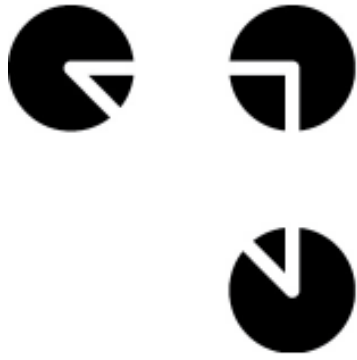




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Madison Rudin

We Have Food At Home

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Desire, Rebellion, & Lucky Charms: Madison Rudin's *We Have Food At Home*

Decadence comes in many, individualized forms. For artist and sculptor Madison Rudin, these forms cost anywhere between two and seven dollars and can be found at most gas stations - mass produced “junk” food. Rudin grew up in a hyper health conscious family, spearheaded mostly by her mother, who would often employ the age old adage “*we have food at home*”. As children are wont to do, this parental deterrent only created a further insatiability for the sugary, salty, and processed, culminating in the sprawling, technicolor fever dream that is Rudin’s Window Space exhibition, *We Have Food At Home*.

Rudin’s exhibition is a dizzying 40 sculpture “pantry” of technicolor scale model junk foods, built from painted liquid plaster bandages, form molds and small amounts of clay - all adorned with rhinestones. Aside from her own life experiences, Rudin was

inspired by the 1998 film *Pleasantville*, a coming of age fantasy comedy depicting teen siblings David and Jennifer who are thrust into a 1950s black and white television world. The unique cinematography of the film which features oversaturated objects and actors in a black and white world, served as an influence for Rudin's addition of black and white "healthy" foods, such as whole grain cheerios or sugar free gummy snacks. A feast for the eyes, they're sprinkled throughout the installation as a reminder, in the artist's own words, of "the dichotomy between the pantry I had growing up filled with healthy, but bland foods and the pantry that I desperately wanted and often saw at friends homes: filled with junk food, sweets, and chips."

Hiding under the sugary sweet surface of this pop art¹ exhibition lies a much deeper commentary. Rudin, who identifies as a bigger bodied artist, has experienced her fair share of fatphobia and diet culture - myself included. When we sat down to speak about her piece, the conversation quickly turned to swapping tales of such in our upbringing, and we found a worrying amount of similarities: one of the most impactful being the perceived and constructed morality of food. Rudin spoke about times when she was allowed junk food in childhood, and a specific life experience called "no rules weekend". Her mom used to travel occasionally, and Rudin's father would host a "no rules weekend", in which the children of the household could go grocery shopping and purchase (and eat) whatever they wanted. I recalled a similar experience of "summer cereal", where my sister and I were both allowed a tiny, individually portioned box of froot loops or frosted flakes on summer vacation at my cousin's place.

The glaring (and unfortunately incredibly widespread) issue with these childhood activities is it, as Rudin pointed out, creates a deprivation mindset with so-called "bad" foods. This experience particularly affects those who have experienced girl-hood, and is somewhat of an epidemic in the western world. Rudin speaks of how that deprivation has only enhanced her desire for junk food into her adulthood, and led to complicated

¹ A western movement from the late 1950s, based in brightly coloured and easily commercialized work. Famous artists from the movement include Andy Warhol and Keith Harring.

relations with snacks and nutrition. She recalls a Weight Watchers program she once participated in, describing it as the “ultimate deprivation” - and she’s right, any system that literally assigns a value to food and has its patrons “spend” their limited points throughout the day is a direct, nasty byproduct of diet culture. Rudin and I even both shared the sensation of guilt, and proclivity to “sneak” junk food into our adult lives, as if food had the power to fundamentally change our morality as people. This of course, is not the case, but deconstructing that concept can prove... sticky. As Madison said, everything has its place - including Oreos. “If something makes you happy, how bad is it, really?”² Therein lies the beating heart of *We Have Food at Home*. Sometimes, when society has made food shameful, the greatest rebellion of all is an unadulterated celebration of taste and decadence.

When asked if she felt comfortable making a piece this personal, Rudin was of two minds. On one hand, she at one point shied away from it, settling on making more broad work about consumerism. As a fat artist, she was concerned with stereotypes and pigeonholing her work. However, nowadays she feels confident and empowered telling her story through dreamscapes such as this. I asked her what she wanted to stir up in people, and she had an immediate answer: she wanted to evoke happiness, and a giddy kid-in-a-candy-store feeling. With a setup swirling with life and color, Rudin achieves her goal and then some. Ultimately, this is an exhibition about joy, childhood, and railing against a culture that would have one eat their junk food in secret shame. In Rudin’s words: “As a bigger bodied person, I’ve been sad enough about food in my life - f–k that.”

I couldn’t agree more.

-Olive Pitschner

² Quote from Madison Rudin, during our interview