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REVIEWS & PRESS

Carolee Schneemann. *Vulva's Morphia*. Granary Books, 1997.

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Princenthal, Nancy. **BOOKFORUM/ ARTISTS' BOOKS (ARTFORUM Spring 1998). SPRING LIVRES. *Vulva's Morphia*.**

Granary Books, NYC, 1997. Limited edition Artist Book. Edition of 35 on Hahnemhle Premium Velour. Cover of crushed rose velvet; goose-stepped text; images color laser printed off Canon 700 Printer on Mohawk Poseidon. Plexiglass slip case. Printed by Philip Gallo and bound by Jill Jevne. \$1,500.

The beastliness of men—and women—is no news to Carolee Schneemann, who has been celebrating our animal appetites for many years. She has never done so to more comic effect than with *Vulva's Morphia* (Granary Books, \$1,500), a poker-faced, Rousseauian tale of an innocent's education. Vulva, the story begins, "reads biology and understands she is an amalgam of proteins and oxytocin hormones which govern all her desires." A fast learner, Vulva soon "deciphers Lacan and Baudrillard and discovers she is only a sign, a signification of the void." Other instructive encounters take place with "feminist constructivist semiotics," the ghosts of the habitués of the Cedar Bar, and Masters and Johnson. Each page has a tipped-in, laser-printed color copy of the collaged and overprinted images that illustrate Vulva's progress. All the plates refer, sometimes rather obliquely, to female genitalia, with sources ranging from paleolithic carvings to the artist's own childhood drawings. Schneemann has presented this material in installations and also in slide lectures, which make it seem an academic performance - but also deliciously subversive. Even Better, though, is this deluxe tome, covered in crushed velvet dyed a dusty rose. A single, uppercase line of text proceeds across the bottom of each stiff, gray-flocked page. The hushed tones of goose-stepping type seem to work. According to Vulva's publisher Steven Clay, male readers, at least, aren't sure at first whether or not to laugh.

Nancy Princenthal is a writer who lives in New York.