

Art review: A sculptor goes 2-D, and the Portland library looks at food in our lives
Jorge Arango, Maine Sunday Telegram, June 7, 2023

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

Artist Lin Lisberger and scholar-author Myron Beasley have curated a show ostensibly about food. But the interesting thing about “Sustenance” is that food is merely a way into thinking about larger ramifications of food in our lives – from our dependence upon it for survival to the insalubrious effects that can result from our pursuit of it.

Lisberger’s own skillfully sculpted works, literal in one way, are more about sculpture than food. “Loaded Hotdog” imagines this American staple in wood except for the squirt of mustard (a metal coil) and lettuce (rotary saw blades). She also offers a hamburger and a bagel sandwich. It’s their non-illusionistic integrity that is more interesting. Rather than Peter Anton’s sweets or Claes Oldenburg’s burgers and cakes, these retain their connection to carving, revealed in tool marks that cut and chiseled the images.



Lin Lisberger, “Loaded Hotdog” Photo by Luc Demers

Some artists reference food gathering and harvesting (Mi’Kmaq artist Richard Silliboy’s impeccably crafted ash basket and Aminata Conteh’s metal basket-like sculpture). Others speak

to food as comfort and a vehicle for community, most notably Rachel E. Church, who created a handmade book where recipes are printed on kitchen cloths. Each has a corresponding paper plate printed with the picture of the dish and/or the originator of the recipe. The work celebrates the way cooking brings people – particularly women – of a community together.

Environmental impacts manifest in various ways. Side X Side, an arts-integrated program in which a teaching artist collaborates with third-graders on art that responds to education about race, income, food insecurity and opportunity inequality, is one of my favorites. While studying river ecology and migratory salmon, artist Pamela Moulton and her charges made plates of food and schools of fish using recycled denim.



Plates of food and schools of fish using recycled denim made through a Side X Side collaboration between third-graders from the Talbot School and teaching artist Pamela Moulton. *Photo by Lin Lisberger*

The loveliness of Jill Pelto's watercolors are deceiving, something her titles clarify: "Salmon Population Decline," "Overgrown" and "Habitat Degradation: Ocean Acidification." Celeste Roberge's seaweed-coated boots and swimsuit look eerily as if the ocean has claimed the bodies that once filled them. (The title of the boots is "Seaweed Will Be Lapping at Your Doorstep," indicating the imminence of rising sea levels due to global warming.)

Other political issues appear in Daniel Minter's "Bouquet for Fire," in which a boat symbolizing the Atlantic Crossing and the human and economic costs of slavery and racism explodes with a crop of okra (a staple of Southern African-based cooking). Valerie Hegarty also comments on the crime of slavery with her picture of a decadent banquet being picked apart by crows in the dining room of Cane Acres Plantation in South Carolina. To the home's 18th-century resident Thomas Cheverall, who sired three children with his mulatto slave (22 enslaved people farmed his crops), the work seems to say, "The party's over."