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Sugar Sugar

by Sarah Vandeppeer

White like porcelain, set like glass, refined sugar is increasingly a captivating medium for visual artists. Sugar itself is a spellbinding substance; as a species we are predisposed to seek it out, our bodies crave it insatiably. The collective mania for sugar production and trade has changed the course of human history, influencing the formation of colonies, slavery, migration, ethnic blending, wars and political structures.

'Sugar Sugar', an exhibition at Brenda May Gallery, features contemporary artwork made by ten female artists. Matina Bourmas, Irianna Kanellopoulou, Judith Klausner, Stephanie Jones, Claire McArdle, Shelley Miller, Mylyn Nguyen, Janet Tavener, Claire Anna Watson and Elizabeth Willing have created ephemeral works entirely out of this beguiling, refined substance.

In conjunction with 'Sugar Sugar', Brisbane artist Elizabeth Willing has produced a multi-sensory performative work titled *Dessert (II)*, which will be

structured into a five-course participatory dessert degustation. Invited female guests will indulge their 'sweet tooth' and interact by consuming. Embracing dinner as a format, Willing draws on the choreography of dining as a mode of performance, to explore how people eat and challenge it.

Masticating the traditions of relational aesthetics and object-based practice, Willing hones in on affiliations between the connoisseurship of fine food and fine art. In 2010, she worked in New York with her mentor, Janine Antoni, alongside doyens of performance art – Michael Rakowitz and Marina Abramović, to develop a menu for a Park Avenue restaurant. Spurred by an interest in avant-garde chefs like Heston Blumenthal and Ferran Adrià, in 2012 Willing attended the annual banquet at the Experimental Food Society (EFS) in London, where she encountered creative practitioners working across cooking, design, visual arts and performance modes.

Challenging the ceremonies that surround communal eating, Willing playfully draws on elements of touch, smell, taste and sound as



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the syntax in her formal language of creative expression. Her artistic process incorporates designing bespoke cutlery, dishes, shared utensils and serving dishes that subvert the mannerisms of food intake.

Dessert (II) will include a procession of courses including wedding cake, fried signet rosette cookies, fudge, fruit confectionary served on precarious plates that revolve as food is removed and cocktails served at body-temperature in spherical cups with human lip motifs which simultaneously seem to salivate and kiss the viewer, blurring the lines between sipping and spitting.

Willing's orchestrated meals, and in particular her sculptural implements, bring to the table the subtle anxieties surrounding dining etiquette and human relationships in general. Cups, for instance, cannot be placed at rest on the table without spilling out plum-coloured liquids redolent of blood. Forcing viewers to nurse beakers with needy infant mouths, they gesture at the interdependency of human relationships. Likewise, the tipping plates draw attention to



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individual diners as they remove morsels from the plate one-by-one, intimating accusation or the communal balance of power. *Dessert (II)* makes vivid, playful vignettes of social behaviors.

Dessert (II) and the 'Sugar Sugar' exhibition highlight the many rewarding, varied possibilities for expressive and conceptual art practice based around senses other than the purely visual. Here is a chance to experience first-hand the sweetness of making and consuming art.

Brenda May Gallery
Curated by Megan Fizell
1 to 19 October 2013
 Sydney

- 1 Elizabeth Willing, *W Inside Heart*, 2013, custom branding iron and rosette cookie
- 2 Elizabeth Willing, *Mouth Cup*, 2013, ceramic, 15 x 15 x 15cm
- 3 Elizabeth Willing, *Tipping Plate*, 2013, ceramic with assorted candied fruits, 35 x 35 x 6cm

Courtesy the artist and Brenda May Gallery