

Sweet and processed foods are the subject of works by artists in GreenHill's spring exhibition SWEET. Foods from designer cupcakes and culinary confections to Twinkies and Frosted Flakes are explored by the artists in SWEET. Painters Rachel Campbell, Bethany Pierce, and Stacy Crabill; and multi-media artists Kristine Baumlier-Faber, Jillian Ohl, Paul Rousso, Robin Frohardt and Ed Bing Lee investigate the cultural significance of food and the emotions enlisted by the senses of taste and aroma. Curator Edie Carpenter states: "Sweet foods are portrayed by these artists as symbols of Pop culture, ephemeral triumphs of the baker's craft, and magnets for consumer taste buds, engaging visitors in a sensory exploration of food as an object of beauty and temptation."

Raleigh artist Kristen Baumlier-Faber's photographic installations present familiar processed foods such as donuts and Tang in innovative ways through combining photography, mixed media and food. Large format close-up photographs mounted on circular panels are presented next to four-gallon bowls of the foods portrayed. The glittering surface of a pool of Tang appears depthless in Baumlier-Faber's photograph and evokes one of the unique qualities of this early processed food put on the market in 1959: Tang uses sugar in a unique way so that there is no sweetness saturation point. Baumlier-Faber hopes that her work will open conversations about how the food industry influences what and how much we eat; manipulating consumer tastes for food in ways we are largely unaware of.

Asheville painter Bethany Pierce's paintings of desserts transform oil paint into luscious textures of frothy cooked icing or creamy ganache. Painting desserts can be difficult she notes: "Beneath the spotlights, they spill and slip and lean, forcing me to work with equal parts spontaneity and deliberation. Inevitably my perfectly composed still life arrangements fall apart. The ice cream melts, the donuts mold, the cakes calcify." The emotional resonance Pierce draws from her still life subjects evokes the passage of time. She taps into the history of art and 18th-century "*momento mori*" still lifes that were also a reflection on the transient nature of earthly goods. The popularity of culinary television shows devoted to desserts speaks to our ongoing fascination with extravagant cakes and sweets. For Pierce this is no surprise, and has "nothing to do with sustenance and everything to do with how we feel or want to feel. We bake them to express love; we buy them to indulge. They soothe our broken hearts, even as they invite guilt and glut."

The paintings of Rachel Campbell suggest celebrations in which cakes and desserts play a starring role. Inspired by a recent trip to Germany, Campbell's paintings of rows of cakes are deployed like a corps de ballet - each element

unique yet complimentary. Elegant tiered pastry servers and titles such as “Afternoon Tea” evoke old-world traditions. Bright clear colors and pared down compositions recall the iconic paintings of Wayne Thiebaud. They also invite the viewer to consider repasts as domestic rituals, sequestered moments carved out from a never-ending flow. “Life, Stilled,” depicting Campbell’s work table with brushes, plants, and an unopened box of donuts suggests that for Campbell food, like art should be savored slowly and has the ability to even suspend time. A similar sensibility is channeled by the delicate forms of ice-cream cones and pie slices by contemporary fiber artist Ed Bing Lee. These intricate three-dimensional sculptures are made from woven beads. Lee’s knotting process stemmed from his attraction to the work of George Seurat and the technical aspects of pointillism - the placement of individual and differing dots of hues, values, and intensity to create a field of color and imagery. Lee’s works will be seen in North Carolina for the first time in *SWEET*.

Artists Jillian Ohl, Stacy Crabill, Robin Frohardt and Paul Rousso are all inspired by the colorful packaging of candy, cereal, and other treats. Ohl contrasts the experience of eating cereal to the heroic figures that are featured on cereal boxes. Crabill combines fortune cookie texts, labels, and vintage photos in collage-like works that suggest the hidden messages sweet foods can project. Frohardt fabricates *trompe l’oeil* cakes and other foods out of plastic bags to heighten our awareness of the impact of mass-produced food. Rousso’s monumental wall reliefs based on candy wrappers function both as abstractions and as odes to the history of candy, contrasting contemporary designs with older two-color candy wrappers.

*SWEET* is accompanied by a host of family-friendly associated programs designed to educate the public about nutrition and healthy eating habits through art-making activities. Two community conversations will be hosted at GreenHill addressing food marketing and consumer choice as well as “designer foods” that are fabricated to make us always want more. A multi-generational food and art party for sweet-lovers of all ages, “Play With Your Food,” will be held on July 13 and feature drop-in art workshops, cake decorating demonstrations, cupcake contests and more to savor the summer.

Edie Carpenter