

Janine Antoni's "Saddle"
<http://www.janineantoni.net/#/saddle/>

Janie Antoni's sculpture "Saddle" (2000) is part of a larger exhibition titled "At Home in the Body" and it explores how the body interacts with space, nature, and time. This idea of creating a home within the artist's body is explicitly seen in Antoni's artistic methods, and in "Saddle," she uses her own body as a mold. Within this piece, there are so many symbolic gestures and I personally think that Antoni does a great job of balancing conceptual ideas with physical, visually interesting sculpture. In addition to creating a highly visceral and sensory sculpture, Antoni uses language to give her work context and nuance. In this piece, the title, the materials listed, and the artwork description all contribute to how the audience reads the piece. Personally, I found both tension and cohesion within Antoni's language; overall, I found that the language that accompanies the sculpture aids in developing a consistent tone and reveals the artist's purpose without ruining the magical experience of confronting this sculpture for the first time.

Beginning with the title, "Saddle," Antoni uses language in a less direct way to create ambiguity and sexual undertones in her work. When I encountered this work, I read the piece in this order: title, actual art piece, materials, then description. The title was the first thing I read and so it ingrained in me an initial understanding of the work. When I read "Saddle," I think about leather, horses, control, movement, and riding, and these associative images then impact how I view the sculpture. The color, texture, and placement of the rawhide seem leathery and the way Antoni positioned her body underneath the rawhide is both haunting and suggestive. To me, there are twisted sexual undertones within this piece, for the artist is on all fours and the title connotes riding or dominating an animal. In ambiguously draping the rawhide over her

body—the abstract and detached draping movement contrasts with parts of the rawhide that clings to her body, thus obscuring the female form.

The bulk of Antoni's language comes from the materials and descriptions section. For materials, Antoni simply writes “full rawhide,” and for the description, she writes: “*Saddle* is a full raw cowhide draped over a mold of Antoni's body. When the material hardened, the mold was removed. Like a ghost, the cowhide holds the memory of the artist's body. When confronted with the object one feels the absence of both the artist and the cow.” Here, Antoni states the reasoning and symbolism behind her methods; although Antoni writes that her piece evokes feelings of emptiness and asks the reader to meditate on the absence of the cow/artist, there is a fullness to her work that contrasts these words. The fullness of the rawhide (“full rawhide”) juxtaposes the emptiness beneath it as Antoni creates an illusion of fullness and captures the paradoxical nature of the body. The rawhide almost looks like a womb encasing the memory of the artist, and this sense of motherhood connects back to the title “*Saddle*.” Like the womb, the saddle is a vessel-like thing that carries a body and Antoni plays with this idea of carrying the memory of the artist within the rawhide. Fabricated by a material that looks like leather, a placenta, or a blanket, Antoni mimics the female shape but does so in a strange and backward way by removing the body (or the mold) from the artwork. Importantly, Antoni used her own body as a mold for this piece, and her decision to remove the mold represents how the artwork both is and isn't Antoni. She literally puts her body into the work, subjecting herself to the medium. Yet, she removes any evidence (the mold) from the finished product, thus implying that this piece exists outside of her body. Overall, “*Saddle*” is a visually compelling piece, but Antoni's use of language ultimately adds complexity to the physical piece and allows the audience to further contemplate how the body exists or doesn't exist, within a space.



Saddle, 2000