



ON THE WORK OF
CIUREJ & LOCHMAN

LISA HOSTELER

Since 1978 Barbara Ciurej and Lindsay Lochman have been fascinated by the construct of femininity, its mythologies, and its imprint on themselves and their environment.

Their gendered perspective is embedded deeply in their imagery, whether their camera explores vernacular architecture, everyday landscapes, the rituals of domestic life, or corporeal transitions from adolescence to old age. From each they extract something elemental to human experience. Most recently, that something relates to nurturing. When they each became mothers and began raising families, this aspect of their work intensified, and it is the source of their series, *Ponder Food as Love* (previously titled *Consuming Passion*).

Ciurej and Lochman had always been acutely aware of the associations and expectations that derive from being female and have enjoyed exaggerating those qualities to the point of absurdity. (Their image of a nude woman draped odalisque-like over a washer and dryer - an uproarious literalization of the term "domestic goddess" - comes to mind in this context.)

But as they grew into their roles as mothers, the connotations and demands incumbent on their gender took on new significance. One function that became particularly salient was providing nourishment. Though this was not necessarily surprising, the constancy and urgency of the task seemed extraordinary.

From breastfeeding to packing lunches and putting dinner on the table every night, the world seemed to revolve around preparing or consuming food, so that procuring sustenance became a form of giving and showing love. Both tender and funny, this realization guides their imagery in *Ponder Food as Love*, in which food adorns, merges with, and echoes parts of their nude bodies.

Although I am not a mother, this series struck me both for the clarity and wit of its sentiment, and for its unexpected resonance with non-maternal life. It occurred to me that the preparation and offering of food is one of the most basic forms of social life. From ceremonial dinners to informal get-togethers, much of our interaction with others centers on offering or accepting food. When we invite people into our homes to feed, we are sharing our resources, giving of ourselves. Although such occasions are not usually a matter of life and death, as feeding a baby is to a mother, they speak to a deeply human instinct - one that is suggested by the parallel curves of a leek and a bent body, one that *Ponder Food as Love* celebrates.

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