

# Sweet Sense

by Olivia Welch

**SUGAR IS AN INGREDIENT IN MANY** of our experiences and memories. Megan Fizell's upcoming exhibition *Sugar Sugar* at Brenda May Gallery explores its use in contemporary visual arts, and as a result reveals the effects of sugar as a medium in harnessing certain reactions and responses. This exhibition's allure lies in its restriction to only including works exclusively made with sugar, dealing with it as a literal substance and not just an abstract idea. ▶



Irianna KANELLOPOULOU, *Bertie and friends* 2008, moulded, handbuilt & hand painted Belgian chocolate, cocoa butter, food grade colouring, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Brenda May Gallery.





Oreo packaging 1912

▶ A notion that arises through this limitation of medium is that the edible object can have certain powers without being digested. Fizell has included a number of works in the exhibition that seduce the viewer through their visual form, but are able to sustain a powerful engagement through the occupation of other senses.

Judith Klausner's *Oreo Cameo* series utilises the imagery and craft of the Roman-inspired Victorian cameo, but the unlikely medium of the Oreo cookie adds an involuntary experiential dimension. Despite visual alterations of the cookie into an artistic form, the knowledge of the medium stimulates the sense of taste, moving the experience beyond the purely visual by incorporating the viewer's stored oral sensory experience of the cookie.

Synesthesia is a neurological condition that involves the involuntary coupling of the senses. Such connections exist within many of our experiences and associations, like pairing curves with deep soothing sounds and spikes with high-pitched jets of noise. These relationships, whether they are learned or innate, become powerfully instinctive. The American-born Klausner is mildly synesthetic, creating definite paired relationships between numbers and colours. It could be viewed that Klausner has harnessed an unconscious synesthetic response in her audience by provoking taste through sight. ▶



▶ The idea of a synesthetic response in regard to the use of food as art is particularly applicable to Australian ceramicist Irianna Kanellopoulou's edible display. When previously exhibiting for Fizell in *Art + Food*, Kanellopoulou created a colony of chocolate bunnies in brilliant shades of red and orange. Without knowledge of the medium, it could be assumed that the works were made from slip-cast porcelain or a moulded plastic designed to emulate candy. However, once the edible medium is revealed, associations of the melt-in-your-mouth sensations of chocolate are instantly applied to the work. This effect may also motivate the recollection of certain memories, such as Easter.

Prompting memories through a synesthetic pairing of taste with a visual stimulus is the activation of gustatory memory, a type of sensory memory. When discussing her sculptures made using fairy floss, Mylyn Nguyen explained that her attraction to this material was its link to carnivals and the overindulgent sugar consumption that occurs. While the engagement with Nguyen's work may begin through sight and an unconscious activation of taste, there is the hopeful and probable conjuration of an episodic memory — a personal memory related to carnivals and their encouragement of excessive consumption. Nguyen's use of a miniature scale adds to this nostalgic quality.

The power that the medium of sugar has in these examples from *Sugar Sugar* is the construction of instant and involuntary synesthetic relationships between the visual and gustatory senses. Through this automatic association sensory memories can be stirred, revealing how sometimes the medium can dictate the message depending on the audience's personal experiences. What Fizell has encouraged through her curatorial goals in *Sugar Sugar* is an exhibition bound to tempt the senses. ■

▶ Mylyn NGUYEN, *A home made of roses* 2013, fairy floss and found object, 30 x 10 x 10cm.  
Courtesy of the artist and Brenda May Gallery.

