

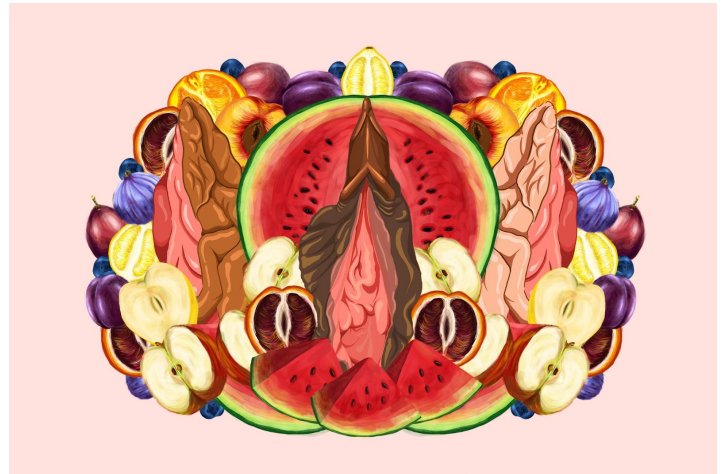
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eating: Otherness
March 16 - April 29, 2023

Artists: **Destiny Belgrave, May Maylisa Cat, Ilana Yacine Harris-Babou, Jeanne F. Jalandoni, Hayoon Jay Lee, TJ Shin**

Curated by **Emily Alesandrini and Danni Shen**

Image: Destiny Belgrave, *Vitamin V*, 2017, Digital painting on satin, 35.75 x 53 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



In her seminal essay, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” (1992), author and activist bell hooks writes: “The overriding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.”¹ The artists in *Eating: Otherness* explore food, consumption and the body on their own terms, asserting an inedibility and agency beyond colonial definitions. Expanding on, and sometimes reconfiguring, various aesthetic traditions and popular representations of foodstuffs, the works in this exhibition take on critical, sociocultural investigations of food-related topics such as meal preparation, wellness culture, and culinary appropriation, while highlighting various forms of sustenance and their meaningful sources. At the heart of this project is also a celebration of food-centered relations via abundance, as well as of intergenerational, ancestral, and embodied knowledge. For artists of various diasporas in the city, food is especially situated among these convoluted factors, and it is at these junctures that works by **Destiny Belgrave, May Maylisa Cat, Ilana Yacine Harris-Babou, Jeanne F. Jalandoni, Hayoon Jay Lee, and TJ Shin** intervene.

This project further acknowledges the homogenizing, colonial, white-supremacist history of the consumption of women’s bodies and labor, while simultaneously serving as a rebuttal to those forces that continue to infringe upon our diverse and specific relations to wellbeing, food security, and bodily autonomy. *Eating: Otherness* prompts us to reconsider both the notions of eating and otherness: Can what we *consume*, a recipe, cooking, or the rituals of a meal, also be a form of resistance and refusal? Can the diversity found in knowledge via food present radical *other* ways of being in the world?

May Maylisa Cat is a multidisciplinary artist whose work spans video, painting, glass, and live performance to investigate culinary appropriation and gastronomic exploitation. Her work engages with varying notions of “authenticity” and community, and the fantasy of the consumable “Other.” The included project *Fok Fok Industries* (2019-present) is a multi-media genre piece re-appropriating and mimicking the award-winning, white-owned Thai restaurant franchise PokPok, and uses digital world-building, media, performance art, and original fake merchandise, as well as a soundtrack to address capitalist consumption and subversive resistance language from Southeast Asia. Utilizing copycat branding and intellectual property loopholes as a Trojan horse, the project

¹ bell hooks, “Eating the other: Desire and resistance.” In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, pp. 21–39. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

incorporates art interventions and worldmaking performances in the style of faux reality TV shows, using humor to interrogate the commodification of culture via food and cuisine artifacts.

Hayoon Jay Lee's food-centered, often participatory performance-based practice traces rice as both an object and metaphor that serves as a diverse building block for civilizations, as well as the basis for social inequities that extends into dialogues around the geopolitics of "food security." In a new two-part installation, the artist creates a meditative environment that serves as a space for contemplation amongst material juxtapositions such as rice, human hair, animal bones, coins, medicine capsules, and earth.

Bajan and African American artist **Destiny Belgrave** utilizes mixed media, papercutting, digital painting, and textile to explore themes of upbringing, family ritual, spiritual inheritance, and ancestral ties. In what can be read as a rebuke of Judy Chicago's censored and exclusionary treatment of the Sojourner Truth plate in *The Dinner Party*, 1974–1979, Belgrave's digital painting, *Vitamin V*, 2017, features a dark-skinned, asymmetrical, open vagina amid ripe and succulent watermelon, blood oranges, peaches, and lighter skinned labia on either side. Belgrave's work conveys the celebratory indulgence of feasting, fertility and the spiritual power of breaking bread in ritual, all with and through a sanctified black body.

Painter and textile artist **Jeanne F. Jalandoni** employs family photos, childhood memories and foods (lumpia, mangos, and flan) to explore notions of "Filipino Americanism." Grappling with the Philippine's history of colonial exploitation by Spain, the United States, and Japan, Jalandoni explores hybrid identities and the embodiment of multiple through anthropomorphic, ancestral portraiture. In the artist's 2018 work, *Carabao (Water-Buffalo)*, a four-handed woman wears the kimono of Jalandoni's grandmother as she picks mangos within a frame of blooming flowers. The water-buffalo, a symbol of the Philippines, abandons the Western utensils of forks and spoons in favor of the strength and capacity of her own hands.

Ilana Yacine Harris-Babou appropriates the aspirational tropes of consumer, popular, and wellness culture in her two video works *Cooking with the Erotic* (2016), featuring the artist and her mother, and *Leaf of Life* (2022), which includes footage of the herbalist popularly known as Dr. Sebi, who gained a global following for promoting diets and treatments that eschewed "Caucasian food" and complemented "the African gene structure," based on the underlying question of: "What were we eating before we were taken from Africa, before there was an invasion by the man from Europe?" Before his death in 2016, the (unlicensed) doctor was also convicted of fraud for claiming that his treatments cured various illnesses. Through *Leaf of Life* (2022), Harris-Babou considers the complex tensions between tradition, myth, and biopolitics—and asks how refusal of American institutions and industries sustain the continued appeal of Dr. Sebi's message.

As revealed through research ephemera from **TJ Shin's** durational, grow/dinner/and fermentation-based project entitled *Microbial Speculations on Our Gut Feelings* (2020), the artist's work responds to research from 2018 published in the scientific journal *Cell* that shows how immigrants lose their native gastrointestinal microbes within 6-9 months after arriving in the United States, and are increasingly susceptible to metabolic disease as their gut microbiomes are figuratively and literally, colonized by exposure to the standard American diet and replaced by more Euro-American gut bacterium. What Shin ultimately proposes through this work is that food, through Korean fermentation and microbiological introspection, can serve as a protection and transformational tactic against the assimilating forces of white supremacy, Westernization, and capitalism. To go with one's gut feelings in this case, is to not only understand, but also consume and therefore embody traditional ways of growing and preparing food.



PROGRAMS AND EVENTS:

Thursday, April 6, 6-7:30 PM

via Zoom

Food Justice & Art Open Dialogue with Chantel Kemp and DK Kinard, co-founders of the Gardens at NYCHA program with GrowNYC

This online conversation is free and open to the public. This program will be recorded [RSVP HERE](#)

Thursday, April 20, 6-8 PM

EFA Project Space

Potluck & Artist Talk

This event includes food and refreshments, as well as conversation with the artists and curators.

Free and open to the public.

Saturday, April 22, 12-1 PM

Phoenix Community Garden, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn

Earth Day Farmstand / Garden Tour & What's in the Bag snack-making session with seasonal produce with Marcia Denson, Garden Elder and Food Justice Warrior

This event is free and open to the public with limited capacity. [RSVP HERE](#)

*The exhibition will also include a printed booklet featuring a commissioned essay on food and Taiwanese-American identity entitled *Lunch at Tunghai*, by speculative food writer and researcher Suqi Karen Sims. Sims's work at the intersections of food culture, myth, and nontraditional forms, has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Heated*, and *Put A Egg On It*, among others. She is an assistant editor for the literary journal *Five Points*, where she writes on food and literature. As a freelance food writer, she has also written for *Compass* (a bilingual food magazine based in Taichung, Taiwan), *Westchester Magazine*, and *Mashed*. She runs the food blog [@diningdecatour](#).*

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PRESS INQUIRIES

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EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it, the communities that arise because of it, and to everyday life. By providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists, curators, and other participants to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas. The program is based on Open Calls as well as invitational exhibitions and projects. It is a home for emerging, mid-career, as well as established curators and artists. We focus our attention on community engagement and public programming. www.projectspace-efanyc.org **The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA)** is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and EFA Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA is a catalyst for cultural growth, stimulating new interactions between artists, creative communities, and the public. www.efanyc.org EFA Project Space is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and additional funding from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.