



Gina Beavers serves up dissonant banquet

Of all the mundane imagery disseminated through social media, the meal snapshot has emerged as a diarylike convention. Whether dining out or cooking at home, people can't seem to keep from commemorating a culinary creation -- or, for that matter, inviting their entire social network to the table. But this documentation, while highlighting contemporary culture's burgeoning food fetish, is really just another kind of "selfie," one that takes the "you are what you eat" adage to heart.

Observing this online fascination with photographing food, Brooklyn artist Gina Beavers began to forage Instagram for the imagery in her paintings, preserving the awkward overhead vantage that defines the genre and repurposing the images' original captions as her titles.



Gina Beavers, "Breakfast at the Casino," 2013, acrylic and pumice on canvas, 16 x 16 inches.

Her first body of food paintings, "Palate," was exhibited at Clifton Benevento in New York last winter, populating the walls with crowded trays of oysters, a plate of chicken and waffles, and a lattice-top blueberry pie for dessert. This month, a second course of Beavers' food paintings is on display at Fourteen30 Contemporary, featuring summer-themed barbecue along with a roast chicken and a casino's breakfast buffet of waffles and crepes freighted with whipped cream spirals.

If that sweet and savory subject matter stirs your appetite, the paintings themselves won't. They are materially grotesque, at odds with the delicacies they represent. In fact, the paintings are sculpted surfaces, worked up with gritty pumice and small pieces of porcelain, so that the food has real shape and protrudes from the canvas like a piled helping

Beavers' detailed painting coupled with her materials imbues her subjects with a perverse artifice that recasts the appetizing as repulsive. Rather than the age-old still life -- a wine bottle and a collection of precisely rendered apples and pears -- Beavers' paintings of food put me in mind of Pop artist Claes Oldenburg's 1962 sculpture "Glass Case With Pies," a menagerie of sloppily assembled desserts, all about as mouth-watering as wax fruit.

The best quality of Beavers' paintings is the disjunction between the flat application of paint and the depth of the sculpted surface. In "Memphis BBQ (Looks Like a Gina Beavers)," 2013, a school bus yellow corncob is nestled in tinfoil. Study it and you'll see how difficult it becomes to tell the depth of the painted tinfoil from the actual depth of pumice and porcelain.

"BBQ Take-out," 2013, is the least representative of Beavers' canvases for being the most abstract. Other paintings in "Family Style" use the combination of painting and sculpture to achieve a realer-than-real feeling, but in this piece it's a challenge to recognize the strips of charred meat.

One sees the dynamism of Kandinsky, the Italian Futurists or even Jackson Pollock in the cross-hatched cuts and centerless composition -- quite an art historical pedigree for an image sourced from Instagram. Clearly, Beavers didn't see just another meal snapshot when she chose it, but rather a feast for the eyes.

-- John Motley August 1, 2013



Gina Beavers, "Chicken!!!!," 2013, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 inches