

6.7 MILLION TONNES: WE'VE BIN THROUGH A LOT

A COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION ABOUT FOOD WASTE AND FOOD JUSTICE

**28 April –
28 May 2022**

Art Exchange

By the MA Curating
Students, School of
Philosophy and Art History,
University of Essex

According to the Waste and Resources Action Programme, 6.7 million tonnes of food are wasted every year in the UK's households, the equivalent of 15 billion meals. Food connects us, nourishes culture, and is deeply embedded with everyone's identity. However, while the UN has declared an "international hunger emergency", one third of the world's food is thrown away during production, processing, distribution, retail, and consumption, and the food industry is responsible for more than 30% of total climate emissions. The promise of abundance and access to any food anywhere in the capitalist world, and the normalisation of the throwaway culture have led us to a wasteful lifestyle, from the bins filled to the brim in the kitchen to the plastic of our coffee cups and sandwich wrappers.

"6.7 Million Tonnes: We've Bin Through A Lot" brings together artworks which document and archive aesthetic, social, and political-driven projects, drawn from intimate experiences of the food system. Through mixed-media and research-based artworks from eight British and international artists, the exhibition highlights the challenges of food justice today through the works of Yiming Mao, Itamar Gilboa, Sean Roy Parker, explores the large-scale impacts of food waste on our daily environment with Cat Coulter, Klaus Pichler, and showcases practical solutions towards a sustainable and resilient food system based on care and recycling proposed by Liz Elton, Björn Steinar Blumenstein, and Lor-K.



CATRIONA COULTER

Seafood Takeaway, 2020,
cyanotype, 32x45cm.

Cat Coulter is a self-taught artist working both in Fife, Scotland, and London. Collecting plastic debris on the Scottish and Thames River shores, she turns the plastic pollution into the raw material of her artworks. From the collected trash, Cat Coulter creates assemblage sculptures, collages, and cyanotypes. Her work joins a worldwide artistic movement aiming to raise awareness about marine plastic pollution. This way, Cat Coulter is part of SplashTrash, an international platform gathering artists from all around the world willing to make a change through their art. In 2019, the UK generated 44kg of single-use plastic waste per person. If with the pandemic the massive use of single-used PPE has become an increasing source of pollution, plastic trash related to food is massively present in oceans and more globally water bodies pollution.

Seafood Takeaway is a cyanotype of found objects. Cyanotype is a photographic method used since the early years of photography, back in the 19th century. In this artwork, Cat Coulter uses this traditional method to raise consciousness about a very current and urgent matter: water pollution by plastic. The deep shades of blue refer to the underwater lighting and colours. However, instead of a fish ban, food related plastic debris is swimming in front of the spectator. Ice-cream plastic spoons, usually referring to holidays by the sea and childhood memories, belong to a dystopian world where marine fauna and flora has been replaced by plastic debris.

LIZ ELTON

Late Harvest, 2022,
paper sculpture (compostable cornstarch, vegetable dyes from kitchen waste, food colouring and silk), 400x250cm.

Compost Bin (Banana skins and Aubergines, Lilies and Carrots, Banana skins, Pips and Pith), 2022,
four prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag, 20x30cm (edition of 30).

Liz Elton is a British artist based in London. She takes inspiration from landscape and still-life painting to explore the potential of waste and the recycling of matter. Her works embrace their own ephemerality whilst addressing environmental issues such as the connection between soil health and food waste, or shifts in ecological thinking.

Late Harvest considers the connection between food waste and research suggesting our farmland is exhausted to the extent that it will only support a further 100 harvests. It is made using compostable cornstarch food waste recycling bags as a ground (themselves made from crops such as corn or potatoes), dyed with kitchen waste and food colouring and sewn together with silk. The material is light and floats as the air moves around it, so the work may appear to breathe as people walk past.

At home during lockdown Liz began recording kitchen waste on its way to compost. The editioned *Compost Bin* prints reference historical still-life painting, memento mori and consider questions of value. Vegetables, fruit and flowers coming into the home are tracked, triggering memories of choices made and events such as the closure and reopening of the local market and attendance at a funeral in 2020. Much of the food coming into the home is from market 'rescue boxes' of produce that would otherwise be discarded, evidenced in a compost bin full of skins of a particular fruit or vegetable. Each print purchase includes a donation to a food bank charity.



ITAMAR GILBOA

Food Chain Project, 2014,
32 plaster sculptures,
variable dimensions.

Born in Tel Aviv, Itamar Gilboa currently lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands. He has always been inspired by the power of numbers and the influence of science. His work, usually taking his own experiences as a starting point, is the result of thorough research and data collection. Gilboa collaborates with scientists, engineers and other artists crossing the boundaries of visual arts. The data he collects on his own physical presence is tantamount to something much more communal, perhaps even universal. His artistic practice can be described as a form of empathy empowered by scientific discoveries.

Itamar Gilboa started the *Food Chain Project* in 2014. For an entire year, he noted every food he consumed, about eight thousand items and one hundred different products, from which he created molds and plaster replicas. This visual manifestation of a one year-eating log resulted in a giant supermarket of white sculptures. As a dry visual inventory highlighting the global food distribution's dynamics, the list made the artist aware of his own patterns of consumption, which turned out to be closely connected to his past in Israel and his current migrant status in the Netherlands. Casting the products in white and stripping them of all labeling and branding focuses the spectator's attention on the profusion, underscoring the fact that this affluence is divided unequally in the world. Seventy percent of the project's profits are donated to NGOs fighting food issues, thereby creating a new food chain.

LOR-K

Eat Me, 2016,
installation (1 book and 1 video),
variable dimensions.

Lor-K is a French artist based in Paris. She studied art in the Sorbonne University and used to work in the retail sector where she was constantly confronted with overconsumption. Lor-K creates ephemeral artworks from waste found in the street. She destroys, transforms, and spray paints bulky items before returning them in the urban space to the sight of the passers-by. Thus, she highlights our rubbish and gives them a new identity by staging them in the heart of the city. In her studio, Lor-K documents her work through photographs, videos, prototypes, and writings to archive and transcribe the artistic process in the exhibition space.

Since 2016, Lor-K has been creating “urban recipes” from abandoned mattresses inspired by street food such as pizza, kebab, or donuts, to reflect on our global eating habits. Thirty of them are gathered in *Eat Me*, a cookbook published in 2019. Found in the street, the mattresses are transformed directly on the sidewalk, into appetizing sculptures. Saws, cutters, scotch tape, and spray cans become the utensils of an unusual kitchen. After preparation, dough, cream, filling, and grout, arise from the foam! Symbols of fast-food are present everywhere in our cities; the chosen dishes are universal and easily identifiable. Like our globalized food industry, pizza, paninis, kebabs, and other recipes are meticulously cooked to offer a buffet of realist rendering. Oversized and colourful, these new-world dishes attract all eyes. Abandoned in the cityscape, these previously repulsive mattresses suddenly become enticing. Page by page, this book reveals all the manufacturing secrets of the project.



YIMING MAO

Who Is Wasting The Cattle?,
oil painting on canvas, 60 x 60cm.

Yiming Mao is currently studying illustration at Camberwell College of Arts, in London. She tends to describe the subject as objectively and rationally as possible, focusing on the value of livestock in the consumer society endowed by human beings, trying to re-examine the meaning of life in the initial production link by observing the price fluctuations in the food market. Her installations, paintings and illustrations have been exhibited in China many times and have been honorable mentioned in The 3x3 International Illustration in 2021.

Who Is Wasting The Cattle? is inspired by the “Milk Pouring Incident”. It focuses on the mismatch of resources after the failure of the food market. The 2008 Chinese milk scandal was a significant food safety incident in China that involved Sanlu Group’s milk and infant formula along with other food materials and components being adulterated with melamine. In the animal industry, livestock, as a stable raw material for production, provide humans with sufficient food and derived values. However, once the transaction costs are too high, the market will stop losses in time through a large amount of waste, such as discarding processed dairy products and meat — or slaughtering animals that have lost their economic value. This painting uses beef cattle as a symbol to raise awareness about the food market. When food is wasted, must the living raw materials also be abandoned?

SEAN ROY PARKER

Fermental Health, 2022,
six jars with fermented food,
variable dimensions.

Based in the United-Kingdom, Sean-Roy Parker describes himself as an eco-anxious artist, environmentalist, and community cook, a forever-amateur, and skill-sharer. His work revolves around the notion of food justice through encouraging slow interspecies praxis. He advocates for food sovereignty, the process of restoring national and community autonomy in matters of food choice, through inclusive social frameworks of marginalised voices and alternative currencies to propose practical, post-capitalist action. In 2021, he produced and designed a *Community Cooks* open-source handbook for National Food Service London with Will Dorman. Sean Roy is currently in residence at the Derbyshire Artist Residence Program, working on nature writing, a surplus food fermentation lab and biodynamic growing project.

As part of his on-going project, *Fermental Health*, Sean Roy Parker produced fresh ferments inside the exhibition space. He used surplus vegetables and fruits from farms and cafés around Colchester. The ferments will live and evolve by themselves during the four weeks of the exhibition and then serve in a common meal and used for a local compost.

KLAUS PICHLER

One Third (Chicken; Potato Dough Patties; Map; Ticket), 2011-12, four prints, 60 x 80 cm.

Klaus Pichler lives and works in Austria. A few years after graduating from Landscape Architecture at the University of Life Sciences in Vienna, he became a photographer. His work explores the hidden aspects of everyday life in its varying forms, as well as social groups, with their own codes and rules.

According to a UN study, one third of the world's food goes to waste - the largest part thereof in the industrialized nations of the global north. Equally, 925 million people around the world are threatened by starvation. *One Third* describes the connection between individual wastage of food and globalized food production. Rotting food, arranged into elaborate still lifes, portrays an abstract picture of the wastage of food whilst the accompanying texts take a more in depth look at the roots of this issue. The pictures of the series *One Third* show food which is no longer edible, at various stages of decay. The products used for this study were once tasty items of food, for sale in supermarkets after being transported there from various parts of the world. *One Third* exceeds the sell by date in order to document the full dimensions of global food waste.



BJÖRN STEINAR

Catch of the day, 2018-2022, installation (1 glass bottle, 1 video, and prints), variable dimensions.

Björn Steinar is a designer based in Reykjavík, who strives towards bringing around societal change through his design practice. He is from a generation of product designers, designing into a world over flooded with useless temptations. The world is in dire need of solutions to an array of problems, which is why Björn tends towards what he calls an anti-capitalistic design method: honest design practice with a real purpose and the use of design as a medium for conveying ideas. Strong narratives and expressive simple solutions, combined with close collaborations, place his local context as a metaphor for the world in a solution-oriented dialogue.

Started in 2018, *Catch of the day* is fighting food waste by handcrafting vodka from dumpster dived fruits - one spirit bottle at a time! Spirits produced from leftover fruits prolongs the 'best before' date to infinity since alcohol over 23% can never go bad. Armed with a simple open-source distilling machine, Björn Steinar is seeking innovative ways to fight food waste, and at the same time the project serves as an icebreaker to discuss its challenges. In collaboration with local food importers and alcohol producers, a professional product is being developed - tasty alcoholic beverage made from fruits - and everyday *Catch of the day* moves closer to becoming market ready.

PUBLIC

PROGRAMME

LAUNCH PARTY

Thursday 28 April
6pm-8pm

Exhibition tour, with the artists Cat Coutler and Yiming Mao

Friday 29 April
12am-2pm
Art Exchange

Talk about food waste on campus, with Somdip Dey, Ethics Food, KatyWheeler

Thursday 5 May
3pm-5pm
Art Exchange

How bad are bananas? Interactive game by the University of Essex Sustainability Society

Thursday 12 May
12am-2pm
outside Art Exchange

Talk about food justice in the United Kingdom, with Bennison Farm (Colchester) and Bin Burger Project (London)

Thursday 19 May
6-8pm
online

Workshops for families and for students, cooking with food waste date and location to be confirmed

TASTY END PARTY

Friday 27 May
6pm-8pm

An exhibition curated by
Faustine Pallez-Beauchamp
Pauline Tristani
Andrea Arteaga Ruiz
Weiqi Li
Yijie Cai
Vikas Garg
Sih-Ting Lin.

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