

TOLARNO GALLERIES

Elizabeth Willing

Strawberry Thief

Melbourne Art Fair, 2–5 August 2018

Exploring the sculptural and multisensory potential of food has been a key focus of Elizabeth Willing's practice. Her work includes sculpture, installation, performance and participatory dining events that engage audiences through sensory dimensions such as smell, taste, and touch. In creating her work Willing is not only an artist, but a cook, designer, engineer and scientist, testing and manipulating the material qualities and limitations of food and applying her highly refined aesthetic sensibility.

– Rachael Parsons, Director, New England Regional Art Museum 2018

Tolarno Galleries presents Elizabeth Willing's solo exhibition, *Strawberry Thief*, at this year's Melbourne Art Fair. *Strawberry Thief* continues Elizabeth's ongoing project of reimagining Australian food culture through art and design.

The multi-dimensional project encompasses a wallpaper print, a series of collage prints, hand-carved wooden sculptures and *Anxiolytic*. This is a bottled and branded spirit and glasses that will form part of a cocktail performance in collaboration with Melbourne mixologist, Cennon Hanson.

The walls of the Tolarno stand will be covered in the wallpaper print, *Strawberry Thief (after William Morris)*. Playing on the double meaning of 'taste', Willing evokes the *good taste* of 19th century arts and crafts home furnishings, but replaces English flora and fauna with Australian natives. A nod towards the contemporary *taste* for wild food and foraging for indigenous ingredients now popular with avant-garde chefs, Willing photographed macadamias, bunya nut, lilly pilly, Moreton Bay Bug, and finger lime. These images were overlaid on the original William Morris *Strawberry Thief* design to recreate the elegant symmetrical pattern. This wallpaper forms the foundation for the whole installation.

Dark (series #1-5) is the next iteration of Willing's fondly described 'blob collages'. The work of countless hours of cutting and assembling, not to mention the time spent riffling through op shops to acquire hundreds of 1970s cookbooks, *Dark* celebrates the festive and ceremonial fruit cake. Heavy with ritual and nostalgia, Willing explains, "The absurdity of the fruitcake tradition, particularly at Christmas-time in Australia, and its laborious cooking process, is amplified through the obsessive process of these collages. They tend to have an architectural feel, and close-up we might lose ourselves in the rich moist fruitcake, the delicate garnishes, or the Escher-like winding staircases of fruitcake slices. From afar the collages form unruly continents, mounds of cooked meats, the scatological, or bunches of dried flowers."

Dark refers to a quote from Margaret Visser's *The Rituals of Dinner* (1991). "Festive food is both out of the ordinary, and (if the festival is a reoccurring one) always the same. Dried fruit mixes require long hard work in the making and 'maturing' of them: time taken in the preparation of festival foods is part of the value attributed to them... There is a tendency, also, to associate very dark food, such as coffee, chocolate, truffles, caviar, and crepes, as well as plum cake, with excitement and luxury... We are eating cultural history and value as well as family memories."

Traditional Scottish shortbreads are made from pressing the sweet dough into wooden molds. In two hand-carved sculptures, *Umber (no. 1)* and *Umber (no. 2)*, Willing carves newly evolved forms into recycled Australian hardwood lumber sourced from demolished houses. Drawing from biological and organic imagery – fossils, bodily organs or bacteria – they also function as decorative biscuit shapes. Much like the inherent afflictions into the timber – timber knots, borer marks and nail holes – Willing's additions into the timber sculptures are parasitical.

One carving will lie on the floor, reminiscent of minimalist sculpture, the other is to be placed upright as a vertical drinking bar – contrasting cold minimalism with the warmth of a functional piece of furniture designed for hospitality.

This sculpture bar hosts the performance, *Anxiolytic*. Its props are a bottle of vodka tincture and drinking glasses. Artist bars that have influenced Willing here include Erwin Wurm's *Drinking Sculptures* and Tom Maroni's *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*.

At the Melbourne Art Fair, audiences will be invited to participate in the *Anxiolytic* cocktail performance. A collaboration between Elizabeth Willing and mixologist Cennon Hanson, Willing has naturalised the valerian plant in her Brisbane garden and made homemade tinctures – seeping the roots in vodka for several months – to form the cocktail base. Hanson has created the cocktail recipe using other ingredients with links to medicinal tonic and foraged herbs: vermouth, brandy, a bitter herbal liqueur and a clove oil with analgesic properties to rim the glasses, to lightly numb the lips.

The cocktails will be sipped from *Pacify* glasses. A thin, fragile glass, *Pacify* is made from an altered laboratory beaker. A tiny hole is pierced on one side. When the cocktail is poured into the glass, the liquid weeps very gently from the hole, like tears. Participants must stem the flow with a finger, to comfort, soothe, *pacify* the glass in its state of loss. The cocktail has a direct connection with fingertip and mouth, creating a full circle of pacification.

Elizabeth Willing lives and works in Brisbane. She has been represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne since 2016. Her *Strawberry Thief* project is presented exclusively at Melbourne Art Fair by Tolarno Galleries.

Elizabeth Willing *Strawberry Thief* Melbourne Art Fair, 2–5 August 2018

Anxiolytic Cocktail Performance times

Wednesday 1 August

- Press Preview: 12pm to 2pm (exact time TBC)
- Vernissage: 4.30pm to 5.30pm

Friday 3 August

- Up Late: 6pm to 8pm

Elizabeth Willing was the recipient of the Australia Council Kunsterhaus Bethanien one-year residency (2014), has undertaken a residency at Helsinki International Art Program (2015), and was Artist-in-Residence at Metro Arts Brisbane (2013). Seeking out artists whose practices explore the use of food, Willing mentored with Janine Antoni (New York, 2011) and Thomas Rentmeister (Berlin, 2014). A work placement at the Experimental Food Society (London, 2012) included tutelage at the experimental food psychology lab at the University of Oxford under Professor Charles Spence and with food designer Fernando Laposse.

Willing's work has most recently been seen at museum shows *Tastes Like Sunshine*, Museum of Brisbane (2017) and *FOOD*, Trapholt Museum of Art and Design, Denmark (2018). Following a residency at New England Regional Art Gallery, NSW, she presented a solo exhibition *Impossible Guest* (2018). Willing has been performing experimental degustations since 2013, most recently collaborating with chef Josue Lopez on *We Who Eat Together* (2016/17) at Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Her work has notably been included in the publications *Oxford Companion to Food* (Third edition, updated 2014), *EAT ME* (Trapholt Museum, Denmark) and *Experimental Eating* (Black Dog Publishing, 2015).

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



**For more information contact Lauren Zoric at Tolarno Galleries
laurenzoric@tolarnogalleries.com | 03 9654 6000**

TOLARNO GALLERIES
LEVEL 4
104 EXHIBITION STREET
MELBOURNE 3000
VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA

PO BOX 67
FLINDERS LANE
VIC 8009
AUSTRALIA

T +61 3 9654 6000
E mail@tolarnogalleries.com