

Curatorial Statement

Fresh Produce highlights the centrality of food as a motif in contemporary art and how artists are putting new twists on the venerable act of rendering still life. It is also a showcase for five artists that have been garnering attention in alternative spaces and the internet during the past year: Luis Carle, Jaiver Cintron, Iliana Emilia, Liza Papi and Enrique Renta. This multimedia exhibition of printmaking, sculpture, photography and digital art delivers a glorious spread of innovative images and installations. In the hands of Carle, Cintron, Emilia, Papi and Renta, foods we would normally take for granted become objects of contemplation and catalysts for experimentation.

Javier Cintron's series of prints reconfigure Goya Foods labels into elaborate compositions that foreground the importance of food to the process of community building and trans-culturation. His subtle quotations of Puerto Rican still life painters such as Francisco Oller and Carmelo Sobrino enhance the art historical appeal of a production that is invested in popular culture.

The manifest content of Liza Papi's work treats the presentation of decorative cakes as an integral component in feasts that celebrate rites of passage. On the other hand, the subtext of this series concerns Papi's documentation of a particular immigrant woman's way of earning her living through baking and the pride she takes in creating artful cake displays. Papi's hand-painted monoprints mimic her subject's method of covering her creations in pastel icing. She has also written a series of poems about the images.

Luis Carle's series of hand-painted black and white photographs of fruits quietly spurn conventions. The simple presentation and serial format hark back to the "pure" aesthetic favored by documentary photographers of the nineteen sixties and seventies. At that time, staying true to the instant you took the photograph and creating a negative image so good that it could be exhibited were considered worthy objectives. In the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties, hand painted photographs became fashionable again, perhaps because automatic cameras have made it all too easy to achieve perfection. But photography of the eighties and nineties is also characterized by the return of baroque compositions and overwrought manipulations of the photographic surface. Heralding a new era, Carle's images strike a balance between the aesthetics of austerity and abundance in photographic practice of the last thirty years.

iliana emilia is another artist who mines the past for inspiration. Quoting the visual vocabulary of Pop and Minimal art, her installation Pan y Agua (Bread and Water), a set of chairs made of those very materials, is a wry response to survivalist credos. In the poem accompanying the installation, emilia questions what she needs for survival and the answer she comes up with is to create art that is multi-fuctional and demonstrates her capacity to do more with less.

→ Enrique Renta is often described by his colleagues as an artist who is "on the verge." He is futuristic thinker who believes in taking advantage of all the mediums available to an artist in the 21st century. Fusing his interests in photography, digital animation, fashion, and high art, his installation, Towards a Theory of Sets, is probably the most transgressive art on display here. Renta's work is not so much a celebration of aesthetic hybridism than a meditation of how systems of thought —particularly taboo thoughts and images—structure our visible world. He estranges food and fashion to the point where we are able to stand back and question the rules that

govern what we see fit to put into our bodies versus what we see fit to put on them.

Fresh Produce is indebted to the work of Edward Sullivan and Clayton C. Kirking, the curators of the exhibition, *Latin American Still Life: Reflections of Time and Place*, currently on view at El Museo del Barrio through May 21st. Sullivan and Kirking have made compelling arguments to expand our notion of still life to include installation art and other hybrid and experimental genres.

“...Contemporary artists who operate in a wide variety of media,” write Kirking and Sullivan, “propelled the meanings of still life beyond its traditional boundaries. Photography, installation and still life sculpture merge with painting and drawing to expand the pre-existing categories. The still life may be thought of as an object of desire, as a signifier of both the absence and intimation of human intervention, as a commodity, and as the distillation of tangible reality. These individual ideas, by themselves or in combination with one another, have been the principal philosophical tenets of the representation of still life from at least the Renaissance until today.”

Yasmin Ramirez