

JUICY FRUIT



This is all mine

I dreamt that I visited an art gallery that was showing two exhibitions simultaneously. One exhibition was by Joanne Tod, but for some reason the gallery signage read "Joan Tod". I don't remember the name of the other artist, but I had already seen the Joan Tod show and it was the other I had now come to see.

The exhibition was comprised of a number of picture windows of various configurations, as viewed from the inside looking out. They had baby blue curtains with pleats. Some of the curtains were pulled back in the middle and tied to the white trim of the windows. There were at least six different windows (nothing could be seen through them except a white glow) and they were installed in a staggered line about 25 feet long. I stood looking at the window display for a long time, not really getting it.

After a while, Joanne Tod walks up to where I am standing and, sensing I am not getting it, steps up to a window and pulls the drawstring so the curtain closes. She pulls it again and the curtain opens. Her eyebrows are raised, as if to say, "Get it now?" I smile, nod and feign understanding. Joanne appears pleased.

We walk to the back of the gallery and sit down on one of those wide, low-slung naugahyde couches with no back. A

bench, really, pushed against the rear wall of the gallery. Joanne pulls out a pack of Rothmans and draws out a cigarette using just her lips. She jerks the pack and another cigarette leaps forward. She leans across the couch and offers it to me. I smile, but decline.

"Not before 9:00 am!" I say.

So we sit for a while. Joanne is smoking her Rothman's. I notice there are two or three rows of chairs lined up in front of us, as if we were the back row of an audience. What had seemed a simple window installation suddenly has a small stage-like platform running in front of it. There seem to be people on it, actors perhaps, part of the art. There are more gallery visitors now and several of them are standing on the "stage" talking to the actors and leaning on the art. Joanne, still smoking, hops on to the stage and joins a conversation.

I lean back and fall asleep on the couch.

I wake up a little while later because someone is kicking me in the head. It's soft but it really hurts. I groan and roll over. There are two young boys, about six and eight, on the couch to my right. Apparently, they are Joanne Tod's nephews. Apparently, the eight year old was kicking me in the head.

I sit up in an unpleasant post-nap haze and Joanne returns. She has met an old friend and brought him over to say hello. It is the actor Anthony Hopkins and he is wearing a tweed jacket with elbow patches. His hair is cropped quite short.

"Hello", he says, politely outstretching his hand. He is smiling like a country vicar but the eyes are all fava beans and nice chianti.

I shake hands and then excuse myself. It's almost 9:00 am and I'm almost late for work.

Juicy Fruit

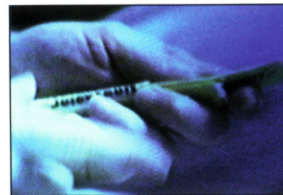
curated by John Massier
The Loggia Gallery
August 10 to September 22, 1995





FASTWÜRMS™
 3 flAVoUr sNo-MAn, 1995
 acrylic on wood, tires
 129.54 x 58.42 cm

Gum transmits the pleasure/pain ambiguity... Gum at first is sweet, then loses its flavor, turns flat, tastes dead. Biting into gum feels good, as does manipulating it with the tongue. Yet teeth grind gum over and over, and it ends up spit out. Gum comes in an array of colours, and some of its brand names are sexually amusing: Chiclets, Juicy Fruit, Super Cherry, Black Jack, Adam's Apple. At the same time, gum can be a disgusting substance, a noncolor when chewed up, sticky and stingy. Translated into art, it becomes something quite different, an instantaneous moment of creation, an item of intimate exchange that flows into delicate shapes and unexpected colors, repeated but distinctive individual works.¹



SUCCULENT, PULPY, LUSCIOUS

I was standing at the corner of King and Dufferin Streets late one night. The few other people on the streets were hunched into themselves and moving with that panicked deliberation extreme cold inspires. It was the kind of temperature that's so cold absolutely everything takes on an intense clarity and sharpness and even stone and bricks look brittle enough to snap apart. I was standing on the curb for just a second, bouncing coldly on the spot and waiting for a lone car to pass. Before I crossed the intersection, I glimpsed something moving coolly across my line of sight. It was a rat, literally the size of a housecat and, during those cold, clear seconds while it ambled across the vacant intersection, it looked as if it owned the world. I walked a little faster in the opposite direction.

The next day, I looked up from my seat on the Dufferin 29 bus and saw a slice of the idyllic: a hummingbird poised at the beginning of flight, laid against a lush background of green foliage, with a white "thought bubble" coming from its head. The hummingbird was thinking about Juicy Fruit gum. It was one in a series of four images used by Wrigley Canada in an advertising campaign called "Taste That Sticks Out," which was featured in the elongated advertising spaces of buses and streetcars for a period of about nine months in 1993/1994. I saw it two or three times everyday and after eight months, I noticed myself still looking at it. Amid the sometimes intolerable visual clutter of bus and streetcar ads, I remained fixated and, despite the number of times I saw it, never bored.

JUICY FRUIT was a spontaneous exhibition — at least, a set-up for desired spontaneity. Artists were presented with a Wrigley bus advertisement and asked to respond with a painting. There was a maximum size restriction, but otherwise no particular directives. Artists were not asked to utilize the colours or graphic design of the product packaging. They were not asked to include a hummingbird in the painting. They were not asked to critique anything. When asked by one of the participating artists about how far along a conceptual tangent one could take the idea, I made it clear that I was not interested in predetermining anything. I wanted a response.

Contained in this is a criticism of the arenas of art display and discourse, yet it is an invitation to visual promiscuous pleasure...²

In the end, it shouldn't be surprising that an open inquiry remains open. Inviting an open response guarantees no real closure, no definitive, declarative statements on painting, just tangents pointing in disparate directions — juice, flavour, the banal, incongruity, graphic

design, inarticulate passion, palpable uncertainty, death. No two artists in the exhibition are looking in quite the same direction. While paths may cross, with tangents briefly shared, each of the participating artists provided individual responses, culminating in what could be called a 12-in-1 show, a cross-section of flavours and taste sensations.³

FASTWÜRMS' *Three Flavour Sno-Man* is like a template for efficient response, combining the artists' own ongoing practice with the project at-hand. The sno-man is a cultural symbol the artists have used in previous work (their most recent prior to this being an eighteen foot tar sno-man, installed in the courtyard of the Centre for the Fine Arts in Miami) and painted tires can almost be called a FASTWÜRMS' staple. Beyond this is the sensibility of the exhibition. FASTWÜRMS' sno-man is painted so juicy it actually appears edible and their use of silhouetted "witches familiars" — a turtle, owl and bat — introduces an animism to the show, similar to the totemic flavour resonating from a hummingbird in a bus ad, hovering above my head two, three times a day for eight or nine months until, two years later, something happens in an art gallery.

Anda Kubis, whose practice involves assimilating images of popular culture and everyday life with minimalist painting, picks up on the fact that there is actually no gum to be found in the advertisement. Packages of Juicy Fruit are depicted, but they are presented as a mental image, the thought of gum, the anticipation of juice. In her painting *Juicy, Juicy*, Kubis removes everything but the thought (and its attendant thought bubble), manifested as drops of moisture springing from both the thought bubble and the clean field of yellow upon which it lays. It is "juicy" as a self-fulfilling prophecy — happy, moist and satisfied.

The antithesis to this is found in Nicole Collins' double-edged triptych that bluntly questions the premise of the exhibition. Her three encaustic squares are subtle references to the colours found in the Juicy Fruit packaging, as well as alluding to the elasticity and material texture of gum, most particularly in the severely-wrinkled, dirty yellow square in the centre, as well-masticated as any work in the show. Responding to the same invitation to chew over a given idea and image, Collins gives the work a title that reverberates within itself, articulating doubt about the validity of the entire exercise: *Chew This*.

While incorporating the prominent ad phrase STICKS OUT, John Armstrong's painting of the same name is, in fact, quite flat, referring to the botanical and sign painting motifs of painting's long history. Many

of the rich colours Armstrong employs in the work seem to breathe more around the perimeter of his oval linen canvas. Blended into a suffocating green on the surface of the painting, reds, blues, black, yellow, brown reveal their pure shades as discreet blobs tucked around the edges of the painting. As long as we're talking about juice, the work could as easily be called *Squeezed Out*.

Sadko Hadzihasanovic's big jar of honey, complete with submerged hummingbird, promises energy and vitality, apparently in the service of sexual prowess. It's quite a promise — a hummingbird, after all, can store sufficient energy to fly uninterrupted across the Gulf of Mexico — but Hadzihasanovic mocks his own machismo. The bicep-flexing male, the procession of silhouetted rabbits, and the well-groomed fellow clutching the arm of a young debutante while exclaiming "WOW! 150 Horsepower!" are undercut by the more distressed-looking figure in the top corner and the casual disorder of the painting. There is a homey, hardly-macho floral pattern in the painting and a vertical row of ornate orange lines — the orange also in evidence underneath the incorporating silver leaf of the painting, like an insecurity lurking beneath a polished and confident veneer.

Perhaps responding to the seeming banality of a bus advertisement, Lorna Mills' *Untitled* looks to draw a measure of beauty from what could be seen as commonplace. Her blue-jewelled necklace and frilly bow are just garish enough to be understood as items of costume jewellery, but Mills looks to be moving costume jewellery to some other level. The necklace is insanely juicy, fit to burst, and

the bow is rendered as intensely elegant and formal. The bow actually begins to read as a living thing, insect-like, antennae sticking out, one multi-sided eye with a reflected hint of green — the slightest allusion to the lush world depicted in the ad. Mills bumps up the scale of these trinkets and magnifies their aesthetic appeal, deflating the notion of "serious" subject matter. Her "canvas" contributes to this deflation, eschewing a pure, white ground for a roll of brown paper, still ear-marked by random notations along its edge, including a phone number and a casual multiplication table that totals "506.00".

Such incongruity is not out of place. In a sense, incongruity reigns. Pat McDermott's *things I cannot know* can be read as an equation of incongruity. Like the hummingbird that sticks out, McDermott's painting doesn't appear at first to fit. Its whiteness hides it in plain view amid the brasher, larger, more colourful paintings in the show. A child's puzzle, hand-rubbed with white oil paint, the three forms which rest on its surface (coincidentally mimicking the "stem" from the advertisement's thought bubble) highlight the dilemma — only two can be used to complete the puzzle. The third remains the odd hole out, articulating the continuing discrepancy between our desire for wholeness and the reality of the awkward incompleteness we often find ourselves to be.

Not only incomplete, but uncertain, suspended by doubt the way the Wrigley's hummingbird is suspended in flight. Duane Nickerson's *Frozen Volition* is a palpable illustration of such a moment. A crouched, naked figure is immobilized in a state of

emotional distress. A large splash of purple stains Nickerson's painting like some kind of grape angustjuice, but it's not a moment of resignation. Like the hummingbird, whose suggested motion is forward and up, Nickerson's figure seems ready to stand, the curtains behind are beginning to open. Frozen volition, the work suggests, need not be a permanent condition.

More permanent is the condition evoked in paintings by Gretchen Sankey and Oliver Girling, the former elegiac and the latter an elegy. Girling's *Homage to Hannah Wilke* resurrects the memory of the late performance artist and sculptor, who appreciated the metaphorical range of gum — from fresh, sexy sweetness to discarded waste — and would affix chewed gum to herself during certain performances. Girling's painting illustrates this duality, the left side reading like a pin-up picture, a half-naked beauty reclining on a Juicy Fruit beach towel. The right side is a more sombre portrait of the artist, a girl with faraway eyes, with the painted blobs of gum looking more like the cancer that took the artist's life.

Gretchen Sankey similarly inhabits a tangent of death in her discreet four-panel work *Doubling the Juice of the Fruit*. It is almost a painted whisper, the hushed tones of desire tempered by fear. The pomegranate, the focus of Sankey's painting, is a symbolically rich fruit — it is found in several passages of the Bible, particularly the Song of Songs, and still appears on the Israeli one lira coin. Sankey uses the pomegranate as an emblem of longing and loss. She has painted the fruit as ripe and juicy, lush with possibility and evoking desire through anticipation. But the hand that reaches for it hesitates, ripe itself, but with trepidation — desire, these days, can be hesitant, firmly manifest in the knowledge that the juice may be tainted and the fruit poisoned.

Jerry Campbell's *Beloved* concerns itself with another avenue of passion. If Sankey's was a cul-de-sac, Campbell's *Beloved* is the incomplete road on the map. His bunch of Bacchanalian grapes are like a cadre of messengers, fumbling to announce the passion to come. However, his grapes are in various states of completion, from fully-rendered to purple smears and are combined with a gathering of strange details — a series of small, red and green dots festively pinpointing the surface; what resemble coffee stains; and, most cryptically, a broad section of orange and white, obscured by grapes, with speech bubbles behind. Filled with quick, horizontal lines, they are

more like speech bubbles for the inarticulate, awkward words one might attempt to share with a beloved — a little clumsy, a little incomplete, but honest and forthright, spilling over with passion.

If FASTWÜRMS' sno-man is a template response from which many of the ideas in the exhibition extend exponentially, Eric Glavin's 7" *Security Strip – Yellow* serves as an oversize lasso that pulls the herd together. Painted directly on the walls of the Loggia Gallery and utilizing design elements from both the Wrigley's packaging and blue Metro Works vehicles in Toronto, Glavin provides an exclamation point to the exercise. Glavin was the first painter originally selected for JUICY FRUIT and for the most shamelessly obvious of reasons: the wide, low horizontal format of the bus ad is mirrored by a large body of Glavin's own paintings on similarly-shaped canvases. When Glavin asked if he could paint directly on the wall instead, it was the best of omens — nothing could really be anticipated. Perfect.

Standing at the opening, with packages of Juicy Fruit laid on a plinth in the centre of the gallery, someone commented about the smell and how pleasing and familiar it was. "Thank God you didn't call the show *Bubblicious*," she said after a moment, "I wouldn't like smelling that."

JUICY FRUIT marked a conflation of ideas, a stumbling of different notions into some semblance of a whole. The original advertisement embedded itself as a footnote in whatever hemisphere of the brain collates visual promiscuous pleasure, during a season of the year that evokes longing, escape, departure. Seeking to critique nothing (particularly the predictable rant of advertising as the art of corporate evil) and exalt nothing (especially painting, which goes through death throes and resurrections more than Jason Vorhees), both the Wrigley's advertisement and the ensuing exhibition were:

... a heat sink in my life... to reaffirm my ideals and cool my ever-burnin' mind.

John Massier, Associate Curator

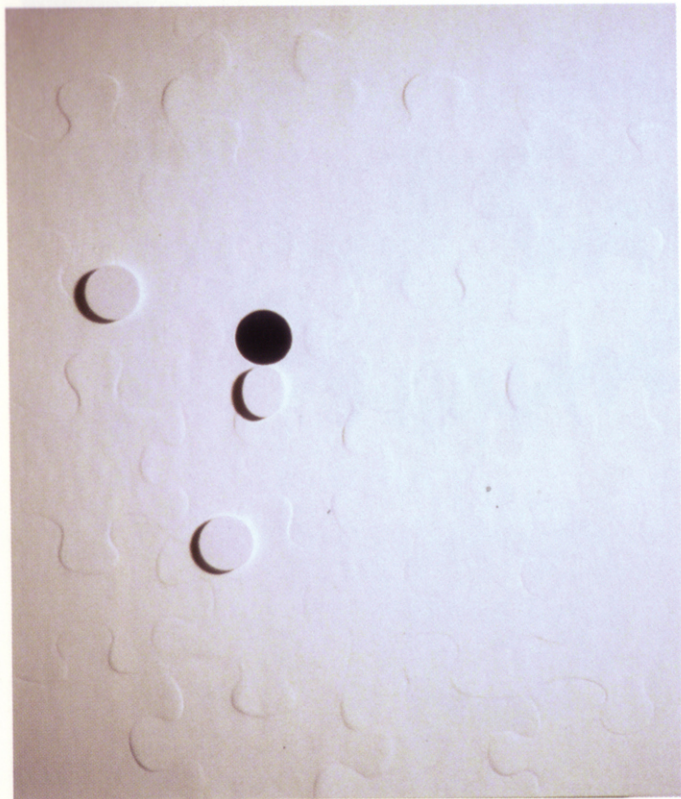
- 1 Kochheiser, Thomas H., ed., HANNAH WILKE: A Retrospective (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 73.
- 2 Lorna Mills, artist statement, 1995.
- 3 JUICY FRUIT was also originally intended to contribute to a perceived need. In 1993, I encountered at least a few painters who bemoaned the apparent dirth of painting exhibitions and the apparent lack of interest in painting in general. So the exhibition was, in part, initiated to fill a small part of this lack. There have, since the initiation of this project, been a number of painting-specific group exhibitions in Toronto, including those organized by painting collectives such as Dead Industry, Posse and Painting Disorders; larger group exhibitions such as *MUD* and *From a Pit*; and new museum surveys such as *Prosperity Returns: The Oral Tradition in Painting* (curated by Ihor Holubizky and Tony Scherman for the Art Gallery of Hamilton).
- 4 Jerry Campbell, artist statement, 1995.



ANDA KUBIS
Juicy, Juicy, 1995

oil on canvas

153.67 x 121.92 cm



PAT McDERMOTT
THE THINGS I CANNOT KNOW, 1995
oil on treated puzzle
31.75 x 38.1 cm



DUANE NICKERSON
fROZEN volition, 1994
oil on canvas
197.48 x 93.98 cm

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WRIGLEY Canada Inc.

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