

# Lick and lather

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Soap and chocolate: the cleaning and the cooking. Considered women's jobs, they represent the stereotypes against which feminism fights.

Both materials are solid and heavy, difficult to move and difficult to break. In Janine Antoni's piece *Lick and Lather*, the soap and the chocolate are used as mediums for busts of Antoni's face. They are elegant and serene, lips neither lifted nor downturned, chin elevated: the pose of a Byzantine empress.

However, if one held a silhouette of Antoni's face next to each statue, a discrepancy would quickly reveal itself. The soap bust is small, with prenatal traits from the narrow shoulders and smooth head to the delicate bridge of her nose—sculpted as if it were ivy swaying over a fluid and rippleless tributary—to the sockets of her eyes, bare and blind. Contrasted by the milky color and phantasmagorical looks of her sister is the chocolate bust.

She might be the more accurate depiction of her creator, but lacks the image of class because of Antoni's decision to remain true to the original subject.

She is strong and sleeping, her eyes visible and shuttered. Her hair is textured and pulled into a bun. Her nose is prominent, the hint of cleavage on her chest revealing a mature grace. Contorting the face is a thick path of lighter chocolate that drags from the shoulders to the collar bone, ascending around the neck to the left cheek where it swipes across the forehead, as if it were tracks of hands trailed through mud before it set. These busts began as identical replicas of Antoni's face, but before being completed the soap face was put in a bathtub and Antoni washed away the outer layers of the profile.

Antoni dealt with the chocolate face similarly, creating the tracks of lighter chocolate by licking her way up to the crown. These intimate, sensual actions

were in preparation for the 1993 Venice Biennale Art Show. Antoni planned to travel to an ancient city renowned for its rich, Renaissance history and as the home and school of so many male painters and sculptors. At the same time, Antoni was also preparing to travel to an art show in the 1990s, a time during which art itself was questioned. New battles were on the horizon: race equality, gay rights, and feminism being a few of many.

Feminism in the nineties was a hot topic and different from the previous “waves” of feminism. While in the past feminists worked to establish themselves as a separate entity and focused on political change through a unified, global rally of females, during the nineties these goals shifted to deliver a more social and personal message. The feminists in the nineties—during the third wave of feminism—were focused on repossessing the pride stolen from women: the pride that stems from not only a woman’s mind but from her body as well. Sexuality was not something to be concealed anymore; it was something of which every woman should be proud. Antoni showed this change of attitude with Lick and Lather.

Both soap and chocolate are initially hard and heavy, but it only takes a little water to completely change them. The soap bust was washed away so completely that while it still was beautiful, it was an ethereal beauty that looked more comatose than alert. The chocolate, on the other hand, was more resistant but retained much of her former natural beauty and strength. In this way, the soap bust represents the first and second waves of feminism—achieving great things but still built on the concept of a male’s world and a male’s view of what a beautiful and pure woman looks like—while the chocolate bust represents the third wave of feminism— a more

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accurate depiction of a woman's face and body, tenacious and immovable in the solidarity found within herself between body and mind. Antoni sculpted these images and ideals into her busts, and in doing so showed an accurate portrayal of the true woman. Antoni has had to make several renditions of Lick and Lather for different art shows since soap and chocolate are far from permanent.

The mediums chosen by Antoni acknowledge the fragility of the busts and their places in history, and consequently the need to reflect on the ever-progressing and evolving image for which they stand as people begin to take their freedom for granted. With Lick and Lather, Antoni proves that while art may be temporary, ideas of equality and independence do not have to be.