

TopSpin
Artists of Western New York and Beyond

Mary A. Johnson: *Generazione Nostra est Scriptor Minas*
(Our Generation's Menace)

May 5-August 25, 2013

Opening reception with artist talk at 3:00 p.m. Sunday, May 5, 2:00-4:00 p.m.



maryajohnson

Hulusi's Silken Road (detail), 2013, red and yellow beet dye, spinach particles and dye, cherries, pomegranate, artist's saliva, digitally altered photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil, and ink on paper, 36 x 78 in.



Apthous Notorious, 2013, red beet dye, spinach particles and dye, turmeric dye, cherries, pomegranate, digitally altered photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil and ink on paper, 36 x 78 in.



Garden of Blastomycodon, 2013, spinach dye, yellow beet dye, turmeric dye, pomegranate, cherries, digitally altered photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil, ink and graphite on paper, 36 x 82 in.



Transitory Benign Plagues of the Tongue, 2012, red beet dye, spinach dye, concord grapes, pomegranate, digitally altered photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil, graphite and ink on paper, 36 x 78 in.

The title for this exhibition was inspired, in part, by a passage from the 2011 book, *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, by Margo Collins and Elson Bond. In addition, Johnson uses “Latin” verses in each of her artwork titles. As she explains, “the titles I make up are actually hybridized words that combine the names of Latin or English skin diseases (or words that are associated with their history) into new, fantastical, completely constructed words that act as a term on their own—as if they possess a history—albeit a false one.” One might say the same thing about the nature of genetically altered foods. The correlation between apocalyptic bio-mutated zombie-humanoids and genetically-altered food manufacturing came to mind when I first experienced Johnson’s work. Both speak to the dark seduction of scientific control over Mother Nature. Johnson’s work seems to suggest that our current progress in creating disease resistant, age-defying food and people is a dangerously false conceit.

Johnson’s subject matter is food: cantaloupes, apples, grapes, lettuce, strawberries, mushrooms and bone-in cuts of meat. Each work is a montage of detailed photographs, drawing, and transparent washes (organic or otherwise) collaged in layered narratives of unstable energy. Through careful placement and editing, the resulting arrangements include stunning permutations of rich color, implied textures, sticky substances and translucent swabs of mottled colors left behind by organic materials in varying states of rot. She moves smoothly between the mediums of drawing, organic pigmentation and mechanical reproduction. Her coloration is

often subtle, based on the look of traditional organic dyes—a reminder that the brightest colors in nature will eventually fade as decay sets in and progresses.

Johnson’s nimble montage of mediums reduces the ability to quickly identify individual objects in the works. Negating this immediacy, the mystery of the identity of objects draws viewers much deeper into the works, and keeps us there. Experiencing these works in a series offers a sense of the passing of time and surreal transformations.

The artist’s interest in food’s ability “to be both sensual and revolting...as a direct result of its connection to the mouth, the stomach and the mind” is perhaps embedded in the realization that all living things are made of ephemeral material, bound in the inevitable cycles of life and death, deterioration and decay. The works in *Generazione Nostra est Scriptor Minas* capture fleeting moments along the way. They are beautiful reminders of the transience of life, be it fruit, vegetable or otherwise. Ultimately, her work is quite sublime—a beautifully revolting visual experience.

Michael J. Beam
Curator of collections and Exhibitions

My work explores labyrinth-like structures between the perceived and fantastical through the lens of the ambiguous space between seduction and disgust. I don’t attempt to pretend my work is the real—I carefully construct facades and masks to confuse the viewer. The faux, the fake, doctoring and embellishment are all key players in this space. Things hide, they peek out and they transform and morph. The pull between the polarities fascinates me because of how close one can come to the other and still exist as itself. When it comes down to it, there is little difference between the two, yet also a world of it. They affirm one another, they negate one another. True horror can exist in this tense, and sometimes sublime, space.

I use food as a primary medium to connect to the viewers’ corporeality in my drawings, objects, and performances. Its ability to be, at once, both sensual and revolting is a direct result of its connection to the mouth, the stomach and the mind. This physicality makes it an ideal conduit to discuss the overlaps, confusions and gaps between seduction and disgust; the perceived and the fantastical.

The drawings include numerous materials: organic dyes, food residues, digitally altered photographs of rotting, yet altered foods, ink, oils, photographic transfers and pencil. I use this broad expanse of materials to further emphasize the ambiguous threads between the real and the false; the object and the image—as well as the seductive and repulsive. Each material to create the corresponding image is another mediation from the thing in itself.

The spaces I am working in and the relationships between the polarities I am interested in are important to understanding and dissecting current rhetoric, interpersonal relationships, politics, and economic structures. Not only is it important for viewers to act and engage in removing the mask, and discover what is hidden beneath—but also to ask questions.

Mary A. Johnson 2013



Garden of Blastomycodon (detail), 2013.

Mary A. Johnson

maryajohnson.com

Mary A. Johnson was born in Pittsburgh, PA. Currently, she is working in Buffalo, NY and completing her Master of Fine Arts in Visual Studies at the University at Buffalo. She makes drawings and installation/performances that engage the absurd overlays between the luscious and the decayed; the image and experience.

Education

2013 Master of Fine Arts, Visual Studies, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY

2008 Bachelor of Arts in Art (painting concentration), Minor in English Literature, Gordon College, Wenham, MA

2007 Istituto San Lodovico, Gordon in Italy (Sculpture, Drawing, Art History and Italian)

Awards and Honors

2012-2013 Teaching Assistantship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2012 Department of Visual Studies Dedalus Master of Fine Arts Fellowship Nominee, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2011-2012 Teaching Assistantship, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2011 Finalist in Art Takes Miami Juried Exhibition, SCOPE Miami, FL

Selected Exhibitions

Solo exhibitions are indicated with an asterisk (*)

2012

Velvet <> *Putrescence*, Installation/Performance, Silo City, Buffalo, NY*

Catacombia, Collaborative Performance, Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada

2011

Parallax, 515 Main Street Gallery, Buffalo, NY

A Questionable Dinner, Performance, Ellicott Island Park, Tonawanda, NY*

SUFD: Futurism or Not, Collaborative Performance, Nuit Blanche, Toronto, Canada

ButterFile, Visual Studies Gallery, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

ButterFax, University at Buffalo Gallery, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2010 *Remnants of a Life Undercover*, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY*

2008 *Are We Home Yet?* Gordon College, Wenham, MA*

2006 Lynn Community Minority Cultural Center, Lynn, MA

Professional Experience

2013

Instructor of Record, Self and Ritual, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Graduate Supervisor, Arts Resource Center, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Visual Studies Department Graduate Student Association Government Senate Representative at the University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY

2012

Graduate Student Leader at Strategies of Effective Teaching Conference, Visual Studies Department, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Instructor, Drawing Fundamentals, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Instructor of Record, Art and the Everyday and Drawing Concepts I, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Arts Resource Center Assistant, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Bibliography

Manifest International Drawing Annual publication (INDA) (v8), Cincinnati, OH publication date: December 2013.

The St. Sebastian Review (v3, Issue 1), online, Cambridge, MA, March 2013.

Art Takes Miami, exhibition catalogue, Artists Wanted, Brooklyn, NY, 2011.

Duquette, Laura, "Remnants of a Life Undercover," *Buffalo Rising*, July 16, 2010.

Art Voice, Vol. 9 No. 28, exhibition announcement with photograph, Buffalo, NY, July 15, 2010.

Nomad, Vol. 1, Art and Literary Magazine, Buffalo, NY 2009.

Selected Collections

Temporary Collection: Satish K. Tripathi's residence President of the University at Buffalo, NY.

Istituto San Lodovico, Orvieto, Italy.

The Orthodox Congregational Church of Lanesville, Gloucester, MA.

Exhibition Checklist

Apthous Notorious, 2013, red beet dye, spinach particles and dye, turmeric dye, cherries, pomegranate, digitally altered photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil and ink on paper, 36x78 in.

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pencil, ink and graphite on paper, 36x82 in.

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photographs, acetone photograph transfer, colored pencil, graphite and ink on paper, 36x78 in.

Year 40: Caligula, the Consul of Bartonella, 2013, Jell-O, coconut milk, radishes, lime, buttercup squash, cucumber, cilantro, beet, grapefruit, beet and spinach dye, walnut ink, rust, digitally altered images, acetone photograph transfers, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper. 20x480 (40 ft) in.

TopSpin

Artists of the Buffalo/Niagara Region

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TopSpin is made possible through the generous Support of Tops Friendly Markets, LLC.



Mary A. Johnson: *Generazione Nostra est Scriptor Minas (Our Generation's Menace)* is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

Catalog design: JCharlier Communication Design



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