians studying the Renaissance and Antiquity.[28] The utility and convenience of photographic reproductions of sculpture recast scholarship, which became

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[24] Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 15.
[25] Batchen, 21-22.
[26] Batchen, 21.
[27] Batchen, 21-22.
[28] John Hannavy, ed., *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth Century Photography*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1108.

increasingly focused on issues of attribution and stylistic analysis—matters which were most easily addressed with slides or photographs.[29]

The naïve utilitarian approach neglects to account for the photographer or artist's hand, but Antin exploits the innocent understanding that the technology functions as a reporting device. *Carving* sits at the intersection between the archival aesthetic of nineteenth century photography and that of conceptual art. Her formal choices subvert and amplify the functional understanding of the photograph as evidence or stand-in for the captured subject. With a photograph, the artist's intervention or influence rests beyond the edges of the photograph and an analytical and inquisitive viewer must postulate as to the extent of the obscured artistic license. In the photograph, the artist's touch or hand is behind the scenes, not on the surface plane. One must interpret the artist's touch in negative terms, whereas, for example, in drawing the residue of erasure is positively registered in the image.

However convenient and seemingly precise, the camera disconnects the texture, light, shade, scale, and physical context from the sculpture, to produce a flat representation of its three-dimensional subject. The result, as Geraldine Johnson concluded, was "atomized sculptures" taken by a "series of discontinuous close-up views."[30] The diachronic photographic eye through which sculpture (typically Greco-Roman or neoclassical) could be documented effectively contributed to the formation of the art-historical canon as well as the somatic canon (since a large portion of the sculpture was figural). As André Malraux declared, the history of art, and

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[29] Geraldine A. Johnson, *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

[30] Johnson, 9.

sculpture in particular, "for the last hundred years…has been the history of that which can be photographed."[31]

Antin exaggerates the visual atomization of her body frequently found in early moments of photographed sculpture and minimizes the sensationalizing emotional potential behind the subject of her performance. At the turn of the century, the photograph was appealing for its extraordinary ability to create the impression of realism that painting had endeavored to recreate on a two-dimensional plane since the Renaissance. Representational painters could pull from the photographs to refine their own technical depiction of anatomy, but, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, it was at this very moment that the avant-garde painter was beginning to look past representation and toward abstraction.[32]

Related principles are at work in *Carving*. The iconographical relationship between Antin's photographs and early photographic practices does not lie in "the moody landscape or the soulful portrait" but in its documentary and functional aspects.[33] The substantial history of sculpture photography is not only implicated in Antin's title but also in the materiality of the photographs—which themselves challenge photographic reproduction, since it requires both synchronic and diachronic readings.

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[31] Quoted in Wolfgang M. Freitag, "Early Uses of Photography in the History of Art," *Art Journal* 39, no. 2 (Winter 1979-1980): 117, http://www.jstor.org/stable/776397. See also: André Malraux, *Museum without Walls* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Donald Preziosi "Art history as we know it today is the child of photography." *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p.72

[32] Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," ed. Alan Trachtenberg, in *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 205. Originally published in The *Literarische Welt*. To clarify, this is not to say that painters were not looking to photography as a technological tool. As Aaron Scharf notes in *Art and Photography*, "stop-motion camera imagery, in particular the geometric diagrams of [Etienne Jules] Marey, with their emphasis on pattern and movement, offered Cubist, Vorticist, and Futurist painters with a fresh vocabulary." But in terms of the utility for the avant-garde, photographs were not referenced to successfully reproduce "realistic" anatomy on a canvas, for instance.

[33] Benjamin, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 203.

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In addition to its practical and documentary role in the fine arts, the early promise of photography provided the scientific community the means to document the human body with extreme exactitude. The medical benefits of photography simplified administrative bookkeeping, patient diagnosis and future treatment.[34] Benjamin observed in 1931 that photography seemed to be more relevant to the study of science and medicine than to the fine arts.[35] Allan Sekula saw the early stages of photography's development as a necessary result of didactic medical and anatomical drawings.[36] He noted that the photograph became a *repressive* instrument intended "to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define both the *generalized* look—the typology—and the *contingent instant* of deviance and social pathology."[37] Documentary realism, he demonstrated, portrays and effectively categorizes the oppressed and exploited members of society. The nineteenth century also witnessed a colonial boom that radiated aggressively from Europe out towards Africa and Asia. With the camera close at hand to satisfy their taste for the exotic, European imperialists cultivated an archive of physiognomic and phrenological studies.

On the occasion of Antin's 1999 retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Lisa Bloom interpreted *Carving* as relating to the *repressive* tradition of photography, which is wrapped up in the politics of Jewish ethnicity. Bloom described Antin's figure as that of a "short Jewish woman" who is "far from being the generic female body."[38] Bloom further characterized the aura of pseudoscience in *Carving* as it relates to photography's role in

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[34] Rosenblum, 77.

[35] Benjamin, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 203.

[36] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *The Body and the Archive* 39 (Winter 1986): 7, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778312.

[37] Sekula, 7.

[38] Lisa Bloom, "Rewriting the Script: Eleanor Antin's Feminist Art," in *Eleanor Antin* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999), 169.

facilitating physiognomic studies and photographic science and the documentation of "ethnic and

social marginals, including many Jews."[39] Students of physiognomy utilized photography so as

to examine and theorize correlations between their subjects' physical appearance—body shape,

proportions, posture—and mental faculties or personal character.[40] Although Bloom does not

illustrate examples of this practice, the evidence of racial anthropological daguerreotypes support

her case. Antin's nude body shown in full profile, front, and back has a precedent in earlier

images such Joseph T. Zealy's three portraits of Jem, a slave owned by F. W. Green (Fig. 11).[41]

The archaic notion that the "surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore

the outward signs of inner character," was regarded as scientific fact, from which researchers

established and reinforced the field's legitimacy.[42] Bloom argued that Antin systematically

documents her body from four different views so as to "exert formal control over her own

body…to achieve the aesthetic ideal."[43] The abstract premise of a singular ideal, she noted, is

historically buttressed by "societal constructions built upon body differences" in the history of

art as well as the legacy of racial and physiognomic theories of the colonial era.[44] Bloom

contended that Antin deliberately "plays off these early traditions in order to mark herself as

Jewish."[45] From this perspective, Antin objectifies herself—or assumes the role of people

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[39] Bloom, 169.

[40] Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes," *American Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 45, doi: 10.1086/424243.

[41] Wallis, 45-46. Another figure of note might be the Hottentot Venus, a South African woman on exhibition at 19th-century European public attractions.

[42] Sekula, 11. See also: Merriam-Webster dictionary defines phrenology as the study of the conformation of the skull based on the belief that it is indicative of mental faculties and character. Physiognomy is defined as the art of discovering temperament and character from outward appearance; the facial features held to show qualities of mind or character by their configuration or expression; external aspect; *also*: inner character or quality revealed outwardly.

[43] Bloom, 169.

[44] Bloom, 169.

[45] Bloom, 169.

historically objectified—using conventions for sculpture and the "Other," both of which are objects of display and fascination. Antin's aesthetic calls to mind the archival aesthetic Sekula described in the mid-1990s: one in which photographic realism is presented as tool of authentication, as a truthful and impartial witness to events that take place in front of the camera but which follows a repressive logic (e.g., criminal mug shots).

Although *Carving*'s photographs share a similar composition and scale with the racial anthropological daguerreotypes printed in the nineteenth century, Antin's powerful grasp of her own agency destabilizes a purely objective reading of her project. Prudence Allen described a dominant pre-modern theory of sexual reproduction in which "the female always provides the material, the male that which fashions the material into shape."[46] But, in Allen's metaphorical gender construction, Antin is both the man and woman. While Jem was photographed as property by a figure of authority, Antin photographs herself. As such, she subjects herself to a viewer's gaze and analysis from a position of power, capsizing yet another historic visual model. Antin's diachronic method of portraying herself resonates with phrenological and physiognomic studies but the diurnal and repetitious nature of the photographs also strike a cinematic chord reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies.[47]

Carving engages the viewer in temporal increments, but rather than record thirty seconds of action, the photographs connect to a more extended duration of time. Both Antin and

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[46] Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC - AD 1250* (Montréal: Eden Press, 1985), 91.

[47] Thomas Eakins, in the United States, Etienne Jules Marey, in France, and Ottomar Anschütz, in Germany, were also early pioneers of motion photography. Scientists were also interested in the mechanics of motion, particularly equine and avian, and were suddenly supplied with visual data of the physical processes that occurred on an anatomical level.(Hill, 3) The catalog of postures available to specialists in the scientific or art worlds ballooned with each of Muybridge's experiments. Scientists reaped the rewards and critically analyzed the different stages of motion from the photographs.(Rosenblum, 249) For the first time, sculptors could resolve the problem of freestanding support from a live model (Eadweard Muybridge, *Animals in Motion* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 11).

Muybridge present a series of images that vary from one print to the next, but where Muybridge

seeks to freeze movement, Antin accelerates change. In the late 1800s, Muybridge addressed the

limits of human eyesight and perception through instantaneous photography.[48] In his first

experiments, Muybridge was able to capture the locomotion of a horse's gallop in a series of

sequential frames using an automatic timer mechanism to continuously activate the shutters in

front of the camera's lens (Fig. 12).[49] His photographs effectively broke what are seemingly

synchronic instances into consecutive diachronic moments "[analyzing] motion into its

components, like a good scientist,…[re-endowing] it mechanically with motion."[50]

Muybridge's *Woman Walking With Hand to Mouth* runs parallel to the four faces of

Antin (Fig. 13). Muybridge's sequential female portrait makes a stronger case to interpret Antin

as the object in *Carving*, but the comparison begins to accentuate Antin's agency. Unlike

Muybridge's *Woman*, Antin not only acts *as* sculpture and accesses the history of serial

photography, but she also calls attention to the process of her diet in the subjective sense,

assuming both the role of photographer and that of sculptor. The images document her progress

and her level of expertise as she carves/photographs her sculpture/body.

CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Thus far, I have focused on the narrative that *Carving* suggests with respect to the art-

historical relationship between photography and sculpture beginning in the nineteenth century.

Antin models herself after traditional academic sculpture yet the majority of criticism associates

Carving with artistic and cosmetic standards of beauty. The critical discourse presents *Carving*

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[48] For more technical detail refer to Paul Hill, *Eadweard Muybridge* (London: Phaidon, 2001), Eadweard Muybridge, *Animals in Motion* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), and Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997).

[49] Paul Hill, *Eadweard Muybridge* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 12-13.

[50] Tom Gunning, "Never Seen This Picture Before: Muybridge in Multiplicity," in The Cinematic, ed. David Campany (London: Whitechapel, 2007), 23.

as confronting the fact that what we call "beautiful" in art—mainly women's bodies—has historically been made by men and for men in a heteronormative society and that "beauty" is unattainable for "real" women. According to this scholarship, the artist's rigorous dedication to, and controlled documentation of, her performance questions women's motivations to conform to a cultural or aesthetic concept of an ideal. From this perspective, Antin narrates the everywoman's struggle to perfect her body, as well as her own dedication as an artist in realizing the performance, photographs, and sculpture.[51]

The critical consensus demonstrates that most interpretations of *Carving* concentrate on her performance and photographs as a conceptual statement confronting the objectification of women at the hands of a voyeuristic male-dominated society, culture, and art world. Most of the literature concludes that Antin's systematic and methodical photographic record of her performance superimposed with her metaphorical Greco-Roman marble body critiques "the pressure to conform to an image of idealized female beauty."[52] Howard N. Fox described Antin's image in subjective terms, likening the photographs to "a police lineup" or an "aggressively clinical recording method," reminiscent of "memories of physical education posture pictures."[53] Arlene Raven and Deborah Marrow explained that the work conveys "the idea that, for women, dieting and cosmetics take the creative place of art and that in this culture women themselves are the art product."[54] Martha Buskirk asserted that *Carving* takes advantage of "deaestheticized

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[51] Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 225-226.

[52] Buskirk, 224-225.

[53] Howard N. Fox, "Waiting in the Wings," in *Eleanor Antin* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999), 44. See also: Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, p. 224-225. See also: Linda Gordon, "Musing About the Muse: An Art Essay," *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 28-29, accessed April 5, 2011,

[54] Arlene Raven and Deborah Marrow, "Eleanor Antin: What's Your Story," Chrysalis 8 (Summer 1979): 43-51.

photography" to "specifically neutralize the erotic, incongruously merge with the thought of the

artist transforming and recreating herself, using a method – dieting – which is a particularly

female obsession."[55] Even as recently as 2011, the Orange County Museum of Art showed

Carving in the "Feminism and Domestic Space" gallery which was near to, but separate from,

the "Art About Art/The Artistic Process," "The Body," or "Language and Wordplay" galleries.[56]

Peter Plagens acknowledged a formal element in the photographs but rather than seeing multiple

layers of sculptural analogy, he praised Antin for her "disciplined lack of window-dressing."[57]

Although she may assume an objectified role that refers to herself and socio-cultural minorities,

Antin also assumes the role of power in *Carving*: *she* takes the photographs, *she* diets, *she*

exhibits the work, and *she* sells the work.

FROM THE 1850S TO THE 1970S

    As I have established through the iconographic comparisons above, many conceptual

artists in the late sixties and early seventies appropriated black-and-white film, and the

pseudoscientific documentary aesthetic that pervaded a large portion of nineteenth century

images of both sculpture and racial or ethnic minorities. Although *Carving* lends itself to a

sociopolitical interpretation because the style is in harmonious dialogue with Antin's

conceptualist and feminist contemporaries, this reading has tended to marginalize the ironic

institutional critique she also makes.

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[55] Buskirk, 28-29.

[56] Constance Lewallen et al., *State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). In relation to *Representational Painting*, Lewallen described Antin's work thusly: "the title [*Representational Painting*] derived from her desire to comment on traditional painting and also to address how women choose to represent themselves to the world…Antin made a companion piece the next year—*Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*…in which she documents her weight loss with 148 black-and-white photographs.

[57] Peter Plagens, "Orlando, Calif; Exhibit," *Artforum* 11 (November 1972): 89.

Antin delved into the nineteenth century photographic past again with a similar flippancy

just a few years after *Carving* in 1977 when she exhibited *The Angel of Mercy*. The work

consists of two albums, *My Tour of Duty in the Crimea* and *The Nightingale Family Album*. The

photographs show Antin with other figures dressed in mid- to late-nineteenth century costumes

set in the Crimean War (Fig. 14). The sepia photographs, mounted on handcrafted paper,

correspond to an antique tradition rather than a contemporary taste for documentation offered by

black-and-white film. The earth-toned prints seem more concerned with nostalgia and gimmicks

than with historical accuracy or scientific study. Antin's deliberate aesthetic aging in *The Angel*

of Mercy mirrors her interest in photographic aesthetics and "the slight disparity, the unexpected

even, that will give the appearance of truth."[58] As Kim Levin stated, Antin has pursued visual

modes of representing historical fiction throughout her *oeuvre*:

> While substituting historical fictions for Conceptualist facts, Eleanor Antin is
> commenting on society's pretensions as well as art's. After insisting on all the quirks and
> illusions and narrative possibilities of the personal, the intimate, the psychological, artists
> are expanding their investigations to include the social, political and moral
> responsibilities of that self, and Eleanor Antin was one of the first to delve into the
> interactions between the private self and the public world.[59]

Carving deftly utilizes that methodological approach, but instead of "substituting

historical fictions" propagated notoriously by documentary photography "for Conceptualist

facts," she swiftly collapses the two. Separated by a century, artists and photographers remained

dedicated to an aesthetic of fact, truth, information, and sincerity. Unlike the subject matter of

Angel of Mercy—which metaphorically points to the state of affairs in 1970s Vietnam—and the

antique photographs—which are suggestive of the mythical "Conceptualist doctrine of art as

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[58] Eleanor Antin quoted in *Eleanor Antin: The Angel of Mercy : [exhibition] La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, September 10-October 23, 1977.* (La Jolla: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977), 21.

[59] Kim Levin, *Eleanor Antin: The Angel of Mercy : [exhibition] La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, September 10-October 23, 1977.* (La Jolla: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977), 22.

pure information,"—*Carving* reflects and mimics the structure and look of photo-conceptualism.

Anne Rorimer recognized a similar duality in *Carving*, stating that Antin,

> wittily synthesizes Conceptual methods…that are founded on the premise of photographic neutrality…With reference to social standards of feminine beauty and the treatment of women as objects, Antin's work photographically follows the carving of her own curvilinear form day by day. In this way, the artist ingeniously comments on the Conceptual rejection of sculptural three-dimensionality, paradoxically, by means of shaping her own body.[60]

Through her subversion, she emphasizes the materiality of her work, those qualities which many conceptualists strove to minimize. Antin's mockery of contemporary art's pretentions in *Carving* becomes even more pronounced in comparison with its sister project, *The Eight Temptations*.

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[60] Anne Rorimer, "California Art Circa 1970: New Mediums and Methodologies," in *State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 229.

The Eight Temptations (1972)

While the images in *Carving* shroud Antin's process within the stylistic indicators of the contemporary art world context, *Temptations* stages a dramatic parody behind the scenes. If Antin's diet qualifies as a performance, then *Carving* acts as the visual manifestation of that performance. However, if we couch the diet in terms of process, then *Carving*'s photographs become both a means to an end, as documentation, and an end in and of themselves, as self-portraits. The photographs do not show how Antin goes about creating this change from one day to the next. Instead, Antin provides *The Eight Temptations*: a series of eight photographs that show the artist in emotional poses rejecting food that would violate her diet for *Carving*.

In one sense, Antin uses her own body as her medium in *Carving* but, as I have established, she also makes deliberate formal photographic choices. In the following sections I aim to demonstrate how Antin constructs a camp adaptation of her diet for *Carving* through appropriating an amalgamation of Renaissance and Baroque imagery. In his serial studies, Muybridge unfolded milliseconds into photographic time and put what Benjamin referred to as "unconscious optics" into motion. The German critical theorist suggested that the banality of the everyday makes up the bulk of our lived experience and yet is barely noticed:

> Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is a familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.[61]

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[61] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 237.

Beyond the borders of Antin's five by seven photographs in *Carving*, how does Eleanor go about her day? We, as her audience, only see how her body *reacts* to her diet and exercise, not how she goes about producing the change. *Temptations* operates in a similar manner as Benjamin's "optical unconscious," filling in the spaces between *Carving*'s photographs.[62] However, *Temptations* does not reflect the documentary or archival aesthetic of *Carving*. Instead, *Temptations* color photography and anachronistic gestures are reminiscent of Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting and emphasize how *Carving*'s aesthetics manipulate the notion of reality, represented reality, and photographic objectivity. Antin's parodic adaptation of her dietary asceticism in *Temptations* redirects interpretations of *Carving*: we move away from a pure sociopolitical statement toward a more nuanced relationship between history of photography, sculpture, photographers, and sculptors—or in other words, between art history and artists. Antin's colorful pendant piece actively engages with the history of painting, allegory, and self-deprecating humor, which in turn dismisses the avant-garde conceptual community's utilitarian approach to the camera. Like Muybridge's photographs, *Temptations*'s atmosphere of spectacle indirectly calls attention to an issue of confidence and belief in the photographic medium, because "What sort of image was a photograph that showed something the eye could not verify?"[63]

TEMPTATIONS: A TRADITIONAL PAINTING

Temptations hangs in eight individual Plexiglas frames in a single row (Fig. 15). Each photograph shows Antin in the same interior setting: sitting in front of an open louvered glass window before a small, round white table. A toaster on a short wooden bookcase sits at the edge of the frame. Antin's dark brown hair, parted in the middle, falls onto her burgundy long-sleeved

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[62] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 237.
[63] Gunning, 22.

button-down blouse. The contents of the eight photographs vary only with the artist's different postures and in which food becomes the object of her adamant rejection. A unique gesture accompanies each food: from left to right Antin rejects a banana, jam, cheese, a hardboiled egg, milk, beer, sardines, and peanuts.[64]

The serial images seem to blend filmic acting with photographic posing, recasting Antin in a range of emotionally fraught scenarios. In contrast to the daily morning routine of photographing *Carving*, *Temptations* articulates time quickly. Antin described making *Temptations* in a matter of hours: "there is something about this piece that is a part of its charm, which was very ad-hoc impromptu…I chose everything within an hour."[65] The brisk sequence of time, the even light source through the windows, and the unchanging backdrop juxtaposed with Antin's shifting poses, all filtered through the color of film, generate a cinematic tone.[66] The serial images tempt the reader towards a cinematic reading of *Temptations*, but they belie the complicated implications of her changing gestures.

The newer color film of *Temptations* paradoxically resonates with even older objects. Compounded with her emotional postures, the images recall certain conventions from Italian Baroque and Renaissance painting. Assuming that the photographs pull strictly from a filmic vocabulary, a modern medium, then Antin's gestures seem evocative of the maudlin era of silent movies. Yet, the photographs would best reflect cinematography in black-and-white film (as opposed to referencing classical white marble sculpture in *Carving*). The title instead

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[64] The items are listed as "a banana, a wedge of cheese, a jar of rose hips jam, a boiled egg, a tin of sardines, a bottle of cream, a bottle of beer and peanuts" in Michael Andrews and David Bourdon. *(Photo) (photo)² … (photo)[superscript N]: Sequenced Photographs : [exhibition] University of Maryland Dept. of Art, University of Maryland Art Gallery, February 26 through March 25, 1975.* [College Park]: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1975.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

contextualizes the portraits within a vaguely moralistic narrative while the color film refers more to a tradition of painting than to one of cinema. The seriality elevates the suspense and tension of the drama, with each image demonstrating Antin's enduring struggle against desire and pleasure.

The stylistic similarities between *Temptations* and three hundred years of Italian painting are necessarily broad. Although Antin's extensive art-historical spread abbreviates the vast history of Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting, her approximation preserves familiar traces of that periodization. Her gestures fluctuate between the generic and more suggestive of various older paintings, and the still-lives imply some intended meaning. Yet, the message remains based in the atmospheric contrast between *Temptations* and *Carving*.

The title, *The Eight Temptations*, for instance, conveys an ominous tone suggestive of the Judeo-Christian subject matter that saturates European art history. By merely using the word "temptations," Antin already points to biblical preoccupations with sin, especially that of Adam and Eve or the temptations of Christ or of Saint Anthony. Numbering the temptations further suggests a strong allegorical reference in Antin's work, paralleling such doctrinal numerical sets as the seven deadly sins. By placing herself within a narrative, she represents herself in concert with the medieval cults of self-flagellation and abuse that would lead saints and the spiritual to salvation and miraculous martyrs to sainthood.[67]

The themes of sin, desire, and ethics alluded to by Antin's title, of course, have roots in the biblical parables and stories promoted by the Roman Catholic Church during the counterreformation.[68] The Protestant reformation divided Europe: by the seventeenth century Catholicism remained dominant in the south while Protestantism took hold in the Low Countries and most of the north. While Protestant sects of Christianity generally approached visual

[67] Eleanor Antin, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011.
[68] François Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 9.

representations of religious subject matter more modestly, the Catholic Church began to exploit ornamentation to evoke awe in their visual media—with varied frequency—in order to strengthen their reputation and to emphasize the primacy of their institutional guidance for Christians in the earthly realm.[69]

In order to reinforce the sacred value of Catholic saints and the Madonna, which the Protestant church rejected as false idols, the Roman Catholic Church recognized visual art both as a useful tool to communicate with the masses and as a way to continue the long tradition of Christian image-making. In the hopes of appealing to viewers' emotional devotion, and of counteracting and undermining charges of iconoclasm, the papacy commissioned depictions of a motherly and caring Madonna, and heroic saints overcoming trials or performing miracles.[70]

Antin's gestures, facial expressions, medium, composition, and title express the stylistic and thematic trends representative of the Renaissance and Baroque painters without necessarily citing specific works or artists in their iconography. Renaissance artists, such as Raphael, introduced significant emotional and psychological content through the objects they created. Raphael's late Renaissance painting *Transfiguration of Christ* amplified highlights, deep shadows, and theatrical composition (Fig. 16). The wild gesticulation of the contorted figures, buttressed by the strong use of chiaroscuro, develops the passion, drama, and tension of the narrative. The seeds of emotion, depth, movement, and rich color Raphael and Titian, for example, planted caused a fruitful harvest in the sixteenth century of artistic practices that would characterize the dynamism and opulence which typifies what we have come to understand about the Seicento. The emotive story-telling artists refined in the Renaissance, the expressive realism

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[69] Julius S. Held and Donald Posner, "Italy in the Seventeenth Century," in *17th and 18th Century Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 22.
[70] Held, 22.

of the Baroque figures, the high finished polish of oil paint, and the polemic political subject matter (having both secular and religious consequences) are the compositional tools with which Antin creates and develops *Temptations*.

BODY LANGUAGE OF THE EIGHT TEMPTATIONS

The iconographic fragments of Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting in *Temptations* suggest that Antin pulls from the dramatic subject matter in order to establish spectacle in her anxious photographs, using the title to contextualize the imagery and tone within an allegorical framework. In an attempt to recall why she chose eight temptations, Antin remarked that she thought it "sounded like some Gothic thing, it sounded like there really were eight temptations. I don't know if that's true or not."[71] In Michael Baxandall's discussion of the body and its language, he argued that painters in the fifteenth century placed narrative emphasis on figures' body movements rather than facial expressions.[72] Despite the overwhelming evidence to support Baxandall's argument, he readily admitted that viewers must rely on suggestive sources and an iconographic gestalt in the absence of a painter's handbook or dictionary of gestures. He further urged his reader to allow for the overlapping of religious and profane gestures, "a primary religious gesture is often used for a secular subject and carried a corresponding weight."[73] Following Baxandall's logic and study, Antin's poses connote an art-historical awareness in their choreography, but, as I will illustrate, each photograph does not rely on strict iconography or explicit references.[74]

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[71] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

[72] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy; a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 70.

[73] Baxandall, 70.

[74] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

Though Antin takes no particular painting as her model, the imagery corresponds with pictorial themes of temptation and scenes of the Annunciation explored by several artists in the Renaissance. A number of artists, including Michelangelo, Hieronymus Bosch, and Annibale Carracci have depicted the story of the temptations of Saint Anthony. Through their own interpretations, each artist shows the saint enduring supernatural temptations during his pilgrimage through the Libyan Desert. Despite the common subject matter, the painting by Carracci offers the strongest formal comparison to Antin's photographs. In the painting, demons surround Saint Anthony as he lays on the ground, while Christ floats down from the heavens with an outstretched arm to offer rescue (Fig. 17). The saint's gesture and facial expression capture the painting's emotional tone of fear and salvation as he gazes at Christ in relief through the sharp claws of the winged devil at his side.

Saint Anthony's gesture offers a striking comparison with Antin in her second photograph (Figs. 18, 19). Antin leans back and extends her hands rejecting the jam on the table. Carracci's Saint Anthony exhibits a similar posture: his raised arms shield from the threat of the invading demons. The body language between Antin and the saint remains similar, but inexact; the comparison fails to give a one-to-one correlation. Saint Anthony looks up in anguish in Caracci's work, while Antin directs her gaze downwards. The saint also holds his hands significantly more open and closer to his body as he turns to face Christ in the heavens.

Saint Anthony's heroic tale of survival in the face of peril corresponds to Antin's own absurd, sinful saga in her kitchen. Antin's gestures link the spiritual struggles of saints like Anthony to her own nutritional plight, magnifying the absurdity of her spoof on her artistic process. Anthony has resisted temptation to the extent that the nature of his persuasions or lures have transformed into violent fantastic figures that torment him. Antin, too, presents herself at

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the climax of her temptation physically manifesting her resistance in her gestures and hidden gaze. Both Carracci and Antin situate their subjects in a position where they benefit from rejecting and denying temptation. For Anthony, the motivation is surely based in the heavenly rewards he will garner in the afterlife. For Antin, the consequences exist in the physical world with her weight-loss at stake for *Carving*. However, Antin is quick to deflect an interpretation of pathos, commenting, "the little peanuts were hilarious, I thought, because you can eat three how bad could it be?"[75]

A similar stylistic case presents itself when comparing Antin's fourth and sixth photographs with Simon Vouet's painting *Temptation of Saint Francis* from 1624 (Fig. 20). Vouet depicts a prostitute seducing Saint Francis, who has fallen on the floor and lies in shadow. Unlike in the Carracci painting, here the posture of the temptress, not the saint, relates to Antin's pictures (Figs. 21-23). Both Vouet and Antin interrupt the action of their narratives, suspending the figures' gestures and emotion in the image. In her fourth photograph, Antin looks toward the base of the egg stand as her head turns back and to the right. She raises her open left hand to her face, flexing the right behind the egg. The sixth image shows a similar posture, with a few alterations. Antin tilts her head to the left while maintaining a downward gaze. Her poses in both images are similar, but her fingers are softer in the sixth photograph—holding a slight curl as they fan across her right cheek. Antin's right palm floats parallel to the tabletop near the white mug of beer. Like Antin, the prostitute leans back, eyes half masked gazing down at Saint Francis. Her face, too, shows little communicative emotion: smooth brow, parted lips, watching the floor as she twists away from the object of her attention.

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[75] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

Despite these similarities, Antin rejects specific references in favor of a general

resonance with Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting, in turn evoking the dramatic and

extravagant rather than the righteous or divine. As a result, she performs a parody of her process

and performance for *Carving*. Vouet's notably more dramatic painting sets the figures in luscious

darkness as the prostitute wraps her thick fur coat around her body, as opposed to the bright

warm setting in *Temptations*. Furthermore, since in this painting the villain mirrors Antin's

gestures the comparison suggests that Antin further removes herself from a specific thematic

narrative.

Antin's title brings to mind a specific art-historical and biblical legacy, but *Temptations*'s

form spills over the bounds of subject matter and bleeds into a vast history of painting. The High

Renaissance and Baroque drama stems in large part from the cultural and theological concerns of

the counterreformation. And Antin mines the imagery liberally, joining expressive gestures with

sedate facial expressions.[76] In Sandro Botticelli's *Annunciation* from 1489-1490, the Angel

Gabriel appears to the Madonna announcing that she will conceive and give birth to Jesus, the

Son of God (Fig. 24). Antin adopts a similar posture as the Madonna in her photographs; the

strongest comparison, with regards to posing, is arguably with the eighth temptation (Figs. 25,

26). In both images, the women lean forward with their arms extended outwards, looking to the

floor. Antoniazzo's *Annunciation* shows a similar leaning gesture with a downward gaze (Figs.

27, 28). The Madonna holds her left arm closer to her chest reaching out with her right gasping a

small pouch. The blend of positions continues to suggest close comparisons but, like the Carracci

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[76] More iconographical comparisons exist between the Virgin Mary in *The Last Judgment* and Antin's
hand placement over her face in the fifth photograph. Michelangelo's depictions of God and Adam in the
Sistine Chapel's nine scenes from genesis also hold some arresting similarities. Antin's outstretched arms
in the second, third, and eight photographs loosely correspond to God's radiating gestures in *Separation
of light from dark* and *God Dividing Land and Water*. Antin's pushing gestures in the second and third
photographs also seem to relate to that of Adam as Michael banishes him and Eve from paradise.

and Vouet examples, the figures are not exact copies. The Botticelli Madonna elegantly sways away from the angel and bows her head whereas Antin leans in and looks down.

The most dynamic and expressive image of Antin's series takes place in the seventh temptation (Fig. 29). Antin embellishes the subtle twisting motion of the other photographs, completely covering her face as she spirals away from the tin of sardines in front of her. She raises her right arm, placing her hand in front of her face while her left hand lies limp near her chest. Michelangelo painted Christ in a similar position in *The Last Judgment*; both Antin and Christ curve their torsos with their right arms raised and left arms bent at their sides (Fig. 30, 31). The direct comparison ends there, but Antin's facial expression toward the banana in her first photograph looks similar to that of Christ. Although Antin and Christ act out significantly different stories, both figures show fairly blank expressions, which Antin maintains throughout her photographs (when visible) (Fig. 32). Her calm face and soft eyes echo the Early Renaissance paintings of Madonna, particularly in Annunciation scenes.

Furthermore, in spite of the compositional and formal similarities between *Temptations* and Botticelli's painting, the striking *thematic* differences emphasize *Temptations*'s preoccupation with lure, deception, and sin, a drastically different narrative than that of the Annunciation. Although Antin's stoic expression resembles other paintings such as Michelangelo's *Manchester Madonna* and Polidoro da Lanciano's *Madonna and Child*, the works neither share a similar subject matter nor do they demonstrate the expressive gesticulation of the former comparisons (Figs. 33-37). The women's faces are blank, and the drama is passionately expressed through their arms. Therefore, Antin does not look to specific painters or paintings to imitate, but samples imagery from a period of art notorious for its high drama narratives to represent her process and performance for *Carving*. Antin collapses the romantic

stereotype of the sensitive and—literally—starving artist, Baroque and Renaissance theatrics, and with *Carving* she mocks the serious objectivity some conceptual artists took to their process. Furthermore, she simultaneously aligns herself with the historical prestige, pedigree, and fame associated with art history, in order to insert herself into the western canon. Ironically, in retrospect it seems the motif was not strong enough given *Temptations*'s critical obscurity.

SYMBOLIC POTENTIAL AND STYLISTIC PROMISE

The bold appropriation of body language from the Quattrocento, Cinquecento, and Seicento suggests Antin may have included other subtle motifs in the photographs. The figurative language of visual art distinguishes Renaissance and Baroque art within a highly symbolic tradition.[77] In light of Antin's histrionic gestures, we may account for the window behind her as a trace of Renaissance and Baroque portraiture. Raphael's *Portrait of Maddalena Strozzi Doni* offers a typical example where the painter places the sitter directly in front of a landscape (Fig. 38). Cornelis de Vos shows a later variation on Raphael's composition that includes a curtain between the sitters and the scenery painted behind them (Fig. 39).[78] Given the religious connotations of her title—*The Eight Temptations*—the window may relate to the Madonna's *hortus conclusus*. Literally translated to an "enclosed garden," *hortus conclusus* was a Christian symbol for virginity in Medieval and Renaissance art.[79] Botticelli's window in *Annunciation* includes a floral background, which may be a variation of the *hortus conclusus*

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[77] For an in-depth examination of the Renaissance beholder see François Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010). See also: Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy; a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

[78] Other strong comparisons are available in Leonardo da Vinci's *Benois Madonna* (after 1481) or *Madonna Of The Carnation* (c.1473)

[79] John R. Spencer, "Spatial Imagery of the Annunciation in Fifteenth Century Florence," *The Art Bulletin* 37, no. 4 (December 1955), http://www.jstor.org/stable/3047619.

iconography, but *The Virgin and Child (The Madonna with the Iris)*, from Albrecht Dürer's

workshop, offers a more precise model (Fig. 40).

Whether or not Antin's window belongs to a distant iconographical category of *hortus*

conclusus remains unclear despite the high frequency of landscape views painted in scenes from

the Madonna's life, Christian allegories, or secular portraits. Antin deliberately poses herself in

front of this window, but like the gestures and postures, her compositional choice refers to a

much more general sense of art history than a particular painting or artist. The window is simple

enough, commonly found in warm climates and bathrooms due to the ventilation and the privacy

the frosted blinds offer. The window certainly has a vintage look from a twenty-first century

perspective, but to suggest that it alone evokes a virginal garden would force the analogy. In the

context of *Temptations* and Antin's anachronisms, however, the window adopts a more flexible

iconographical and interpretative potential.

Despite Antin's glib comment that she chose her blouse because it "would go nicely with

the landscape," her clothing also lends itself to a comparison with Baroque imagery.[80] The lush

shadows and bright highlights, even the wrinkles in her arms and chest, play with the shadows in

the folds of her clothing calling to mind the *sfumato* of the Venetian Renaissance or the extreme

chiaroscuro of the Baroque. The food on the table, which she has arranged incongruously in front

of her (a peeled banana, or seven circles arranged within a circle), also proposes a general

reference to *vanitas*, or still life painting traditions. In one sense, Antin's arrangement shares a

similar staged mood with Francisco de Zurbarán's *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges, and a Rose*

(Fig. 41). The items are not prepared meals, but strategically placed on the table by themselves.

While Antin's shifting postures make the strongest reference to Renaissance and Baroque

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[80] Eleanor Antin, interview by author, December 16, 2011.

imagery, these details—the window, blouse, and food arrangement—imply that the gestures are only a portion of a larger art-historical tableau.

The food can either be a dead end of interpretation or a rabbit hole of subtext. For instance, in the first image of the series Antin rejects a banana. With regards to the *hortus conclusus* interpretation, the peeled banana may be interpreted as a symbolic phallus—Antin blocks against the penis and against lust. Likewise, the egg in the fourth photograph could potentially symbolize fertility and the sardines may stand in for Christ. Taking into consideration the seriality or sequential nature of the photographs, Antin may as well have added five more to the series to evoke a Last Supper tradition. By fetishizing the food, Antin draws attention to the dramatic absurdity of the banal, which further highlights the parodic relationship with *Carving*.

Beyond the symbolic potential in the photographs, Antin's composition and medium also relate to stylistic trends in Renaissance and Baroque art history. The intensity of human emotion portrayed through subject matter was only matched by "the crimson of velvets and gold of damask were for the Renaissance."[81] Antin uses color photography, a traditionally "low" medium, to refer to painting. Likewise we can elevate color film to the Caravaggesque saturated color of Seicento Rome. Baroque artists were also fascinated with demonstrating their illusionistic skills through devices such as *trompe l'œil* or sampling Classic formalisms.[82] The technical virtuosity sought by artists and "cheating the eye" through oil paint becomes short hand with a click of the shutter button and the dark room in the twentieth century.

Antin's play with depth in *Temptations* persists in its invitation to an art-historical treasure hunt. The Renaissance saw the birth of linear perspective, and the human figure as a

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[81] Alexander Liberman and Jonathan Tichenor, *The Art and Technique of Color Photography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), xv.
[82] Held, 12.

designation of that new space.[83] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sculptures emerged from their niches, figures in frescoes and ceiling paintings related to one another across architectural and illusionary spaces, and paintings' protagonists seemed to reach or tumble out of their frames.[84] Antin's photographs imitate the unlimited expanse of Late Renaissance and Baroque art by creating a serpentine curve in the eight photographs moving from left to right (Fig. 42). Beginning with the first image of Antin guarding against a banana, her body dips down in the next frame with the jam, rising slightly with the wedge of cheese, and dropping down once more as she shields away the hardboiled egg. In the last four frames, she swims upwards and her figure reclaims the majority of the image.

The changing placement of the camera, operated by David Antin, causes Eleanor's figure to bob up and down throughout the series, destabilizing a sense of linear perspective in the images. For instance, in the second image where Antin poses with the jam, she leans to the left and holds out her arms. The table is partially visible but appears fairly flat. The perspective seems accurate: Antin's figure and the elements around her convey a considerable sense of volume. However, if we compare the jam photograph with the last image showing Antin with peanuts, the composition has changed. A large portion of the table takes up the picture plane with Antin leaning over and reaching for a peanut. She also occupies two thirds of the frame in contrast to about half in the jam picture. The unbalanced perspective has captured a moment right before the peanuts seem to roll off the table and into our reality. Although the small scale of the photographs makes a difficult comparison with the grandiose paintings of the Baroque, Antin's incongruous gestures maintain the historical ambiance.

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[83] Quiviger, 8.
[84] Held, 17

The multivalent but imprecise connections between *Temptations* and Italian Renaissance or Baroque painting suggests that Antin does not try to recreate or forge the seventeenth century neither in her dress nor in her setting. Yet, she plays with characteristics of her art-historical models, aware of the anachronistic incongruity she brings. In 1915, Heinrich Wölfflin set out to delineate between the Renaissance and Baroque using specific formal objective classifying principles.[85] Wölfflin argued that studying the shifts in style, rather than those of meaning in the period between the Renaissance to the Baroque, provides an art-historical framework within which we can identify stylistic developments. Wölfflin dominated art-historical categorization for decades, and his widely-read *Principles of Art History* was presented in art-historical surveys of the type that Antin seems to engage. Although Wölfflin's rhetorical pairs, like those of Lessing, are antiquated, they nevertheless serve to highlight Antin's frank rejection of such strict categories.

Wölfflin described that the Renaissance, or classic, forms were strong and rigid, while the Baroque emphasized the gestural lines. He identified a second shift from plane to recession, referring to the reduced visual planes of the Renaissance to the Baroque's interest in depth. His third paired concept distinguished between the stylistic development from the closed form in the Renaissance to an open one in the Baroque. Wölfflin characterized the closed form as a work that is self-contained and points back to itself, whereas the open form reaches outside the composition. He continued on to contrast the arrangement and treatment of individual parts of a composition in terms of multiplicity and unity. In classic works the single parts are more independent of one another, and thereby multiple, while in the Baroque the aggregate parts come together to form a stronger sense of unity. Finally, Wölfflin compared the absolute and relative

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[85] Heinrich Wölflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New-York: Dover Publications, 1950). The English translation was first published in 1932 by G. Bell and Sons Ltd

clarity of the subject. Here, he looked at the differences in defining form through precision versus a more painterly style. This fifth category can be thought of as an extension of the comparison between the linear and the painterly.[86]

Wölfflin's rigid binaries attempt to trace a swinging pendulum of style, rather than a linear deterministic model. But, if we apply his criteria to *Temptations*, Antin's hybridization of Renaissance and Baroque style becomes more pronounced. Her gestures and saturated color seem to have more in common with the Baroque, but her photographs have a linear finish, which would contradict the "painterly" style Wölfflin ascribed to the period. Or if we consider his open/closed form precepts, *Temptations*'s seriality challenges Wölfflin criteria. According to his argument, should we consider the eight photographs as part of one composition and therefore tectonic, or should we consider each photograph individually and a-tectonic? Even without Wölfflin's rubric, my own art-historical examples seem to blur the iconography, coming up with more general comparisons than revealing pairings that leave no remainder.

ELEANOR ANTIN: THE PATRON SAINT OF PERFORMANCE

Antin draws from images whose creators had a profound politico-religious investment in evoking deep personal emotions within their beholders. During the counterreformation, Catholicism placed its faith in the Italian painters to inspire patrons and breathe life into biblical texts and draw out the intensity of emotion and piety. Artists infused their work with passion to achieve a transcendental experience of viewing, in stark contrast to their Protestant contemporaries. The spectacular narratives recounted by artists covered a wide range of biblical and mythological narratives, but Antin's area of interest seems to cite the subject of martyrdom and trials of biblical saints in particular. Antin commented that when making *Temptations* she

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[86] Wölflin, 14-15.

thought of saints "who starved themselves, beat themselves, tormented themselves…all to achieve an idea of spiritual perfection" in a similar way to how some women, stereotypically, torture themselves in "our modern version."[87]

In *Temptations*, Antin expresses moral resilience in her gestures and psychological fortitude in her expression, but the strength and willpower to refuse a banana quickly turns the photographs into a farce. Through her photographs, Antin highlights the absurdity of sin and the self-destructive potential, in extreme cases, of a distorted sense of one's body image. In Zeno's paradox of motion, often referred to as the Dichotomy paradox, he postulated that for a traveler to arrive at any given destination, he or she must first travel half the distance towards it, from there half the remaining distance, so on and so on. Ultimately, the underpinning theory holds that no one can actually arrive at the end point.[88] Many people—not just women— face a similar impossibility, aspiring to reflect an idea of societal perfection: "The suffering saints never believed they had achieved it. Most women will never look like supermodels without [Aladdin's] Lamp."[89]

But Antin goes beyond paying homage to women who have tormented, or will torment, themselves trying to prove their self-worth by controlling their physical appearance. She also chooses to cast herself in a role detached from a societal and cultural myth of the ideal body. Antin may be playing a woman, for whom food consumption is a daily battle, but she increases the drama removing herself from an ordinary narrative and into a visual language of canonical art. Just as Antin performs the dual role as subject and object in *Carving*, she does so in *Temptations*. Antin, viewed as the object of *Carving*, inspires a sociopolitical conversation of

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[87] Eleanor Antin, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011.
[88] Wesley C. Salmon, *Zeno's Paradoxes* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).
[89] Eleanor Antin, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011.

ethnicity and gender whereas a subjective interpretation of Antin gives her role more agency as the artist and creator. In *Temptations*, Antin objectifies herself calling upon the vast histories in which women's physical appearance take primacy over intellect or character as it pertains to a public role in society. Given that the photographs are also self-portraits and that Antin subtly appropriates a hybrid of art-historical imagery, she also marks herself as a canonical artist. Moreover, Antin's choice in time period—the Renaissance and the Baroque—is significant. Her decision places the images' narrative within a biblical and epic context, suggesting that the artistic process involves as much trials as that of achieving sainthood. Her visual and thematic language canonizes her as art-historically relevant and devout in her practice.

Portrait of the Starving Artist

As I suggested by looking at the setting, props, costume, and framing in *Temptations*, the interpretive conclusions or understanding of the photographs may be based in imagery or in the reader's subjective associations with a window, a banana, or a purple shirt. In the 1975 catalog *(Photo) (photo)² ... (photo)[superscript N]: Sequenced Photographs*, Antin remarked that she based *Temptations* on "reading" and "the capacity of the mind to make meaningful connections between several facts placed side by side and so go from 'here' to 'there.'"[90] *Temptations*'s wide range of art-historical references offers little reassurance to the reader's interpretations instead encouraging the mind to wander through a web of associative imagery.

Temptations, thus, points to a liminal space of meaning and intent between itself and *Carving*. *Temptations* questions the nature of Antin's attitude towards *Carving* and, by extension, her relationship to her dietary performance. As Antin notes about "reading" images, *Temptations*'s flippant representation of her diet proposes a more skeptical reading of *Carving*. Both series present a different Antin: one who expresses a vulnerable private act in public and another who reinterprets the same act as an exaggerated mockery of self. *Temptations*'s egregious absurdity admits openly to its fiction and theatrics while *Carving* makes claims of objectivity and logic.

We are inclined to interpret Antin's projects as documents of performance instead of self-portraits because other artists of that time period encouraged such readings. When early performance artists began using their bodies as their medium, they broke with a conventional definition or understanding of the self-portrait. For instance, Bruce Nauman looked to his body to assume the role of the art object in performances such as *Walk with Contrapposto* in 1968

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[90] Andrews and Bourdon, 11.

(Fig. 43).[91] In his exploration of behavioral codes and psychological states of being Nauman does not consider his work as having to do with self-portraiture. Nauman roots his mode of expression and choice of subject matter in the structure of our perceived existence in his work, which rejects interpretation and welcomes formal description and underlines the matter-of-fact nature of his art.

As a major contributor to performance art, Nauman's performative works point to the late twentieth-century tendency toward dematerialization, process, and idea-based conceptual work and away from a historic use of the artist's own image. Although he frequently used his body in his work, Nauman's focus and intention was not necessarily dedicated to the conventional definition of self-portraiture. Nauman, and his generation of artists, did not explicitly use themselves in their work to achieve some kind of abstract immortality. Instead, this was a clear goal of many painters of centuries past. Taking into account Antin's formal citations of the Renaissance and Baroque, however, allows us to reframe her work in the traditional genre of self-portraiture.

Carving and *Temptations* are portraits not simply because Antin appears in them, but because, together, the photographs index a nebulous realm of intent and personality. Joanna Woodall described the tradition of self-portraits as work "*physically invested* in various ways with the presence of their author, rather than being simply surfaces generated by the design and genius of a hidden, abstract agent."[92] The majority of criticism interprets *Carving* as a political act based on biographical terms: the aesthetic purports documentation while Antin's gender

[91] In *Walk with Contrapposto*, Nauman films himself walking down the corridor with his hands clasped behind his neck and swings his hips left and right to touch the walls of the narrow corridor thus imitating the movement of the classical Greek posture.
[92] Joanna Woodall. "'Every Painter Paints Himself': Self-Portraiture and Creativity." In *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*. London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005. 27.

implies a feminist agenda. The photographs are already taken as a personal statement, as an honest personal expression, which *Temptations* dismantles with self-deprecating humor. In the conventional sense of the term, self-portraiture was generally a means of demonstrating the artist's place in society as a creative and powerful force, while preserving his or her historical existence for spectators in the future.[93] Antin uses herself in *Carving* to demonstrate her place in society as a woman, certainly, but she accesses the seemingly honest medium of self-portraiture to assert her value as an artist as well.

The Renaissance's cult of the artist perhaps inspired the genre of self-portraiture that has continued through the present era. Three general modes of representation that artists developed to articulate their creativity and advocate their vocational skills were to paint themselves with their tools (in front of the easel wielding a brush), incorporate a trace of the their hand in signature or in the brushwork, and to depict allegories of creativity.[94] For instance, in Sofonisba Anguissola's painting *Self-Portrait Painting the Madonna*, the artist presents her likeness as well as her profession by documenting her artistic process (Fig. 44).

Antin does not depict the mechanics of the camera, the shutter button, the shutter release cord etc., like the painter does with his or her easel or paint palette. Instead, she shows the tools of a performance artist: her self image acts as sculptural material in *Carving*, while *Temptations* reveals her process, creativity, and dedication to her performance. Antin does *physical* work, and by that token, her representations of her body are highly significant. In both *Carving* and *Temptations*, Antin photographs herself in the act of performance through different lenses and

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93 Anthony Bond. "Performing the Self?" In *Self Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*. London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005.
94 Bond, 31.

together the two works bridge these two realities: the documentary and theatrical perspectives of her performance.

As it pertains to self-portraiture in the history of painting, Anthony Bond observed that the painter "makes explicit the notional fold between the real and the represented. In this kind of image the artist captures the moment of creation, showing himself with the tools of his trade in hand."[95] Anguissola's self-portrait in the studio offers the traditional, restricted view to her working environment that Bond identified. We can adopt this line of interpretation to *Temptations*. As a principally conceptual and performance artist, Antin does not work in a traditional studio setting. Her "studio space," so to speak, is more of an area of creativity and vision, and can be a home office or public environment in which she realizes her performances. In both *Temptations* and *Carving*, Antin captures herself at home. In one respect, we can interpret this as pointing to the domestic interior space in which women live and traditionally work. But through a professional lens, her home equates to her studio. In couching her performance in conventional art-historical language of self-portraiture, Antin challenges socially accepted forms with an intimate depiction of her private world. In contrast to Anguissola's portrait, which shows a didactic representation of her occupation, Antin also engages with a bohemian gesture that echoes Caravaggio's self-portraits as Bacchus or Michelangelo's self-portrait as Saint Bartholomew in the Sistine Chapel (Figs. 45, 46).

Self-portraits, like that of Anguissola's, offer a sense of directness and a presumably accurate representation of the artist and his or her character. Alternatively, the Dionysian Caravaggio or Michelangelo portraits remind a viewer of the inherent performance involved in self-portraiture no matter how intimate and insightful the image may seem. In the majority of

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[95] Bond, 35

Antin's work like *The King of Solona Beach* or Eleanora Antinova, she overtly plays a fictional role. However, the deliberate fabrication of *Temptations* complicates *Carving*, which, as the criticism explains, appears as a literal and autobiographical representation of Antin and her own ideologies. In other words, Antin performs as an artist in the private sector while she tends to perform as a fictional character in the public realm. Where a viewer doubts the realism of *Temptations*'s scenes, Antin's artistic choices become obvious: the tools of her trade are photographic and theatrical. Just as Anguissola's painting illustrates the artist's creative space, *Temptations* provides an insight to Antin's process.

Antin subverts the sober approach to conceptualism that many of her colleagues took, as she plays with the associations between self-portraiture and autobiography. Yet, of course, artists choose how to present themselves, especially in light of how they want viewers to see them. Antin produces an image of herself as a conceptual socio-political performance artist in *Carving*, and in *Temptations* she paradoxically performs the victim caught between indulgence and moderation. On a tertiary level, as I mentioned in the previous section, Antin marks herself as canonical through both of these projects combining the Wölfflinian rules for Renaissance and Baroque painting and following the conceptual rubric set up by post-object idea art.

Despite the overtones of the history of painting in her gestures, composition, medium, and subject matter, Antin takes care to remind the beholder that fame and success is not her goal alone. *Temptations* re-presents *Carving* symbolically as an objective documentary conceptual feminist performance. Antin uses the allegorical tradition of the Renaissance and Baroque art to conduct a self-referential critique of the art world in which she is complicit. Painted self-portraits typically show the artist looking out of the picture plane and making eye contact with the beholder. In the case of painting, the surface of the canvas acts as a mirror reflection of the

painter who meets the gaze of a viewer. In this "moment of connection between artist and beholder" they are "bound in an empathetic exchange" that can be a truthful or deceptive likeness, representing the physical appearance of the artist.[96] The compelling and intimate exchange between beholder and photograph only occurs in the top row of photographs in *Carving* where Antin faces the camera. In *Temptations*, Antin obscures her gaze completely, directing it to the tabletop or floor.

Antin struggles to avoid eye contact with her temptations, as if by establishing a visual exchange would open the door for weakness and sin. But, by cutting off her gaze, she also eliminates a reciprocal relationship with a viewer, thus positing herself as an allegorical figure that represents her process for *Carving* as myth. Antin exchanges the documentary or the archival for theater, thereby fictionalizing her artistic process through hyperbolic visual language that follows the legacy of Baroque extravagance. Her self-parody contradicts what seems to be a fairly straightforward social critique of gender and beauty in *Carving*, emphasizing its notes of irony.

AVANT-GARDE AND CAMP

In *Temptations*, Antin paints her dedicated process and frustrating dieting for *Carving* with a sacred brush of martyrdom in the tradition of the Renaissance and Baroque. The pastiche of art-historical imagery remarkably evokes a strong sense of the Renaissance and Baroque, the recognition of which consequently incites a humorous reading. By accessing a period of art notorious for its drama, Antin filters her diet, performance, and process through a comical lens.[97] The drama elevates her process to an absurd level of pretension and turns Antin into a caricature

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[96] Bond, 35.

[97] Incidentally, the title can also be interpreted as play on words: *The Eight Temptations* or The Ate Temptations.

of herself. She adopts a ludic and overdramatic tone to conduct a self-deprecating parody in two roles: a misogynistic stereotype of emotional women (who bring an equal level of hysteria to dieting and body image) and the equally reductive understanding of the bohemian artist who sacrifices well-being in order to focus all energy on work.

Modern theories of humor rely on categorical distinctions, but the synthesis of these binaries illuminates the mechanics at work in *Temptations*. Two theories hold relevance in reference to Antin's work: superiority and incongruity. The theories of superiority, supported by philosophers Aristotle, Hobbes, and Bergson consider laughter and the ridiculous originating from the "triumph over other people."[98] This brand of humor does not necessarily originate from a place of scorn or contempt; superior laughter may also involve "sympathy, congeniality, empathy, and geniality."[99] A.M. Ludovici attempted to quantify the process claiming, "the greater the dignity of the victim, the greater the resulting amusement."[100] From this perspective, Antin's mockery of her struggle to lose weight suggests that she does not (or at least attempts not to) surrender to the societal pressure, which plagues other women and which the patriarchy reinforces. Although she performed the diet, Antin uses humor to emancipate herself from the limits and superficial restrictions of the social system based on gendered hierarchies.[101]

Antin also positions herself in a place of authority over her contemporaries who commit themselves to suffering and metaphysical contemplation. For philosophers Schopenhauer and

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[98] Patricia Keith-Spiegel, "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues," in *The Psychology of Humor; Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues.*, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 6.

[99] Keith-Spiegel, 7.

[100] Keith-Spiegel, 7.

[101] John R. Clarke, *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3-8.

Kant, the incongruity of ideas, situations, or images is the basis for humor.[102] Laughter results

from "the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which

have been thought through in some relation, and the laugh itself [to be] just the expression of this

incongruity."[103] Antin extracts imagery from the Baroque and Renaissance and transplants the

remaining fragments into a contemporary sociopolitical satire as a woman and artist. As a result,

Antin bases *Temptations*'s humor in logically incongruent events and behaviors that violate

rational thought.

Bracketed within Antin's role as an artist, the Whitney's rejection of her conceptualist

and artistic strategies evidences her then underrepresented status as an artist. The art market

tends to praise sensationalizing work in search of the next pioneering artist, in turn challenging

artists to rise to the occasion. Certain art professionals—critics, historians, artists, and galleries—

elevate the passion of artwork (that might even be somewhat mundane) and raise it to the level of

a post-neo-ism. Granted, this commercializing development in the art world and art history hit its

stride in the 1980s, but was not unknown to the seventies.[104] As Linda Nochlin put it, "the Great

Artist, is, of course, conceived of as one who has 'Genius;' Genius, in turn, is thought of as an

atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist"—the

aggregate effect of which the creative lexicon begins to lose any meaning of what

groundbreaking or unique genius means.[105] Antin negotiates with the heavy past lurking in the

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102 Clarke, 3-8.

103 Schopenhauer quoted in Keith-Spiegel, 8.The differences between the incongruity and surprise theories are nuanced and it may be useful to consider a blend of both in "explanatory concepts" (as suggested by Goldstein and McGhee).

104 For a more in-depth look at the art market see Robert Hughes, "There's No Geist like the Zeitgeist," review, *New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1983.

105 Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *ARTnews* 69 (January 1971): 25. Nochlin noted in her footnote: "For the relatively recent genesis of the emphasis on the artist as the nexus of esthetic experience, see M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical*

shadows by working within the standards of the dominant avant-garde culture in *Carving* while asserting her own individual personality through humor.

To parody the conceptual art scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Antin must exercise the same logistics and mechanics while the material goes through a comedic process. Even though she may be launching *Carving* under ironic sails, the photographs still conform to a conceptual aesthetic persuading critics to peer through a feminist and conceptualist lens. Alternatively, the art world that Antin comments on comedically in *Temptations* comes across plainly by way of campy appropriation and deliberate ridicule. By deconstructing the contemporary archival aesthetics, *Carving* masquerades as photo-conceptualism whereas *Temptations* parodies the pretenses of the avant-garde by repackaging it as a parade of the absurd. The main difference here, in approaches to humor, expresses itself through style and aesthetics. As an artist who works with Conceptual methods as well as political feminist approaches, Antin actively involves herself in the art world, which confines her irony in *Carving* to the dominant avant-garde culture. By contrast, her theatrical twisted take on Renaissance or Baroque painting with her emotive gestures and allegorical title, mostly divorced from a contemporary style, offers Antin the freedom to create an amusingly brash allegory of her artistic process.

In order to grasp a better understanding of how Antin humorously navigates around and within the dominant avant-garde culture it is useful to examine valances of comedy in different communities. By interpreting Antin's humor and its social function as exclusive to women from a twenty-first century perspective, the analysis excludes men from the conversation. Doing so

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Tradition, New York, 1953, and Maurice Z. Shroder, *Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961."

presumes they are exempt from societal and cultural pressures to look or act a certain way. However, from a woman's perspective during the early 1970s, Antin's mockery of a societal definition of an ideal body type indicates larger cultural changes. Nochlin found that underlying her interrogative title "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," is the "myth of the Great Artist—subject of a hundred monographs, unique, godlike—bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence."[106] During the early seventies, the second wave of feminism gained momentum and Antin's subversive sense of humor reflects the changing times—not only as it pertains to the history of women but also race relations in the United States. By 1972, Americans had seen, and in some cases participated in, an incredibly violent chapter in this country's history. Historian Joseph Boskin discussed the development of humor in African-American communities and culture as similarly indicative of the civil-rights movement era.[107] Boskin argued that internal or ingroup humor serves to disarm and disempower discrimination. He further suggested that internal humor helps to reduce individual and group tension while ridiculing the mainstream authority during a time of escalating racial discord and conflict. He concluded that emerging comics and styles of humor began to desert an oppressive and condescending tradition of minstrelsy that appealed to white society and became characterized by confidence, pride, and growing self-awareness.[108]

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[106] Nochlin, 26. It bears mentioning that in her discussion of female artists, Nochlin does not differentiate between the experiences of white women and women of color in the arts. I do not aim to suggest that all marginalized people experience the oppressors' force with the same blow, that white women and black women see discrimination through the same lens and hope for the same ends by the very nature of sharing a gender.

[107] William H. Martineau, "A Model of the Social Functions of Humor," in *The Psychology of Humor; Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues.*, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 112.

[108] Martineau, 112.

Antin's humor manifests a similar sense of autonomy and independence from a patriarchal source of social and cultural authority. As a major representative of the feminist movement, Antin sarcastically builds on cultural stereotypes of women and tortured artists to express an empowered posture towards social cohesion. Like her marginalized contemporaries, Antin uses self-deprecating humor to conduct a social satire, which criticizes and underscores the inequality and disproportion of power in the United States.

Because *Temptations* indulges in a dramatic language of the Renaissance and Baroque, the tone of the photographs may be misinterpreted as melodramatic. The traditional definition of melodrama tethers the work to a tradition, which portrays emotion—usually that of saccharine sentimentality—rather than the viewer eliciting a response. Linda Williams characterized the traditional definition of melodrama as the "seemingly archaic excess of sensation and sentiment, a manipulation of the heartstrings that exceeds the bounds of good taste."[109] Williams argued further that the nineteenth century origins of melodrama stem from American culture and society's attempt to negotiate the history of enslaved West Africans and the nearly ninety years of Jim Crow law which followed emancipation. Melodramas evolved as a "mode of storytelling crucial to the establishment of moral good" and aim to evoke sympathy and pity from the viewer or audience for the misfortunes of the protagonist.[110] Similar to how Williams understands melodrama that came out of a history and context specific to an African-American experience, Antin's epic pulls from a sexist history of an emotional and hysterical woman. The victimized

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[109] Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

[110] Williams, 12. Williams elaborates on various examples melodrama in the United States by addressing how "the alchemy by which African Americans would themselves eventually reframe both the Tom tradition of white sympathy for blacks and the anti-Tom tradition of sympathy for beleaguered whites to their own ends." (p.44)

role Antin plays as a woman, wrought with conflict over dieting, inverts the genre and thereby acknowledges the oppression of the patriarchy as a weakened and collapsing institution.

Antin's dramatic subversion, however socio-politically relevant, does not necessarily qualify as melodramatic. From this perspective, *Temptations* belongs to a kitschier category in the visual arts that Clement Greenberg described in his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."[111] Both the traditional definition of melodrama and Greenberg's understanding of kitsch as low art for the masses are tethered to work that portrays emotion (usually that of saccharine sentimentality) rather than the viewer eliciting a response. If Antin created her photographs with the tradition of melodrama in mind, then she would intend for the photographs to appeal to a sympathetic viewer's pathos. However, while melodrama and kitsch tend to pull at a viewer's heartstrings, *Temptations* knocks at a viewer's funny bone. Therefore, while *Temptations*'s overly dramatic tone may sample from a melodramatic tradition, Antin's insincerity moves the photographs closer to the realm of camp or ironic kitsch.

Susan Sontag attempted to summarize and propose a definition for camp in 1964.[112] Early on Sontag admitted that camp defies easy interpretation and that the "sensibility" prefers "the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[113] She also distinguished between kitsch, or *naive* camp, and *deliberate* camp. As a genre or style, kitsch obliviously and ignorantly delights in tastelessness, whereas deliberate camp subverts kitsch thereby exploiting the nature of kitsch. Sontag continued to establish camp through referencing various examples in popular culture where the similarity applies. Her specific, although inconclusive, contrasts tend to understand

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[111] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[112] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007). First published in *Partisan Review*, 31:4, Fall 1964, pp.515-30

[113] Sontag, 275

camp as reliant on elements that fail at a level of genuine seriousness. Ultimately, the camp

model uses the comically serious as a mechanism for entertainment and mockery, usually at the

expense of the middle-class. Like Sontag's camp, Antin's gestures in *Temptations* reek of artifice

and exaggeration, thus translating the seriousness of *Carving* "into the frivolous."[114]

Richard Dyer proposed a definition of camp twenty-two years later in reference to Judy

Garland's cult celebrity status in the gay community. He asserted that camp is "a

characteristically gay way of handling the values, images and products of the dominant culture

through irony, exaggeration, trivialisation, theatricalisation and an ambivalent making fun of and

out of the serious and respectable."[115] Garland is camp, he argued, due to her

"imitable…appearance and gestures copiable in drag acts."[116] He also noted that there are two

main popular versions of Garland, a young Judy and a mature Judy. Her early "ordinariness,"

Dyer stated, is camp because of the "failed seriousness" of her films. Whereas Garland's drug

and gin soaked brassy persona in the 1960s was "wonderfully over-the-top."[117] Likewise, Antin's

sense of camp in *Temptations* takes the overly emotional stereotype of women and the

seriousness of conceptual aesthetics, the dominant style of the avant-garde, and reduces the

emotional impact to a cliché.

Antin acts as a comedian who, with political and social concepts, criticizes and collapses

the archetypal haughty artist who scarifies material well-being to focus on artwork with the

hysterical emotional woman consumed with the obsession of her physical appearance. What

Nochlin recognized in the mythic stories of the Great Artists was,

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114 Sontag, 276

115 Richard Dyer, "Judy Garland and Gay Men," in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 176.

116 Dyer, 176.

117 Dyer, 176.

the apparently miraculous, non-determined and a-social nature of artistic achievement; this semi-religious conception of the artist's role is elevated to hagiography in the 19th-centur, when both art historians, critics and…some of the artists themselves tended to elevate the making of art into a substitute religion, the last bulwark of Higher Values in a materialistic world.[118]

Carving and *Temptations* are merely constructs or formats into which Antin may translate her satirical expression. Antin achieves success in the world of the avant-garde while endearing herself to her humorous contemporaries such as John Baldessari and Ed Ruscha. Antin uses conceptual art to subtly satirize itself as a stylized movement and as a convention. Although *Temptations*'s statements are bolder, Antin delivers the proverbial punch line to an empty room. Like the satirist who aspires to articulate and bring into focus an intangible feeling, the photographs ultimately sit on the sidelines critically pointing an impotent finger to the missteps or shortcomings of others.

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[118] Nochlin, 27-28

Conclusion

Temptations's ludic dismissal of *Carving*'s socio-political statement suggests that Antin had substantial formalist concerns and that *Carving* may not be a purely idea-based project. In conclusion, the camp atmosphere of *The Eight Temptations* inspires an aesthetic-based interpretation of *Carving: a Traditional Sculpture*. However, if writers celebrate *Carving* in exhibition catalogs, journals, and art-historical surveys, then why have they relegated *Temptations* to a footnote?

Perhaps *Temptations*'s emphasis on dramatic art-historical imagery was distasteful to an art world and market concerned with conceptual strategies and with work that did not reflect the artist's hand. However, Antin's work often incorporates anachronisms and the art world. For instance, in 1972 she wore a seventeenth century costume for her performance as The King (Fig. 49). *Angel of Mercy* also looked to Winslow Homer's campaign sketches to stage in 1977. The photograph *Sharp Shooter*, in comparison with Homer's *A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*, makes the case (Figs. 50-51). Antin also performed as Eleanora Antinova, a black prima ballerina in 1981. Through the course of a much larger performance and literary project, Antin photographed herself as her Antinova persona in character for a theatrical role in the style of dance production stills (Fig. 52).[119] Most recently, Antin produced three series of photographs recreating scenes of Greco-Roman life: *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2001, *Roman Allegories*, 2004, *Helen's Odyssey*, 2007 (Figs. 53-55).

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[119] For a more indepth analysis and discussion of Antin's Eleanora Antinova project see Cherise Smith, "The Other "Other" Eleanor Antin and the Performance of Blackness," in *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 79-134.

The artist's continuous interest in art history has certainly not been a deterent to her

success. As such, *Temptations*'s underrepresented status in Antin's body of work cannot be

merely a result of her candid appropriation of art-historical imagery. Rather, her subversive

humor encumbers the photographs' success. Further analysis of the literature surrounding

Antin's "Traditional Art" demonstrates that critics and historians favor a discussion of Antin's

conceptual strategies over her formal ones. Antin exhibited *Carving* along with two other works,

Representational Painting and *Domestic Peace* collected under the title *Traditional Art* from

1972- 1973: Orlando Gallery in Los Angeles, Henri Gallery in Washington D.C., and Northwood

Experimental Art Institute in Dallas (Figs. 56 – 58).

Although the three works are distinct in medium, process, and context, Antin filters them

through the academic tradition of the fine arts: sculpture, painting, and drawing. She filmed

Representational Painting, a thirty-eight minute silent black-and-white video in which she

applies makeup to her face. For *Domestic Peace*, Antin prepared conversation topics for multiple

discussions with her mother over a weekend visit. After the visit, Antin recorded, or *drew*, the

emotional responses of both parties by memory as waves on a graph, attempting to chart their

relationship through a scientific approach and a seemingly objective method.

Contemporary critics and art historians received both *Carving* and *Representational*

Painting fairly well, in contrast to *Temptations* and *Domestic Peace*. Arlene Raven and Deborah

Marrow emphasized the conceptual aspect of the work, arguing that Antin's "renewed focus on

the self" points to "an appreciation for autobiography, back into an art context otherwise

preoccupied with formalist concerns."[120] Howard N. Fox explained that Antin's sculpture and

painting works capture "the irony in making such arbitrary distinctions between plain and

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[120] Raven, Marrow, 43-51.

beautiful."[121] He continued, proposing that *Representational Painting* "slyly begs the question of why women subject themselves to this exercise of making their appearance conform to preferred tastes."[122] Writers Raven, Marrow, and Fox see Antin tackling topical socio-political issues that affect women and which are rooted in cultural conformity. Yet, what is more troubling is that each of these interpretations reduces Antin's work to a socio-political gesture and negates her "formalist concerns."[123] The politico-conceptual interpretations, thus, limit Antin's work, just as a purely formal reading does: both readings abbreviate the diverse range of sources that inform her practice.

While I have sketched a brief overview of the reception of *Carving* and *Representational Painting*, the dearth of criticism on *Temptations* and *Domestic Peace* prevents a similar synopsis. Unlike the former works, *Domestic Peace* does not imply a causal relationship between society and identity. In the rare case that the drawings receive any attention, they are esteemed for their reference to "realness" and the quotidian, that "these social situations were real in that they actually transpired, but they were fictitious in that they were preplanned episodes of acting out."[124] *Domestic Peace*'s medium relates to art-historical traditions but since the drawings do not conform to socio-political statement, they seem to have fallen through the proverbial cracks. Bloom attributed the critical silence around *Domestic Peace* in the early 1970s to the fact that "bourgeois (Jewish) familial relations" remained a taboo topic. Moreover, it conflicted with the second-wave feminist emphasis on mother-daughter relationships.[125] The feminist community, Bloom proposed, may not have embraced *Domestic Peace* because of the scribbled conflict

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121 Fox, 43-44.
122 Fox, 43-44.
123 Raven, Marrow, 43-51.
124 Fox, 170.
125 Bloom, 170.

between Antin and her mother; "the mother-daughter bond" was considered "an unproblematic

relation that was not threatened by feminism."[126]

I propose that *Temptations* suffered a similar fate due to the fact that the photographs

humorously deride and undermine the socio-political conceptual aspects of *Carving* rather than

reinforcing them. In the rare cases that *Temptations* is discussed, the writers offer only

superficial descriptions. For instance, Viv Groskop explained:

> women artists have explored the way food defines us...Eleanor Antin's *The Eight
> Temptations* (1972), which showed her resisting treats that would break her diet, to her
> *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, made up of nude photographs of herself as she dieted
> down to a more 'ideal size.'[127]

The account falls short on two accounts: description and context. Groskop misinterprets Antin's

ironic temptations as "treats" and fails to provide any real critical analysis of the images. The

statement was also published in the "Life and Style" women's section of *The Guardian*

newspaper to buttress a larger article on Caroline Smith's one-woman performance, *Eating*

Secret. In Antin's Los Angeles County Museum of Art retrospective catalog of 1999,

Temptations is restricted to the curatorial remark below,

> In mock historical gestures, Antin represents herself resisting the tempting snack foods
> that would violate her diet. The progress of this same diet was documented in *Carving: A
> Traditional Sculpture*.[128]

In this case, LACMA at the very least recognized the presence of "mock historical

gestures," but suspects its formal potential like dangling signifier. The literature on Antin's

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126 Bloom, 170.

127 Viv Groskop, "Deliciously Dark," Latest News, Comment and Reviews from the Guardian |
Guardian.co.uk, June 19, 2009, accessed March 5, 2011,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/jun/19/mertle-food-eating-secret-caroline-smith.

128 Fox, 49. This is the only reproduction I have found and I suspect the digital images found on
ARTstor were taken from this same publication.

"Traditional Art" reflects that together, *Carving* and *Representational Painting* offer a conceptual statement representative of the 1970s feminist *Zeitgeist*, whereas *Temptations* declares a heavy use of art-historical and formal information. In the decades since Antin exhibited the three projects in the early seventies, the trio of sculpture, drawing, and painting has dwindled down to a duo—sculpture and painting.

The humorous over-dramatization of *Temptations* ushers familiar images into a new light, thereby fictionalizing her artistic process and entering the realm of mythmaking. Antin conflates her roles as maker and product and simultaneously elevates a sense of active process in the seriality of *Temptations*. She photographs herself in the serial acts of creating *Carving*, but her gestures and blank facial expressions are camp and satirical. As such, she dramatizes and mocks the gravity of *Carving*'s conceptualist aesthetic and highlights the absurdity of wastefully whittling away at her own body.

Antin is at once the director and the actress, existing on two different planes of reality. She begins as a painting in 1971, then transforms into a sculpture in 1972, and soon it is not just her body that she is painting or sculpting, but an allegory of her life. Antin continues to objectify herself, her body, her identity, and her process. Recognizing and fabricating her split identity, Antin finds the self-deprecating humor in her own work. She noted that *Temptations* was a "break from the tediousness and 'pain' of producing the larger ironical piece, kidding the 'serious' formalisms of my fellow conceptualists while tormenting me performatively."[129] Her active self-awareness, and indeed her sense of humor, illuminate the overdramatic politics of her other works, and the work of artists around her. In *Temptations*, Antin engages with a satirical

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[129] Eleanor Antin, "(No Subject)," e-mail message to author, April 1, 2011.

language, extending herself and the work beyond the elite conceptualists, to present images,

which end up being, quite simply, funny.

Figures
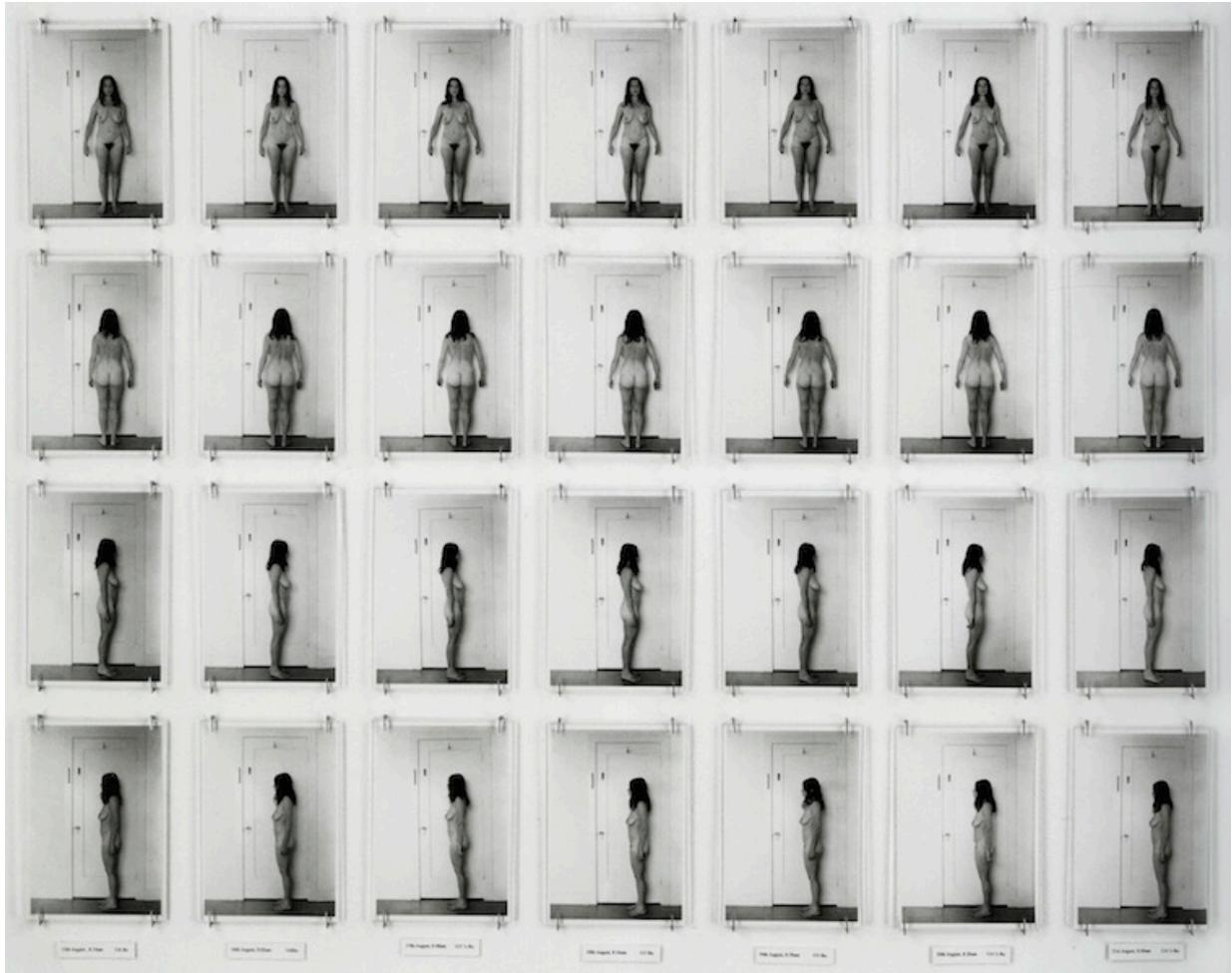
Figure 1: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail), July 15 – August 21, 1972. 148 gelatin silver prints, 31$^{1/4}$ x 204 in. (each 7 x 5 in.), Art Institute of Chicago. Source: DASe.

Figure 2: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations*, 1972. Eight color prints, each 7 x 5 in., Loeb Family Art Collection. Souce: DASe
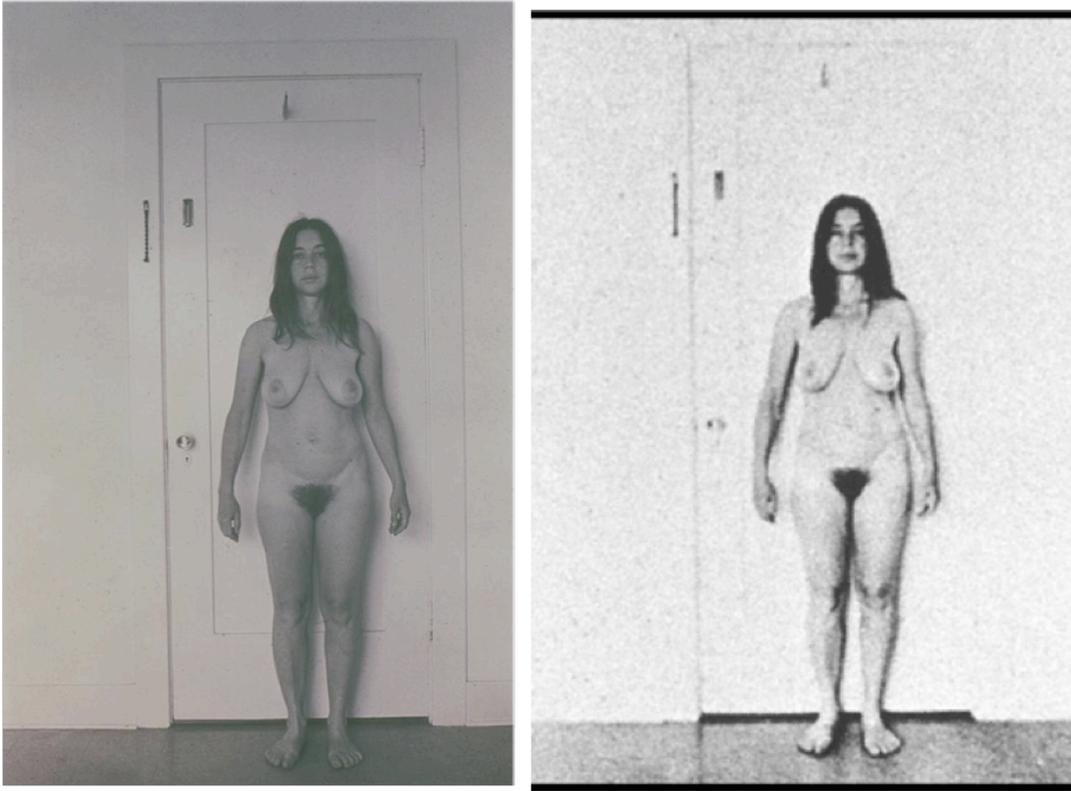
Figure 3: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail, reproduction comparison. Left: ARTstor, Right: Artforum). July 15 – August 21, 1972. 148 gelatin silver prints, $31^{1/4}$ x 204 in. (each 7 x 5 in.), Art Institute of Chicago. Source: ARTstor. After: Artforum
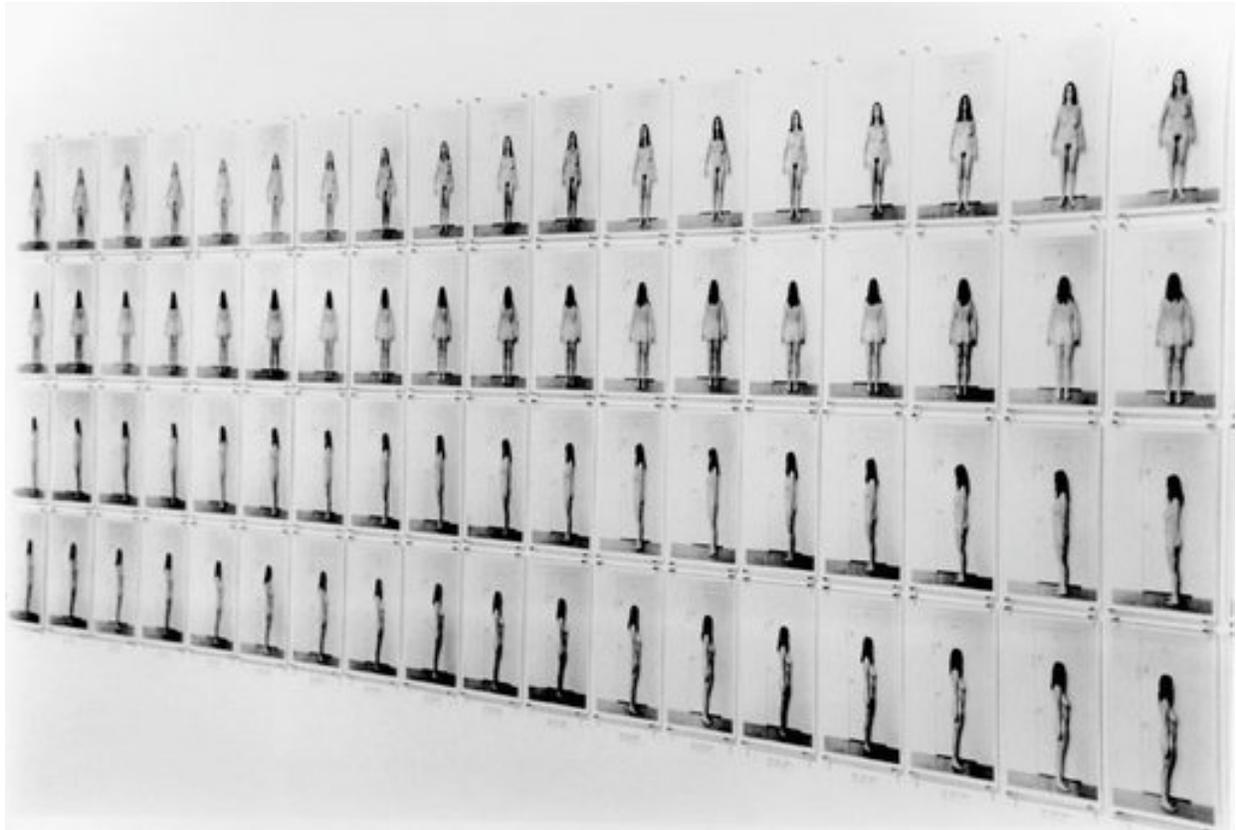
Figure 4: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail), July 15 – August 21, 1972. 148 gelatin silver prints, 31$^{1/4}$ x 204 in. (each 7 x 5 in.), Art Institute of Chicago. Source: ARTstor.
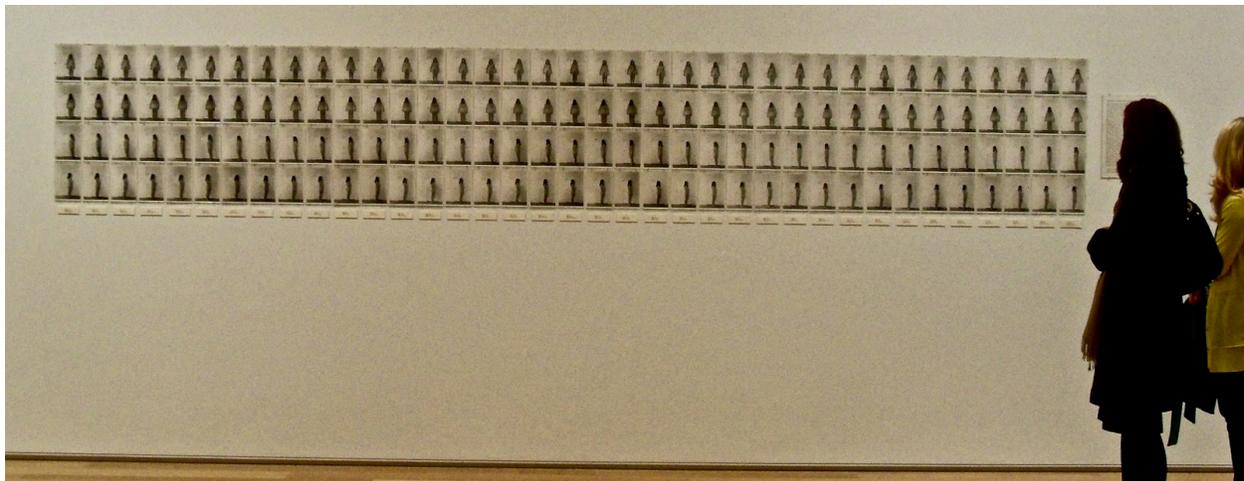

Figure 5: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, July 15 – August 21, 1972. 148 gelatin silver prints, 31$^{1/4}$ x 204 in. (each 7 x 5 in.), Art Institute of Chicago. Source: http://caseymurtaugh.blogspot.com/2011/12/saturday_10.html

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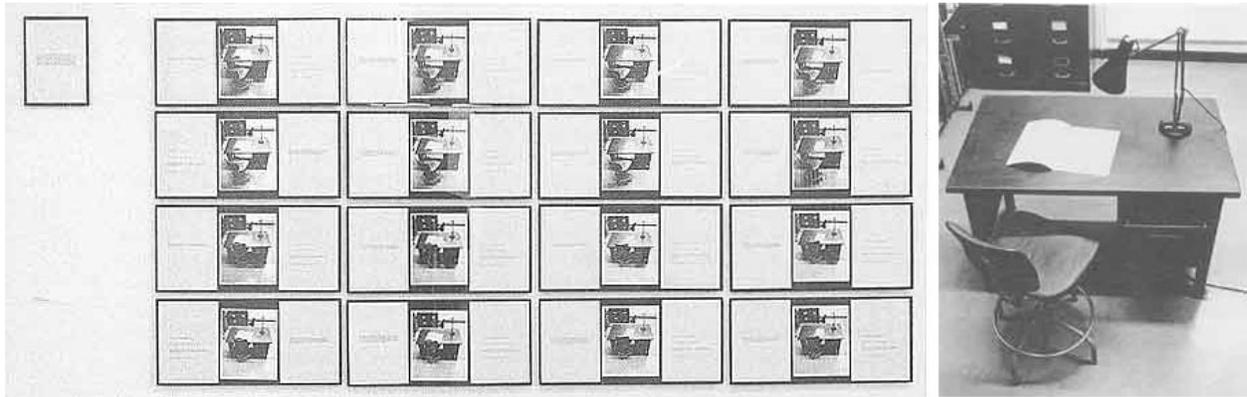
Figure 6: Victor Burgin, Performative/Narrative, 1971. 16 black and white photographs, each 18 x 34 in., Source: web

Figure 7: Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece #70*, 1971-1997. Gelatin silver prints and typewriting on paper, $17^{1/2}$ x $40^{1/8}$ in., Museum of Modern Art. Souce: moma.org

Figure 8: Bernd and HIlla Bechers, *Winding Towers*, 1966-1997. Nine gelatin silver prints, 68$^{1/4}$ x 56$^{1/4}$ in. Museum of Modern Art. Souce: moma.org
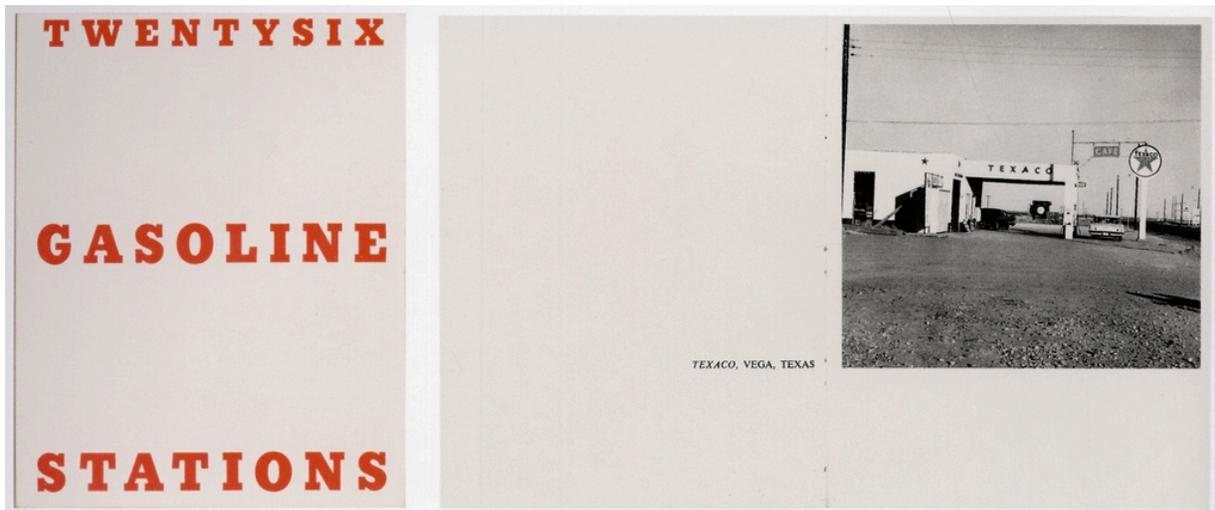

Figure 9: Ruscha, Edward. *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963. Artist book, 7 x 5.5 in. Source: DASe
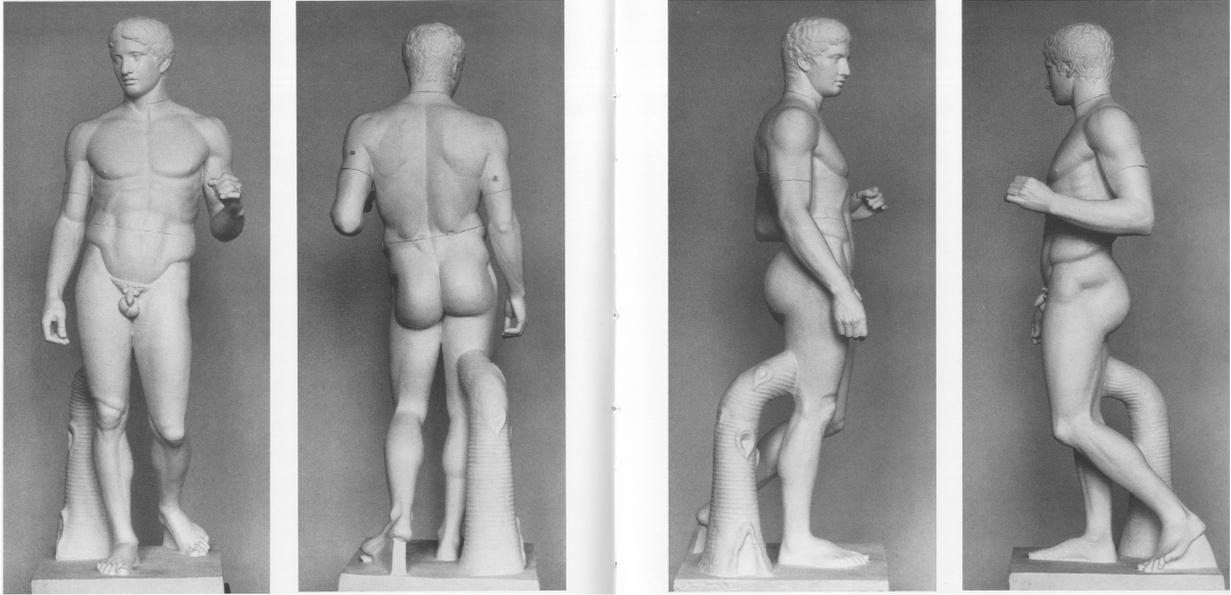
Figure 10: Polykleitos, *Doryphoros*. Plaster cast. After: Steuben, plate 20-21. Göttingen

Figure 11: Joseph T. Zealy, *Jem, full frontal, full back, full profile*. March 1850. Daguerreotype, each: 4.7 x 3.8 x 0.8 in. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Source: ARTstor
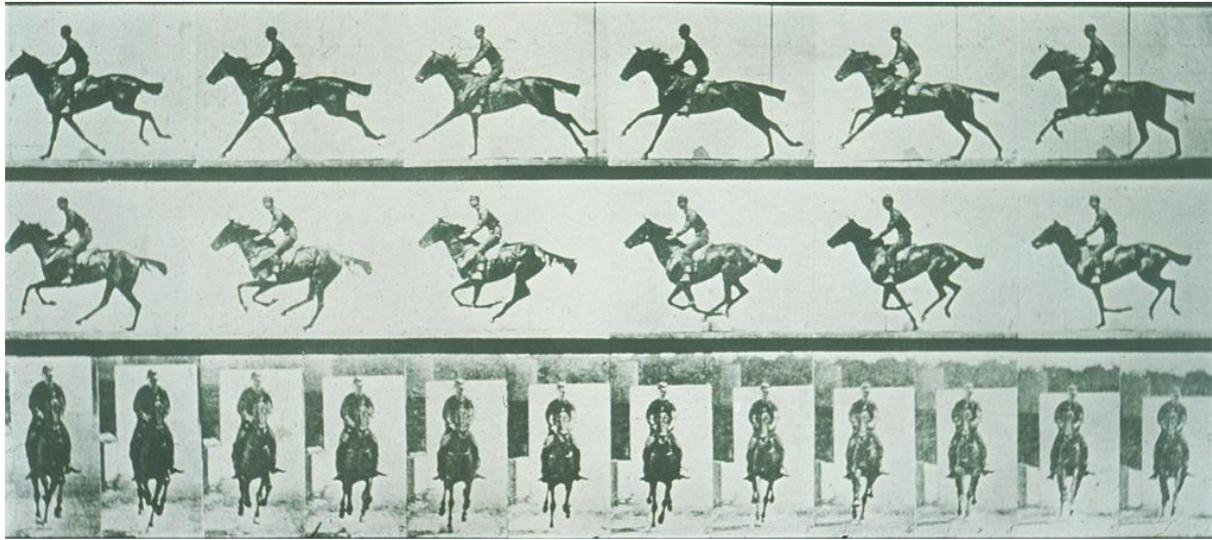
Figure 12: Eadweard Muybridge, *Annie G. in canter, from "Animal Locomotion,"* 1887. Museum of Modern Art. Source: ARTstor
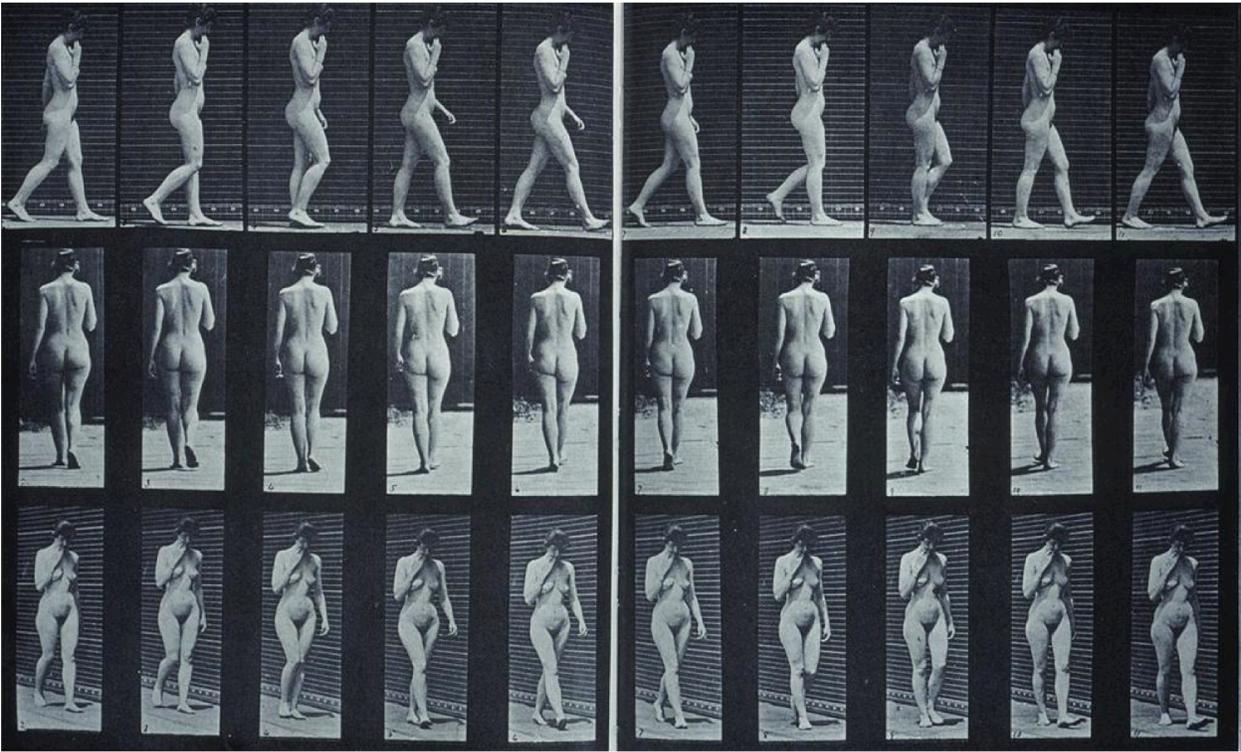
Figure 13: Eadweard Muybridge, *Woman Walking With Hand to Mouth*, 19th century. Source: ARTstor

Figure 14: Eleanor Antin, *Angel of Mercy: My Tour of Duty in the Crimea "In the trenches before Sebastopol*," 1977. Gelatin silver print, 18 x 13 in., Whitney Museum of American Art (New York City). Source: DASe

Figure 15: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations* (installation view), 1972. Color print, each 7 x 5 in., Loeb Family Art Collection. Courtesy Kunstverein Gallery, Hamburg.

Figure 16: Rafael, *Transfiguration of Christ*, 1517. Oil on wood, 160 x 110 in., Vatican
Pinacoteca, Rome. Source: DASe

Figure 17: Annibale Carracci, *Christ appearing to Saint Anthony Abbot*, circa 1598. Oil on copper, 19$^{1/2}$ x 13$^{1/2}$ in., National Gallery. Source: http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/
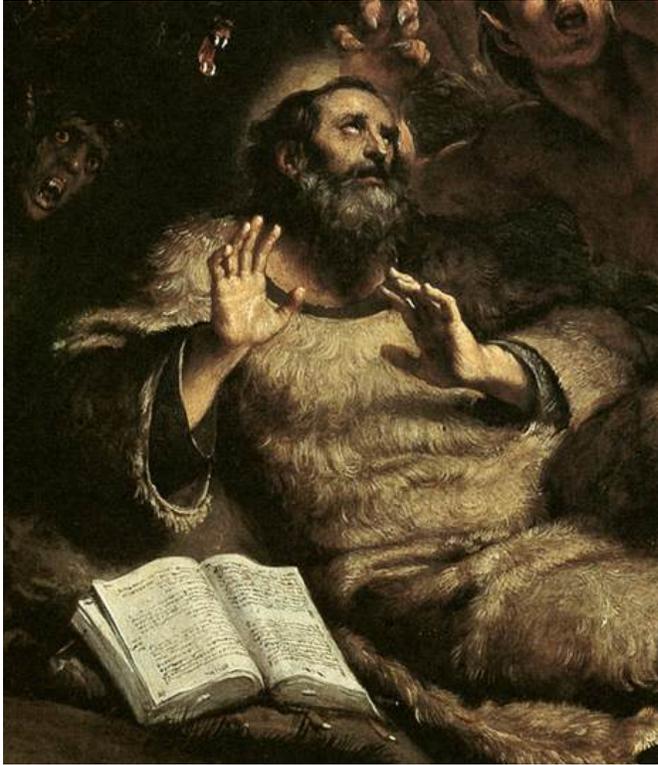
Figure 18: Annibale Carracci, *Christ appearing to Saint Anthony Abbot* (Detail)
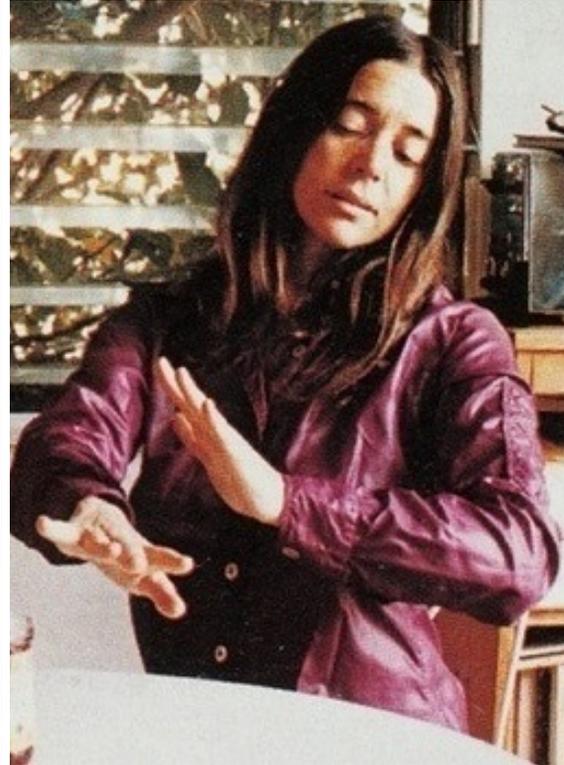
Figure 19: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Tempations* (Detail, #2)

Figure 20: Simon Vouet, *Temptation of Saint Francis*, 1624, oil on canvas. 72-4/5 x 99-1/5 in., San Lorenzo in Lucina, Rome, Italy. Source: ARTstor

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Figure 22: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations* (Detail, #4)

Figure 23: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations* (Detail, #6)

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Figure 27: Antoniazzo, *Annunciation*,
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Source: ARTstor

Figure 28: Antoniazzo, *Annunciation*,
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Figure 29: Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel: The Last Judgment*, c. 1534-41, fresco. Vatican, Rome
Source: DASe

Figure 30: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations* (Detail, # 7)

Figure 31: Michelangelo, *The Last Judgment* (Detail)

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Figure 33: Attributed to Michelangelo, *Virgin and Child with Saint John and Angels* (*The Manchester Madonna*), c.1497, egg tempera on panel. 41.14 x 30 in., National Gallery, London. Source: ARTstor

Figure 34: Polidoro da Lanciano(?), *Madonna and Child with Saints Mark and Peter*, 1535-1540, oil on canvas. 23⁵/¹⁶ x 32³/⁸ in., The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Source: ARTstor

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Figure 36: Polidoro da Lanciano(?) *Madonna and Child with Saints Mark and Peter* (Detail)

Figure 37: Attributed to Michelangelo, Virgin and Child with Saint John and Angels (The
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Figure 39: Cornelis de Vos, *Portrait of a Lady with Her Daughter*, c. 1620, oil on pine panel. $43^{1/2}$ x $33^{7/8}$ in., Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. Source: ARTstor

Figure 40: Workshop of Albrecht Dürer, *The Virgin and Child (The Madonna with the iris)*, c. 1500-10, oil on lime. 58.7 x 46 in., The National Gallery, London. After: Fisher, 48.

Figure 41: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges, and a Rose*, 1633, oil on canvas. 24.5 x 43 in., Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA. Source: ARTstor

Figure 42: Eleanor Antin, *The Eight Temptations* (composite graphic), 1972. Color print, each 7 x 5 in., Loeb Family Art Collection. Source: DASe
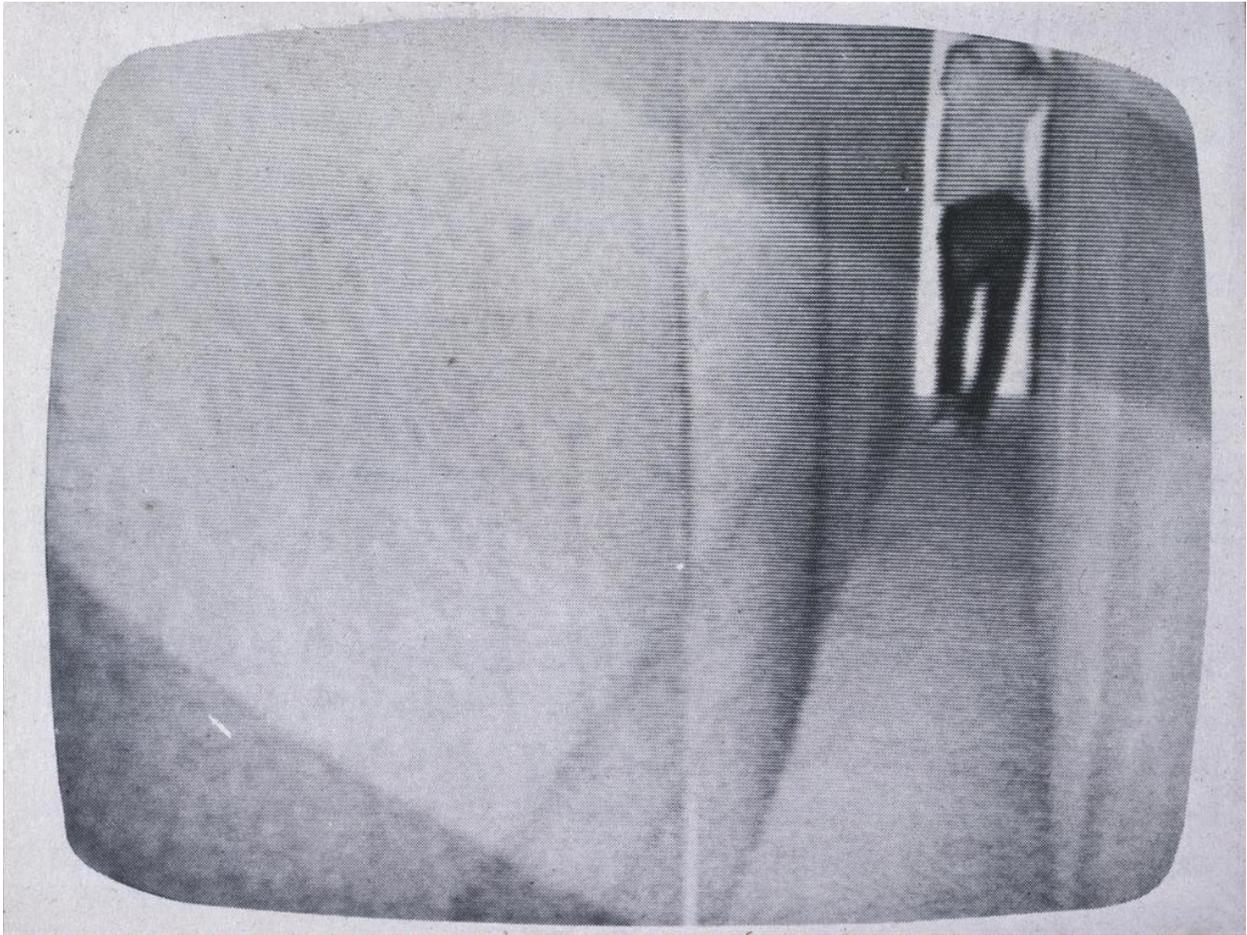
Figure 43: Bruce Nauman, *Walk with Contrapposto*, 1968. Black-and-white videotape, sound, 60 min., Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Source: ARTstor

Figure 44: Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait Painting the Madonna*, 1556, oil on canvas. 66 x 57 in, Muzeum Zamek w Lancucie, Lancut, Poland . Source: ARTstor

Figure 45: Caravaggio, *The Adolescent Bacchus*, c.1598, oil on canvas. 37.4 x 33 in., Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Source: DASe

Figure 46: Michelangelo, *Last Judgment* (Detail: Saint Bartholomew's flayed skin), c.1534-41, fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome, Italy. Source: DASe

Figure 47: Eleanor Antin, *King of Solana Beach performance*, 1974-5.
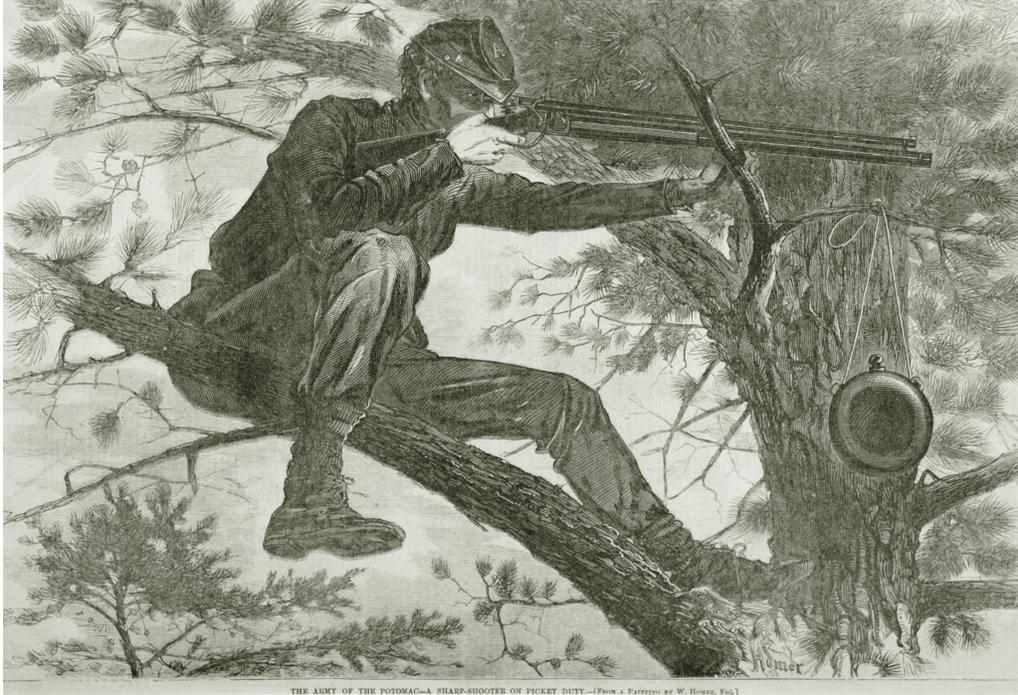
Figure 48: Winslow Homer, *Army Of The Potomac: A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*. From "Harper's Weekly," November 15, 1862, wood engraving. 9 x 14 in., Museum of Art (Cleveland) (Repository). Source: DASe

Figure 49: Eleanor Antin, *Angel of Mercy: My Tour of Duty in the Crimea "Sharp Shooter*," 1977. Gelatin silver print, 18 x 13 in. Whitney Museum of American Art (New York City). Source: DASe

Figure 50: Eleanor Antin, *Recollections of My Life with Dialghiey: Eleanora Antinova in Pocahontas*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, 14 x 11 in., The Loeb Family Art Collection. Source: DASe

Figure 51: Eleanor Antin, *The Last Days of Pompeii "The Artist's Studio,"* 2001, chromogenic print. 46$^{5/6}$ x 58$^{5/8}$ in., Collection of Stuart B. Kincaid, M.D., San Diego. After: Antin, *Historical Takes*.

Figure 52: Eleanor Antin, *Helen's Odyssey "Plaisir d'Amour,"* 2007, chromogenic print. 70 x 106 in., Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. After: Antin, *Historical Takes*.

Figure 53: Eleanor Antin, *Roman Allegories "The Triumph of Pan (after Poussin),"* 2004, chromogenic print. $60^{1/2}$ x $72^{1/2}$ in., San Diego Museum of Art. After: Antin, *Historical Takes*.

Figure 54: Eleanor Antin, *Representational Painting* (detail), 1971. Silent black-and-white videotape, thirty-eight minutes. Source ARTstor.
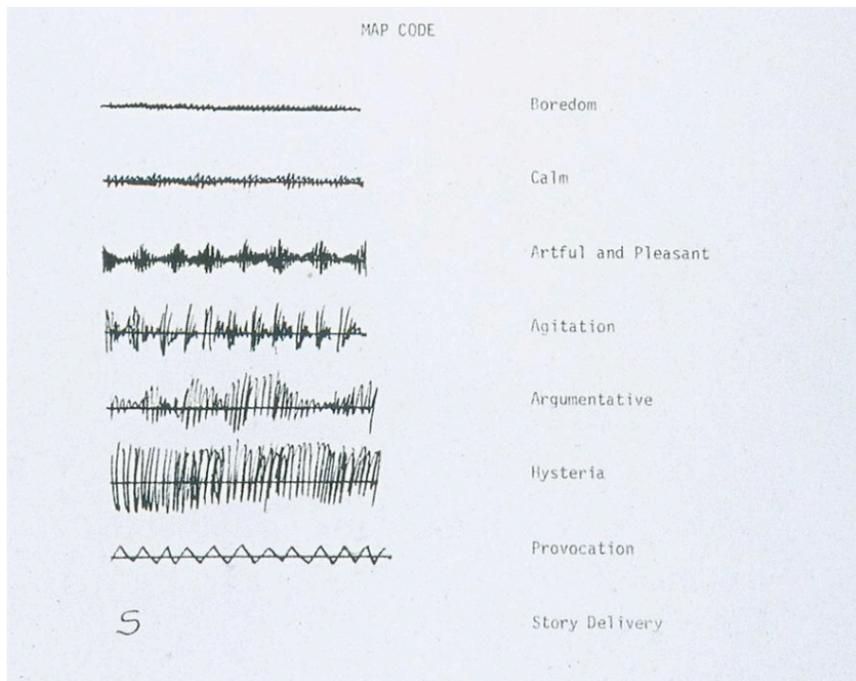
Figure 55: Eleanor Antin, *Domestic Peace: December 9*, 1971-1972. Handwritten text on graph paper, typewritten text and ink on paper. Seventeen pages, each 11 x 8$^{1/2}$ in., Source: ARTstor
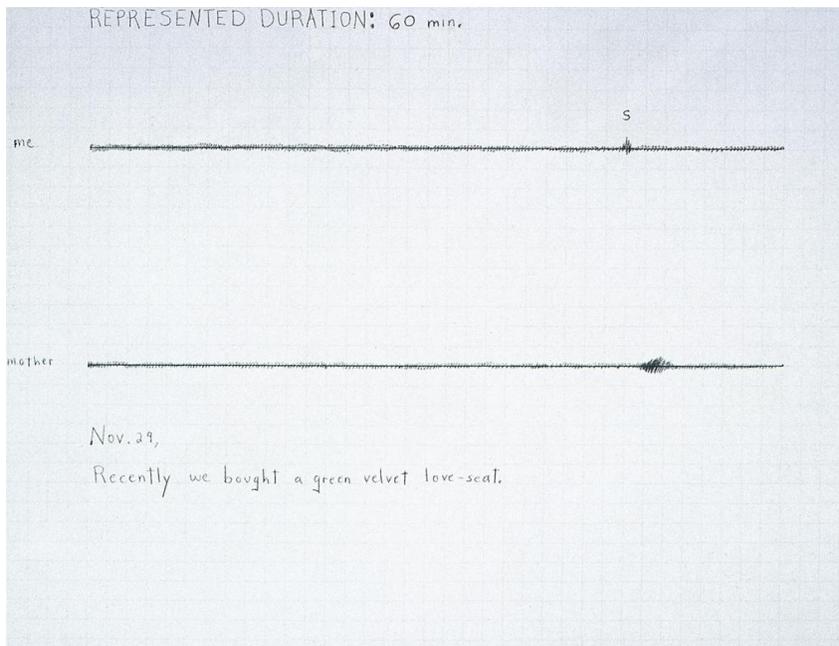

Figure 56: Eleanor Antin, *Domestic Peace: December 9*, 1971-1972. Handwritten text on graph paper, typewritten text and ink on paper. Seventeen pages, each 11 x 8$^{1/2}$ in., Source: ARTstor

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