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GINA BEAVERS

Food porn, Instagram, and painting

"I KNOW IT WHEN I see it," says Gina Beavers, inadvertently quoting Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart from 1964 as he explained how he instinctually identified hard-core pornography. It's an amusing coincidence, considering that Beavers is talking about the gut feeling she gets when trawling Instagram photos hashtagged #foodporn, hunting for compositionally appropriate source material for her paintings. A range of them were on view earlier this year at **Retrospective** in Hudson, New York: sculpturally thick renderings of the original images, depicting things like pastries, bread loaves, and lobster claws. In some cases the square images are singular; more recently, Beavers has been experimenting with reproducing the multifaceted, gridded shots that Instagram users can create using third-party apps. ("They can't get enough angles of the kimchi hot dogs!" Beavers says, referring to one painting based on an image in which the foodstuff in question is explored from all sides.)

These paintings aren't simple reproductions of the ubiquitous "this is what I ate today" images shared via social media. "If I paint something directly from a photo it looks like a copy," she explains. Beavers constructs a base for the image, generally using a thickened acrylic medium that she carves and manipulates with a simple

plastic deli knife. Once the representative shapes are built, she paints on top of them; the finished works have a lumpy, physical quality, as if you could indeed scoop them off the wall and devour them. The artist mixes in various other agents in order to achieve specific effects, like the dappled skin on raw duck legs. Beavers's topographic surfaces have a gnarly depth, flirting with intentional kitsch, a bit like the dimensional tableaux of Llyn Foulkes. "Building up the work interferes with my ability," she says. "It looks a little more handmade. The painting is trying to mess with me, and I'm trying to calm and tame it."

For a solo exhibition this month at **Clifton Benevento** in New York, Beavers is moving away from the restaurant table. She's still mining Instagram feeds for material, though the selections are more eclectic: a shot of old carburetors; a gridded image of statue genitalia snapped at the Getty Villa. She's toying with some other possible photographs,

including one of a pair of female hands holding dice, with nails painted to match the black-on-white patterning. One in-progress painting hanging in the studio is based on a how-to image for applying eye shadow to create a "smoky eye," she says. That one "reminds me of what it feels like to make a painting," she notes. "You're using brushes, trying to make yourself look appealing. It's evolutionary. Mate with my painting!" She's still pondering how to sculpturally represent the eye's lashes, perhaps using bits of cut rubber



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tire or strips of colored acrylic.

This built-up, hands-on process comes from what Beavers terms a "crafty impulse," part of which she traces to her father—a retired hobbyist who builds mostly military-themed model installations out of simple materials. Her own practice is similarly obsessive and labor-intensive, albeit focused on what she admits is the transient, eternally in-flux world of social media. "There's something perverse about poring over all these half-meaningless, never-ending photos and putting all this work into it," Beavers admits of her practice, which might artfully memorialize a stranger's ephemeral snapshot of a lobster dinner as a painting with real-world weight and permanence.

Does she think that the Internet has changed our brains, the way we process the world around us, I wonder. Beavers, who studied anthropology before turning to art, responds with a maxim borrowed from that field: "Things are never getting better and they're never getting worse," she says. "They're just what they are. We are test cases in this weird experiment—and what's going to be the end result?" In the attention-deficit context of digital oversharing, Beavers's strange, unwieldy paintings—her peculiar, delectable perversion—might simply be a way of hitting pause, of investing everyday images with humorous significance, one layer of acrylic medium at a time. —SCOTT INDRISIK

RIGHT:
Gina Beavers,
Kimchi Hot Dogs,
2014. Acrylic on
canvas, 30 x 30 in.

BELOW:
Beavers in her
Brooklyn
studio, 2014.



FROM LEFT: KYLE KNOBELL; GINA BEAVERS AND RETROSPECTIVE, HUDSON, NEW YORK