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TAMARA JOHNSON
House Salad
July 8 – September 2, 2023

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *House Salad*, an exhibition of trompe-l'œil sculptures by Tamara Johnson—the artist's first solo project with the gallery.

Tamara Johnson's handmade colanders are so meticulously crafted they might convince you they are what they purport to be, unless you look closely enough to notice their slight squishiness precludes mass production. The colanders hang on walls, convex or concave like bulging bellies or inviting vessels, and are festooned with what appear to be charming non sequiturs: more handmade replicas of hair clips, bobby pins, false eyelashes, a vine of English ivy. Although Johnson's work is suffused with lightheartedness (and simultaneously unafraid of leaning into tragedy), the objects she makes and combines are all deeply personal signifiers.

The colanders and their accouterments are cast or otherwise shaped in a range of materials—gypsum, pewter, resin, epoxy putty, fiberglass, Tyvek—before Johnson subjects them to an elaborate faux-finishing process. She covers some of the hole-y bowls in silver leaf that she then paints to appear tarnished, scratched, even

rusting in spots; others she paints with thick layers of vivid oil-based paint, making them look like well-loved and worn enameled cast iron. They seem to have spent years rinsing macaroni and crudités for countless family gatherings—July 4th, the Superbowl, or any old Sunday night. Although Johnson is a sculptor, she feels tied to her early years as a painter, when she was tasked with copying the conventional still life paintings of her childhood teacher, artist Martha McKinney (1929-2020). “Everything I sculpt is also painted, whether I’m aging concrete or faux-painting a plaster cast. Adding a skin of paint or pigment to a surface is crucial—it adds a notion of reality.”

When she applies paint a little gloppily or shapes the contours of her sculptures with a little wobble, Johnson is channeling the messy, fleshy realities of bodies and how they change over time. Bodies are fundamental to Johnson’s practice—not only their vulnerability to time and gravity, but also their centrality to pleasure and identity and their miraculous ability to give and support life. Two recurring motifs in Johnson’s work are some of her family’s favorite comfort foods: pickled okra (“Tiny little penises!”) and “semi-sexual, semi-sensual” deviled eggs, which are “cooked and then the yolk is taken out and reworked into goo and reinserted back into the void.” The hemisphere of a colander recalls the curves of the body, both physical (bellies, hips, derrières) and metaphorical (a bowl is a vessel; a vessel receives, holds—looks after and maybe even *cares* for its contents, in its own material way). But a colander also has holes that filter and transmute, like a kidney, a lung, or a placenta.

Saltines have holes, too: they are one of the core symbols in this show. Johnson sees them as filters similar to colanders—little edible sponges that absorb whatever might upset a stomach. “These items become condensed bouillon cubes of material meaning,” the artist says, “holding vulnerability, sexuality, and humor in a delicate balance.” Although the holes in the quotidian objects Johnson sculpts may point to the body’s orifices (with a naughty smirk) and/or the filtration provided by a body’s internal organs (with a cerebral chin scratch), most of all, they seem to point to the porosity of time and experience.

Tamara Johnson, born in Waco in 1984, is an artist, educator, and curator living and working in Dallas. She has mounted solo exhibitions at institutions including the CORE: CLUB (New York), CUE Art Foundation (New York), MAD Arts (Florida), Nasher Sculpture Center (Dallas), Sunroom Project Space at Wave Hill (New York), and *Wassaic Project* (New York); she will have a solo show at the Saint Louis Art Museum in 2024. She has produced public art commissions for the NYC Parks & Recreation Department at Maria Hernandez Park, Socrates Sculpture Park (Long Island City), and is currently producing a permanent public sculpture project commissioned by the City of West Sacramento. She has participated in shows at Black Ball Projects (New York), the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Frank Institute at CR10 (Hudson), Grand Union Gallery (Birmingham, England), Green River Project Room (New York), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art (Staten Island), and Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (Salt Lake City). Reviews of her work and features on her practice have been published in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Bushwick Daily*, *Dallas Morning News*, *D Magazine*, and *Modern Arts Notes Podcast*. She has been awarded grants from the Brooklyn Arts Council, Meadows Museum (Dallas), Santo Foundation (St. Louis), and Southern Methodist University (Dallas). In 2018 she co-founded Sweet Pass Sculpture Park in Dallas with her partner, Trey Burns, an art space featuring temporary outdoor projects by emerging and mid-career artists. Sweet Pass has received grants from the Arts Community Alliance (Dallas), City of Dallas Office of Arts and Culture, Nasher Sculpture Center (Dallas), and National Endowment for the Arts (Washington DC).