

Corpus Inductum

“CORPUS INDUCTUM” (2001) co-opts the rhetoric of medical photography and art-historical tropes to posit masculinity and the sacred as intricately attenuated and darkly exuberant. The “Corpus Inductum” photographs are documents of poultry meat and skin, food dissected and photographed in the manner of nineteenth-century medical specimens. The uniform frontal presentation, soft northern light, and serial organization of the series recalls pathologizing typologies that sought to empirically identify common characteristics and an attendant range of aberrations.

The specimen, however, is elaborately configured to simulate the loincloths of Christ as they appear in the paintings of Fra Angelico, Rubens, and others. The free-floating objects oscillate between being perceived as morbid pathology, art-historical trope, and the jaunty, fleshed-out, bodiless figures of a J. Peterman catalog. Like a cross between Dr. Frankenstein making a monster and Julia Child creating a farce, I seize the spirit of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “scrupulously fake”¹ by literally creating the image of the Lamb of God out of meat. The loincloths appear like disembodied organs (a heart, lungs, and testicles) or like textual scrolls, underscoring the dense metaphors of food, knowledge, and sacrifice.²

The synecdoche of the loincloth for Christ’s body not only insists that His body is culturally inscribed but also



functions fetishistically—the sensual folds eliciting our desire and the attenuated, partial figures flagging anxieties of loss. Here, Christ’s masculinity and humanity are signified not by an explicit display of His body³ but by His submission to the instrumental gaze of science, art, and commerce, positing an elegiac masculinity that is joyously tendentious and hauntingly incomplete. ◉

NOTES

1. Gayatri Spivak, *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 170–186. Spivak’s call for “scrupulously explicit...strategic misreadings” is a response to the quandary of the feminine subject first negated by Nietzsche and doubly displaced by Derrida. Noting Nietzsche’s infamous claim that the

woman is condemned to self-impersonation (she is faking it even when she is “making it”), Spivak exhorts the woman to “undo the double displacement, as it were, and to operate from displacement as such... [t]o produce useful and scrupulous fake readings in the place of the passively active fake orgasm.”

2. The irregular bilateralism of the loincloths, a kind of symptomatic *controposto*, suggests “Corpus Inductum’s” canny relation to Spivak’s reconsideration of Jacques Derrida’s *Glas*, a text in which the theme of the athletic support belt plays an important structuring presence. *Glas* also appears as a side-by-side text, with both columns differently conjuring Derrida’s symbolic and philosophical loins: his father, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud, as well as the place of the mother, sister, and wife, et cetera, on the left and the writings of the illegitimate outlaw homosexual Jean Genet on the right.

3. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).





Mary Beth Heffernan, from the "Corpus Inductum" series, 2001. Numbers 2 (p.31), 4 (left), and 7 (above). Poultry skin and meat, gelatin silver print.

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