

GALLERIES PROGRAM 2012
GUT FEELING
ELIZABETH WILLING
8-25 AUGUST

GUT FEELING
ELIZABETH WILLING
ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

!Metro Arts

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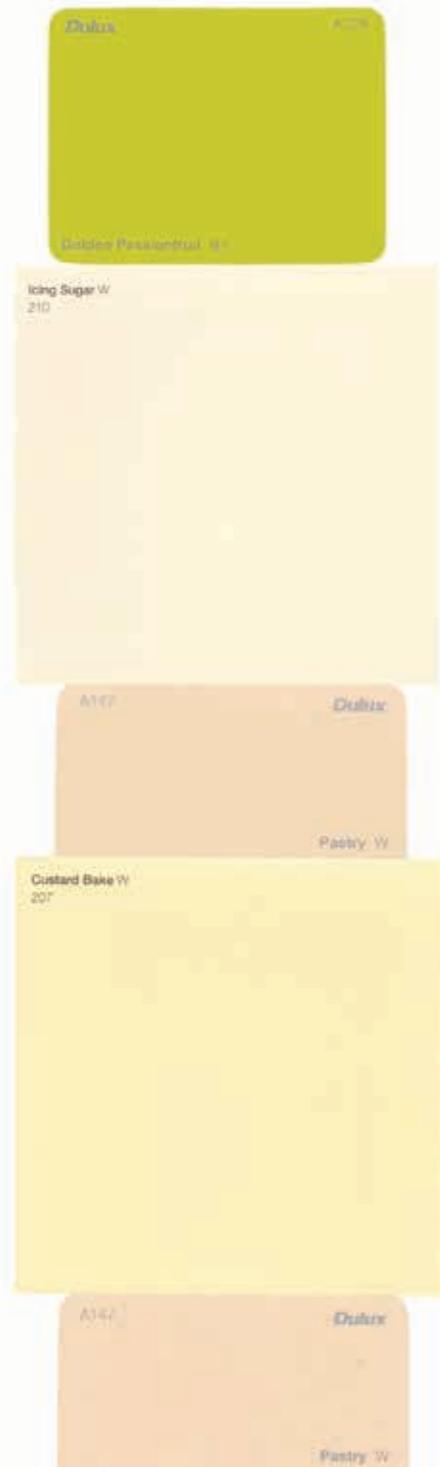
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ELIZABETH WILLING: GUT FEELING

Food lies at the heart of Elizabeth Willing's practice. It's her inspiration, her subject matter and her material. Fragrances and flavours draw us immediately to specific times and places and Willing knows that the sensory power of food is not to be underestimated. Through her work she conjures up a sense of nostalgia oft associated with sucking on a lollipop or nibbling on a piece of home-baked cake. But Willing's trips down memory lane are also cleverly constructed entry points into more complex conversations about food – particularly about food production and consumerism. Added to this is the artist's deep engagement with the history of art. She often explores the very materiality of her edible subjects via the tenets of modernism and architecture.

Gut Feeling, Willing's first solo exhibition at Metro Arts, contains a series of sculptures, paintings and installations that encapsulate the artist's different approaches to food. Sometimes it's the formalism of her materials that comes to the fore. Willing's wall paintings *Vanilla Slice* and *Banoffee Pie* initially recall the lofty abstractions of Mark Rothko, coolly translated into orderly bands of creams and browns. But these aesthetic groupings also have a culinary twist. The artist only uses paints with delectable names like 'Pastry', 'Caramel sundae', 'Gold banana', and 'Whispy cream'. Furthermore, the brown bands or 'ingredients' are sliced up into exact proportions that recall an ice-cream sandwich, or a brownie. Describing the works, Willing says they are "attempting to tie together the idea of confectionary as architecture, exploring the structural qualities of food and then relating that to the domestic and decor".

This statement reveals the artist's interest in the way that recipes and the ingredients they contain are structured and built. Adopting an almost scientific approach, she often reconfigures familiar foodstuffs to make new art forms that depart significantly from their original constituents. Take her *Liquid Breakfasts* for example; in which powdered food products like Ovaltine and Nesquik are individually mixed by the artist into tough, tactile doughs. The final form of these works is determined by the materials themselves; they're left to collapse into modest, sculptural folds on the floor. As well as being wonderfully anticlimactic, they also reveal the artist's interest in play.



Kisses is equally cheeky. While it might look like the ceiling of Metro Arts has been peppered with 'spit balls', the little white lumps are in fact made from flower paste icing, thus making the objects doubly unsavoury. Willing is fascinated by the artistry of wedding cake decorations and the hours of handcrafting they involve. This type of manipulation goes directly against our reluctance to eat food that has been handled by others. Her stucco-like *Liquorice Wall* operates on a similar principle. Despite retaining its appealing fragrance, the confection is smeared onto the wall by hand, and is thus 'ruined' by the artist's fingerprints. Often treading the line between delectation and repulsion, Willing says; "It's interesting how quickly food can make the transformation from edible to inedible, enticing to revolting, for example dropping food on the ground, eating too much, food on a plate transferred into the sink becomes instantly inedible".

This sense of repulsion is taken to the extreme with *Stew*. For some time the artist has been collecting browning images of meat casseroles from 1970s cookbooks. She knits together the kitschy images as seamlessly as possible, the result being a discoloured mass of cooked flesh creeping across the wall. Far removed from the pleasures associated with a home-cooked meal, en masse the creeping stew recalls the sheer scale of production and consumption associated with the industrial food industry. Willing is particularly interested in "ideas around food choices, the anxieties around that and the forms food goes through in modern food production". We live in an age where food is increasingly manipulated and produced in unnatural ways, as Willing claims; "It's pretty amazing how little food actually looks like food anymore, it's so far removed and altered from its original source. I wonder when it stops becoming food?"

This line of thinking manifests itself throughout the artist's oeuvre. Willing's work is intentionally sweet, sometimes sickly. As well as being elegantly resolved it is often infused with humour – a mechanism employed to disarm the viewer, encouraging them to not only recall pleasant culinary memories, but to also consider what it means to be a consumer; to both enjoy food, and to be greedy.

| SERENA BENTLEY