

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

BUY MY BANANAS

PAULINE BOUDRY / RENATE LORENZ, KATHE BURKHART, AMANDA CHURCH, ANNE-LISE COSTE, LIZZIE FITCH, MARTHA FRIEDMAN, RACHEL HARRISON, SOPHIE VON HELLERMANN, LINDA LIGHTON, LEE LOZANO, SARAH LUCAS, SARAH H. PAULSON, MARY REID KELLEY, AURA ROSENBERG, ALLYSON VIEIRA, CARMEN WINANT AND AMELIE VON WULFFEN

CURATED BY JULIA TROTTA

JUNE 22 - AUGUST 2, 2012

PRESS RELEASE

Here is the story of *Buy My Bananas*. I hope I remember its genesis accurately; there may well be some errors of chronology and fact. It is easy to confuse things from a distance.

I had organized a session called "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art" for the 1972 College Art Association Meetings. The call for papers had been successful—so successful that it had to be a double length session to include all the good submissions. I was preparing an introduction for the session and needed some visual material that would make my point and brooding over the structure of the talk itself: I had several ideas. One of them involved a nineteenth-century photo, part of a book of quaint demi-porn I had bought at a bookstall on the quai in Paris the previous summer. Titled "Buy My Apples", the image represented a fetching young woman, nude except for black stockings and boots, holding a tray of apples under her breasts. I immediately thought of a picture in the Metropolitan Museum based on an analogous conceit but raised to a very different level of cultural importance: Gauguin's *Women with Mango Blossoms*. I made slides of both.

Where could one find a similar pictorial analogy in the realm of male sexuality? One, or at least I, could not find such an image. So I decided to create one for myself. The question was what edible object to use as my penis equivalent? I had more or less decided on a frankfurter—kosher, of course—when I went to Washington, DC to participate in a panel discussion at one of the first large-scale meetings of women in the arts. I remember walking up the aisle with Louise Bourgeois, an enthusiastic participant, and telling her about my planned photo. She was encouraging: "Use a banana instead" she said. "It will make the point better."

And so I did. I made an appointment with the male model at Vassar, where I was teaching, to come and pose for me in the art studio. On the appointed day, I arrived at the studio with a large tray, a Nikon, and a bunch of bananas. I showed him "Buy My Apples", and, good professional model that he was, he got the point immediately. He even suggested that he retain his socks and shit-kickers to match the stockings and boots of the Nineteenth-Century prototype. Then he mounted the models' stand, seized the tray and the bananas—there was some discussion about exactly at what level of his body he should hold them—took the pose, and I snapped: one shot at the regular F-stop, one below and one above, according to protocol. It was the only "serious" photo I ever took, and all three came out fine. The rest is art history.

The photographs, when I presented them in San Francisco at the College Art Association that winter, made something of a sensation, reinforcing my point that the imagery of the erotic is gender-specific and nonreversible. The piece was published, illustrated, with the rest of the session, in *Women as Sex-Object* (ed. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin: Newsweek Books) later in 1972. "Buy My Bananas" I have heard, went on to have a life of its own, turning up on T-shirts and posters all over the world. I have a T-shirt from Israel featuring it on the back.

One little addendum: either directly before or after I took the picture, I read Erica Jong's wonderful poem from her collection *Fruits and Vegetables*, in which she asserts: "The poem about bananas has not yet been written." Right on, Erica!

Linda Nochlin
June 2012

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Left: "Buy My Apples" from a late 19-century popular French magazine. Courtesy Linda Nochlin.
Right: "Buy My Bananas", 1972. Photograph by Linda Nochlin.

*Julia Trotta is currently in production on a feature film titled **Forget to Be Afraid: A Portrait of Linda Nochlin**. The film is in collaboration with Glynnis McDaris and Dustin Bowlin and produced by Lizzie Nastro. Trotta is the granddaughter of Linda Nochlin.*