

Susan Hobbs

Meech Boakye

1997 born in Winnipeg
2013 B.A. University of Toronto, Hon. Visual Studies

Selected Exhibitions

2021 *Collective Offerings*, Art Gallery of Guelph, Guelph
 Incubator, Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, Clarington
 You just hold your breath, the plumb, Toronto
2020 *no-longer-being-able-to-be-able*, Skelf UK, *virtual*
 Food Beyond Extraction, Beyond Extraction Counter-Conference
 Shelley Peterson Student Exhibition, Art Museum UofT, Toronto
2019 *Video Fever*, Trinity Square Video, Toronto
 Involuntary Escapism, Margin of Eras Gallery, Toronto
2018 *Shelley Peterson Student Exhibition*, Art Museum UofT, Toronto

Other Activities

2020 Speaker, *Arts & Gentrification Panel*, Black Futures TO, Toronto
2019 Resident, Trinity Square Video, Toronto

Susan Hobbs

...

Canadian artist Meech Boakye started experimenting seriously with gelatin only recently, drawing from similar veins of inspiration as Franklin, but splitting their political emphases between bodily reparation, environmental remediation, and communal labour practices. Channeling influences that span bioplastic cookbooks, cyborgian critical theory, and mutual aid, Boakye's enchanting gelatine works grapple with similar antagonisms as Griffin Hunt's and Telford-Keogh's: the perverse intrigue of our contemporary techno-capitalist material landscape, and the strangeness of producing art against the backdrop of the planet's ineluctable deterioration. Boakye became intrigued by gelatin and aspics when they noticed an unusual uptick in gelatin-oriented images across the internet in recent years; their research threads led them to connect gelatin to its longer histories of labour, gender, preservation, and healing. Boakye's works now mobilize gelatin as a kind of occult conduit, molding sheets and shapes that straddle the substance's ambiguity and ambivalence, hold it up to the light, once again refract our historical moment through these resilient material poetics. In a recent exchange, Boakye relayed to me that one friend, upon interacting with one of these gelatin works, "remarked that it smelled both of sewage and (fondly) of their grandmother's cooking."

-Miles Rufelds, *Aspic Sculpture IV: Material Poetics*, Public Parking, 2021

<http://thisispublicparking.com/posts/aspic-sculpture-iv-material-poetics>

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

The Art of Food: In Conversation with Meech Boakye



Meech Boakye. *Bioplastic Experiments III*. Image courtesy of the artist.

Interview by Adi Berardini, *Femme Art Review*, 2021

Scrolling down [Meech Boakye](#)'s Instagram feed truly demonstrates the art of food— I view a pop of red from cherry tomatoes, floral patterns emerging on crackers, freshly grown asparagus, and bread twisting and turning. The images are not just appetite-inducing, but create a sense of intrigue through their detailed presentation.

Interdisciplinary artist Meech Boakye performs material research as a ritual, exploring alternatives to extraction and exploitation through care and nurturance. As they further describe, “the markers of my identity and my connection to place has always been fluid and liminal, thus hard to describe in brief. I’ve found that art focused on these peripheries and in-betweens is a social space. It is through alienation that I am drawn to making and through making I’ve found myself alongside others again.”

Through their work, they have begun to explore the potential of preparing food, foraging, and gardening, as an avenue for communal care and as a means of resistance. They also seek to uncover the hidden labour embedded in neoliberal practices. Meech speaks more about their art and creative process in the following interview.

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs



Meech Boakye. *DIY Bath and Body Works Imitation Cold Process Soap Tutorial!* still. Image courtesy of the artist.

Your film [DIY Bath and Body Works Imitation Cold Process Soap Tutorial](#) is a satirical take on Youtube tutorial videos, commenting on the invisibility of labour and flattening of cultural identity through commodification. Can you explain more about the film and your process?

I recently went back to this work to participate in this online exhibition at [Skelf](#), a virtual projects space. The show, curated by Hang Li, *no-longer-being-able-to-be-able*, is a response to the neoliberal ideology of constant consumption and productivity, attempting to discuss art-making amidst burnout, overstimulation, and a global crisis. I feel like I'm a very different person than the one that made this work, only a year later, but this year has been long. I made it because I needed to find a hobby. The summer prior, I was dreading winter, as I usually do, as I get pretty bad seasonal depression post-daylight savings. I thought, "What can I do this winter to fill up my free time?" I went on YouTube for a while and just sort of found myself in the world of soap making. It was kind of random, but I think the algorithm was working in my favour.

I was just struck by the number of white soap-makers there were and the gender demographics of soapmaking, which was unsurprising but kind of strange in its repetition. I was just making a video about that originally, not seeing myself, and then I started thinking a bit deeper about soap and cleansing and purity and contamination, etc., words with incredibly loaded, racial, and class undertones that felt even stranger juxtaposed with these soapfluencers on YouTube. We were starting to hear about what was happening in Wuhan and I wasn't sure if it was too early to be worried yet. I had a stack of sea island cotton scented soap and this new hobby that coincided with a global pandemic. After that, I think the meaning has shifted, or at least my relation to it has.

I was thinking about the idea of visibly invisible labour. Sondra Perry, in her exhibition [Typhoon Coming On](#), has a work that projects a moving image of her skin, zoomed in to the point of being unrecognizable as a smooth membrane, opposite a chroma blue projection. Like Perry, I was thinking about the depiction of Black and Brown skin in film and TV, which

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

complicates the chroma blue or green screen as a relation to the default white skin tone. I used the chroma blue morph-suit to indicate this idea of something visible, but knowingly made invisible; that these things unfolding around us, both literally and indirectly, are built upon the institution of chattel slavery and normalized through ideology.

The work was a satirical take on these videos using a Bath and Body Works called *Sea Island Cotton*. I combined the scents *Ocean Breeze* and *Fresh Cotton* to approximate the Caribbean cotton plantation dreamt up by Bath & Body Works. I made a large soap bar that could hold an iPhone, so that when you touch it to watch the video, it leaves a residue. Again, the residue acts as this visibly invisible thing; you're still aware of it even though you can't really see it. It leaves you with the silhouette of something.



Meech Boakye. *Is This Self Care?* installation shot, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

In your work *Is This Self Care?* you explore the idea of transplantation and also use marijuana relating to its recent legalization and its use for “self-care,” exploring how this relates to white privilege. Can you discuss this project and its inspiration?

I wasn't actually thinking about gardening as self-care until I showed the work. Gardening has become much more prominent as a result of that project, especially as I stay in my family home during quarantine. Gardening in downtown Toronto was pretty restrictive, but I was able to garden indoors with a hydroponic system called an AeroGarden. I wanted to use it to grow weed.

I went online shopping and was so fascinated by the images of people using superfluous tools, the ones with one function like an avocado slicer. This hydroponics machine was kind of unnecessary and expensive. It touted the cleanliness of not using soil and how much faster you could grow a salad on your kitchen counter than in the garden (which is somewhat true). I also noticed that everyone modelling the machine—it's kind of a common theme—is white. There were these images of white women who were growing lettuce, their overly expressive smiles reminded me of that stock image of the white woman enjoying a salad a bit too much. For some reason, the first thing I thought was, “what if I used this thing to grow weed instead of herbs and lettuce?” which was something I still felt so uncomfortable doing even in a place where it's legalized. I even had half of the amount of plants that were technically legal.

It was one of those projects that I found out what it meant as I did it. As it was living, it's one of those works that can't be recreated, well it could but its meaning would shift as it grew. I had some printed images of these women growing the lettuce framed by these hemp growing mats. I was also exploring the idea that hemp is the part of the plant that's considered more acceptable was used for utility like in food or clothing, but the part that you get pleasure out of was criminalized.

You use food and natural processes as a form of artistic expression, the things you make are incredible—How did you first begin exploring food as an art medium? How does using food and gardening as a medium relate to your everyday life and act as a way to explore ideas of communal care?

As I was making soap and figuring out what I wanted to do with my time (while trying to get a bit less screen time and work with my hands more), I became interested in the entire timeline of objects and living things. I didn't just want to know how to make a pasta meal for dinner but I wanted to know how to make pasta dough, how to grind flour, how to grow wheat—essentially trying to acknowledge the labour embedded in objects by making things from scratch. And this was partly an attempt for a new hobby to pass the time, but also a larger web of thinking I was beginning to engage with to remedy the alienation that I was deeply feeling.

A lot of the things I've made are kind of pointlessly rigorous. Well, not in the sense that there is no point in making them, but, and I feel this especially being at home with my family, I'm

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

often asked “why are you doing this?” And I don’t really know why. I just like the process and the presence of making something somewhat challenging from scratch. Some days I’m just killing time. Other days I’m learning how to take care.

I also like the idea that I can make something that takes several days and eat it with people I love in thirty minutes. That ephemerality is incredibly rewarding, it reminds [me] that making a thing, not just the end product, is what I enjoy about art. I’m sure that’s the same for most artists.

When the pandemic started getting bad and lockdown began, my immediate thought was that I don’t want to make art. Making art during a crisis felt wrong, or just irrelevant in some way, and I’ve been trying to get to the root of why I thought that. I also didn’t really stop, I just started making art differently. The thing about food is that it has a purpose, I can share it, I can eat it and nourish myself. Even in a superfluous state, it goes somewhere useful. I don’t really believe that art has to be utile in that way, pleasure is “useful,” but that distinction helps justify art making for me as my surroundings continue to fall apart.



Meech Boakye. *Bioplastics IV*. Image Courtesy of the Artist.

In what ways are you interested in using food as a means of social practice, or social resistance, through artistic intervention?

In February of last year, I was part of a collaborative project led by an artist I admire dearly, [Dana Prieto](#), chef [Milo Ramirez](#), architect [Reza Nik](#) and I. Beyond Extraction, in conversation with the [Beyond Extraction](#) Counter Conference to PDAC (Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada), a networking event for the biggest and villainous corporate extractors worldwide. We created this mobile food stand to serve people protesting outside the convention center at the People before Profit rally. We fed protesters meals from the

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

communities affected by extraction in the three countries that were sponsoring this year's conference—Brazil, Peru and Canada. And we were sharing these meals not just to nourish people on a very cold afternoon, but [the] food was a way to connect us to these sites of extraction. As Indigenous populations are usually the most harmed through mining practices, the recipes were mainly Indigenous in origin. I was reminded, sweetly, how food can bring people together. If anything, free food can easily get a smile. It was honestly a really cool experience. We were serving chili and it was such a cold day. This was right before the pandemic too, or right before the restrictions of the pandemic, and we were handing out food in a crowd. It was the last time I would be around such a large group of people for a while.

I've begun to think about social practice art differently as I get more involved in community organizing. For a while, I wanted to make art *about* politics and social issues, but it was merely illustration, pointing at things. I've shifted to work as process rather than making a work about something. Making food has allowed me to connect making with communal care, performing labour as an expression of love to share with living things. I think this work, especially performed at the time it was performed, was an important inception point in thinking about sharing food as care and as social practice.

Making food has allowed me to connect making with communal care, performing labour as an expression of love to share with living things.

I've spent most of my time in quarantine with my family and making food for them as our small community unit has been incredibly fulfilling. For a while I also spent a lot of time on Instagram, connecting with a variety of weird and wonderful food accounts that sprang up during the pandemic. I've been connecting with people online by sharing my food creations in a way that I never have before. Food connects to each of us so deeply and we all want to talk about why. I am trying to translate this discrete individual ritual into a cyber-social space I'm clinging onto because it's missing right now. But frankly, it has always left me with a lasting sense of ennui.

Who are some artists that inspire you and your practice?

Sondra Perry, Tiare Ribeaux's [Bioplastics Cookbook for Ritual Healing from Petrochemical Landscapes](#) guides my practice with thoughts on communal material research as rituals for healing from extraction and tools for resistance. Sharona Franklin is a huge influence, she originally got me interested in gelatin and healing. When I first saw Franklin's work, I just thought, "I've never seen food that looks like this," it just blew my mind. Her work got me interested in edibility, and the idea of something being edible but looking sort of strange is intriguing and curious and beautiful.

I kept weaving in and out of it but I finally finished reading *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, which taught me a lot and was also a dream to read. *The Mushroom at the end of the World* by Anna Tsing helped me understand assemblages and loving a forest. In the winter I tend towards nature books, but specifically, those tend towards social ecology. I also read recently various books about cephalopods, and trees and psychedelic plants.

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064

Susan Hobbs

This isn't an artist, but walking has become part of my practice as well. Being able to rest and walk, and look at the fractals in the leaves and look for mushrooms. That's been just as important for me right now.

I know what you mean. I have an obsession with queer ecology as of lately, and my inspirations have been books as well.

When I think of books and walks as inspirations, I don't mean they specifically influence the content of the work, but they sort of become part of the work. The rest they provide, the ability to reflect on what you are creating before or after or during, this part of the process is just as imperative to making art. We are constantly told to be productive as if our productivity is also a measure of our value as a person. Rest is the most important thing you can do to continue going.

<https://femmeartreview.com/2021/02/22/in-conversation-with-meech-boakye/>

Susan Hobbs

AGO Talks Interview, Madelyne Beckles

<https://ago.ca/events/talking-art-and-food>

Susan Hobbs Gallery Inc.
137 Tecumseth Street
Toronto, Canada M6J 2H2
Telephone 416 504 3699
Facsimile 416 504 8064