

## FANCY A BITE?

15 JUNE - 6 JULY 2022

Alice Johnson

Phoebe Boddy

Rafaela De Ascanio

Pippa El-Kadhi Brown

Nell Mitchell

STUDIO WEST is proud to present FANCY A BITE? a group exhibition showcasing the work of five women artists whose practices explore the politics of food. Themes emerge surrounding our complex relationships to food, domesticity, nostalgia, and cultural heritage. Through installation, ceramic sculpture and painting FANCY A BITE? encourages the viewer to delve into each artists' unique relationship with food, and consider the silent politics at play in the everyday act of eating.

Throughout time and in every culture, human beings have eaten together. Commensality - eating and drinking at the same table - is a fundamental social activity, which creates and cements relationships. Meals are everyday rituals of profound importance in social life. They reinforce cultural values specific to communities, and evoke feelings of nostalgia, belonging and pleasure. The politics of gastronomy are key to understanding many social negotiations and societies. Issues of gender, race, class and culture all emerge in the wider conversation of what decisions surrounding food and eating can represent.

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising, that there is a prevalent history of women creating politically active artwork about and with food – examples include Carolee Schneemann's controversial performance Meat Joy (1964) and Sarah Lucas' iconic Self-Portrait with Fried Eggs (1996) where egg yolks stand in for nipples. Historically, food has been mobilised by women artists from championing female emancipation from domestic duties and to discussing the female body. Nowadays, in western society, women are generally liberated from exclusive domestic labour and the preparation of food is not always a gendered act. Yet, food continues to be a prevalent topic in work by women artists.

Painter and ceramicist Nell Mitchell makes work about "normal things" that "are often passed by or less noticed". Combining a deliberately naïve style, a vibrant palette and humorously relatable subject matter, her work breeds an air of unguarded "triviality and silliness". Mitchell's Dinner Party installation takes a closer look at the relationship between food culture and moralising consumption, through the lens of amusing ceramic objects laden with phrases such as "You Are What You Eat!" and "A Moment on the Lips,

A Lifetime on the Hips!". Similar in tone, Phoebe Boddy's practice takes flavour and the sensation of eating as a starting point for bold, graphic paintings. She comments, "food and flavour are my greatest influences". Although these two artists create works that, at first, appear uncomplicated, there is something deeper at play in the act of monumentalising the everyday. Canvases and sculptures act as odes to passing moments spent with friends, pedestalling intimate exchanges over meals, generating what is often referred to as "food nostalgia".

Sculptor Alice Johnson is known for her iconic ceramic prawns, small sculptures that straddle categories of fine art and functional craft. The little vessels are acts of metamorphosis, a prawn becomes a vase, a vase becomes an art work. They play with the notion of food as a decorative and aesthetic object, rather than as a source of sustenance. This points to wider issues surrounding class and access to certain foodstuffs. In their decorative quality, they are loosely reminiscent of the kinds of monumental feasts a King might dine on, while a peasant goes hungry. These kinds of social relations encoded in food are explored in varying manifestations subtly throughout the body of work.

Pippa El-Kadhi Brown's fluidly painted, bright and charming work looks at the matter of the domestic environment as a space suggestive of the occupier, "filled with objects that allude a past, present and future, exposing certain elements, but more importantly, concealing others". For El-Kadhi Brown the personal and the domestic are political. Through her paintings and sculptures, we see our homes expanded, both in terms of scale and perspective. Vibrant colour palettes mimic food-stuffs, with the familial table often centrally placed.

In Rafaela de Ascanio's installation, consisting of painting, sculpture and ceramic, she focuses on the ritual act of feasting. Taking antiquity as a starting point, the works included in FANCY A BITE? re-evaluate the importance of meals as esoteric pagan practices, as well as gendered occasions. Inserting women into her works, they are defiant, powerful and importantly, very much in charge. De Ascanio's work also alludes to her cultural heritage, with early years spent in the volcanic Canary Islands, bleeding into her tropical colour palettes.

The exhibition brings together contemporary woman artists making work exploring the culinary, the delicious and the domestic. Through the pieces on show, wider issues are brought to light surrounding gendered relations, class relations and cultural heritage. The act of collective dining is inherently political. Shared meals, both historically and in the present, cement relationships, encode social hierarchies and delineate boundaries surrounding class and gender, inadvertently mirroring wider society. Through a joyful yet complex display of artwork, STUDIO WEST creates a welcoming environment within which we may reflect on the role food plays in our own lives.

Alongside the exhibition, the artists have collectively created a recipe book of dishes that hold personal resonances. The recipe book is an intimate and tactile representation of the unique associations each artist has with food and nourishment. The exhibition coincides with Kensington + Chelsea Art Week 2022, themed 'Nourish', forming part of a wider celebration of enrichment for the mind, body and soul across the borough.

## ABOUT STUDIO WEST

STUDIO WEST is an art gallery in Notting Hill founded in 2021 by curator Caroline Boseley. Its annual exhibition and events programme features the work of the UK's most exciting emerging and newly established artists. It endeavours to fully support the artists it works with through mentorship, hosting opportunities, network building and knowledge sharing, nurturing their growth and helping them to build sustained professional careers without requiring exclusive representation. For collectors, it offers the opportunity to learn more about London's vibrant emerging art scene and purchase artwork made by incredibly promising talents.

Since inception, STUDIO WEST's values have remained the same. It aims to engage fully and authentically with the local community, create a comfortable and welcoming space for all visitors, encourage investment in contemporary art created by emerging and newly established artists and, most importantly, always prioritise the needs of the artists' it works with.

The gallery opened in November 2021 with a duo show by Victoria Cantons and Xu Yang and has since hosted multiple group exhibitions, including 'The Reality in Whytch You Create', 'Fancy a Bite?', 'GROUNDWORK', 'SKIN DEEP' and 'The Angel in the House', and three solo shows with Karolina Albricht, Lydia Makin and Brynley Odu Davies respectively. The gallery runs an annual Open Call Exhibition and Art Prize titled 'NOW Introducing' that invites applications from any artist currently studying on or recently graduated from a London based BA, MA or alternative study programme.

STUDIO WEST is becoming known for thoughtful concept-driven exhibitions, authentic community engagement, and offering comprehensive support to London's emerging artists.

## STUDIO WEST

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