

Nailing Jell-O to a wall

Homos are as much fun to make as they are to eat

**Review by
Kathleen Pirrie Adams**

Cultures live inside food, growing inside it, animated by nutrients and bacteria. Nothing is missed so much. Savoured, needed desperately, food is our code.

Like a good meal, curator Andrew Harwood's show at A Space combines tastes, textures and colours, with proper attention to display.

Despite the title, Buffet is not the riot before indigestion-inspired regret. The installation of works avoids the church basement bake-sale feel that mocks the good intentions of many group shows. Instead, it rhythmically mixes scale and sensibility, materials and emotions.

Below the surface, the works are bound together by a common interest in how food provides the template for our experience of sex and our understanding of what's good and what's gross.

At one end of the gallery, food clichés cover a whole wall, drawing attention to what is already familiar, ubiquitous and pre-digested: "Hungry as a horse," "Two peas in a pod...."

On another wall, artist John McLaughlin's Mostly Day Olds ironically contrasts the emptiness of these worn out words with a series of por-



SINFULLY DELICIOUS. Sue Lloyd's Eating Tulips is just one of many tasty morsels in Buffet (All You Can Eat).

traits of donut holes. Jelly-filled, double-chocolate, dusted, sprinkled: The day olds are seized by a pornographic gaze that magnifies and probes, laying everything but their sphincter-like centres to waste.

Rescued by McLaughlin from an ignominious end, the iconographically Canadian, almost disposed-of delectables, momentarily regain the glory befitting each and every hole.

Sandra Haar's A Story About An Orange also rescues the profane. Her piece consists of paper oranges inscribed with a masturbatory fantasy of a girl who "places an orange between her legs, against the lips of her vagina...." By involving the viewer in the construction of the oranges,

Haar encourages an awareness, not only of our complicity in the creation of this particular fetish, but also of the grade-school, lunch box origin of our individual sexual menus.


Unearthing the culinary roots of desire is a theme present in both the gallery show and the quick-copied catalogue — a food 'zine — which accompanies it. Writings such as Jane Farrow's cafeteria wars confession, "I Was A Teenage Food Fight Fiend" — a piece that practically begs for a psychoanalytic deciphering — as well as those by Rochelle Holt, Carol Anne Gillis and (Xtra arts editor) Gordon Bowness, all allude to the home/childhood/food/sex nexus.

Another central concern is the rig-

orous, and commonly racist, culinary-inflected identity short cuts of gay male desire. From rice queens to potato chips, Kamal Al-Solaylee and RM Vaughan both offer writings that call into question the objectifying and impossible standards of gay men. In the gallery, Ken Chu's mixed media installation No Yellow Feverists uses cut out personal ads and bowls of raw rice to provide a precisely arranged indictment of the fetishization of Asian men.

Deanna Bowen's video installation, Milk Fed, stands out by pushing deeper into the terror at the core of many works. Food, family and sexual role-playing form an aural and visual abomination of Leviticus concoction. The video oscillates between a black screen story of the tormented milk-fed boy and a close-up, real-time record of bacon frying, accompanied by a self-justifying account of a daddy-baby girl relationship. More liquid than its stark compartments might initially suggest, the piece is an astounding balance of conceptual clarity and emotional power.

In the end, Buffet seems to suggest that despite all the programs for moderation, good health, sustainability or integration, the twisted truth is that food and sex are each, inescapably, both the playground and the cemetery of our dreams of pleasure.



Buffet (All You Can Eat).
Free. Till Fri, Oct 17.
A Space.
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