

# TAKMING CHUANG

b. 1978

## *Gurney* \* ..... 2018-2020

Medium . . . . . Composed of the older works: *Petrified Pound Cake* (2018), *Erectile* (2018), *Soul* . . . . . *Unit* (2018), *Incense Holder* (2018), *Buds* (2018), *Ghost Ship* (2018), *Aortic* (2018), . . . . . and *Soul Home* (2018), Raw Clay, Plastic  
Dimensions . . . . . Dimensions Variable

## *Dust Collectors* \* ..... 2020

Medium . . . . . Raw Clay, Plastic  
Dimensions . . . . . 8.5 x 11 in, 8.5 x 11 in

### CONTAINED WITHIN A PLASTIC “SKIN” —

actually translucent, colored trash bags—Takming Chuang’s folded, raw-clay sculptures emulate living bodies. By leaving the clay unfired, his sculpting process replicates aging. The supple forms of the sculptures will wrinkle, blister, shrink, discolor, and eventually harden beneath their plastic skin. The artist is interested in anti-aging and aesthetically driven health practices, such as gym and diet culture. Like the bodily process of chewing, Chuang repeats the actions that make up his sculptures over and over again. Chuang’s work is marked by repetition, habit, and recreation. His work *Gurney* incorporates eight aging sculptures into industrial food shelving. A set of two sculptures, titled *Dust Collectors*, have been made using the same raw-clay process, but their more recent production illustrates the earlier stages of Chuang’s sculptures, allowing a comparison between the cracked skin of the older works with the taut, bright smoothness of what appears to be young flesh.

### GURNEY CLUSTERS TOGETHER MULTIPLE WORKS

as a way to consider the physical toll of time and the appearance of aging. The artist’s concern with the wrinkles and folds is ultimately an interest in the body’s decay, and how external appearances reflect lifestyle choices and determine our worth. The artist is interested in a type of internal alchemy—that is, how the brew of what we consume and how we behave generates physical reactions. However, no matter what our lifestyle of choice, we will all reach the same inevitable end: the ultimate failure of the body. Chuang’s practice at large addresses the illusion of choices related to health and fitness, and the marks or results . . . . . of . . . . . eating, . . . . . movement, . . . . . and . . . . . time . . . . . on . . . . . the . . . . . body.

# ALISON KUO

b. 1985

## *I Remember You* ● ..... 2020

Medium . . . . . Gelatin, Desiccant Beads, Chest Freezer  
Dimensions . . . . . 55.75 in W x 29.5 in D x 32.5 in H

### I REMEMBER YOU

is an organic gelatin sculpture that is kept in a wet state by its refrigerated case. The weight of the gelatin is the same as the artist’s body weight. By casting directly within a refrigerated case, known as a chest freezer, the sculpture maintains a soft flesh-like quality and the plastic refrigerator becomes its skin. The freezer both contains the work, preventing the gelatin from spilling into the gallery, and ensures its survival by preventing it from rotting entirely. Through this work, Kuo offers her own body.

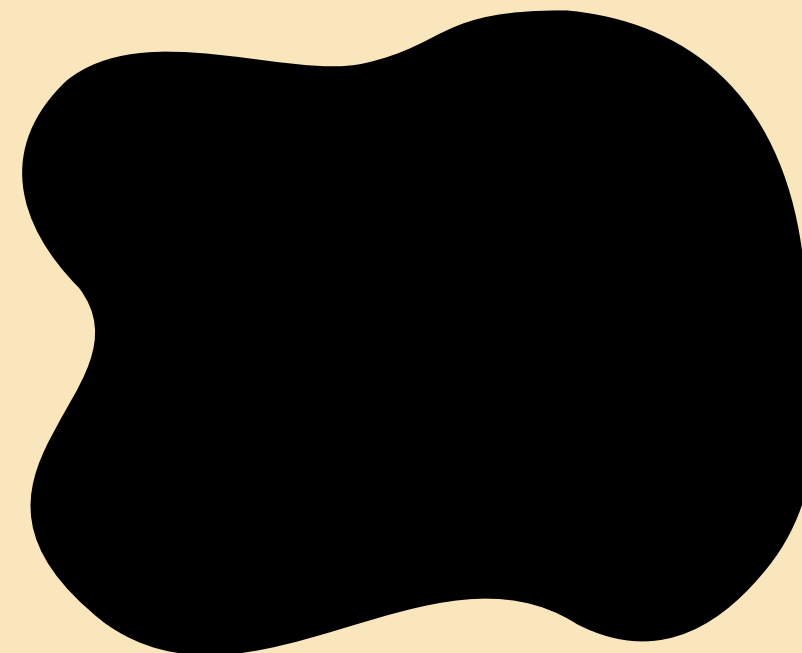
### KUO’S CHOICE TO WORK WITHIN

gelatin relates to its chemical properties as well as its social role. Gelatin is an irreversibly hydrolyzed form of collagen, a living material derived from animal by-products, typically beef. It is used in mass-marketed foods such as sweets like gummy candy and marshmallows, ice creams, dips, and yogurts. It can also be used at home in the form of powder, granules, or sheets that are available at most grocery stores. As a Chinese American, Kuo is interested in emphasizing how gelatinous foods can be read differently in disparate spaces. Chinese cuisine uses the by-products that make up gelatin, such as cartilage from chicken bones, to create foods that are often deemed unappealing in white spaces, yet Kuo has observed that there are white contexts in which gelatin appears as an object of desire, often in the form of molded cakes and glass-like constructions of Jell-O. Her work plays with the space between abjection and desire, foreignness and familiarity—a space that for Kuo, . . . . . gelatin . . . . . can . . . . . uniquely . . . . . fill.

● ..... Commissioned for *Somatic’s Grocery*  
\* ..... Courtesy of the Artist

# SOMATIC’S GROCERY

Curated by ..... Brooke Nicholas



### ARTWORKS BY

Takming Chuang	Hayley Martell
Bibbe Hansen	Mel Nguyen
Ilana Harris-Babou	Bettina Yung
Alison Kuo	

Summer 2020

Hessel Museum of Art  
Bard College  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

*Somatic's Grocery* is a group exhibition that explores somatics, a practice that acknowledges the role of interlinking bodily responses to external stimuli. Somatics accounts for how biological processes—like the ways that food ingredients are absorbed into your body—impact expressions of the ego. Through the logic of somatics, the entanglement of human consumption and internal systems have an effect on the outward expression of personality. Put . . . . . simply: . . . . . you . . . . . are . . . . . what . . . . . you . . . . . eat.

This exhibition is made up of artworks that emphasize and produce embodied practices, repetitions, habits, and observations, by artists Takming Chuang, Bibbe Hansen, Ilana Harris-Babou, Alison Kuo, Hayley Martell, Mel Nguyen, and Bettina Yung. Their works address parallel spaces between the interior and exterior of the self by looking into moments of eating, digestion, and cooking. The result is an intimate look at the body's abilities, processes, histories, and relationships . . . to . . . others . . . as . . . processed . . . through . . . the . . . gut.

*Somatic's Grocery* is curated by Brooke Nicholas as part of the requirements for the master of arts degree at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.

## ILANA HARRIS-BABOU

b. 1991

### *Cooking with the Erotic* \* . . . . . 2016

Medium . . . . . Two-Channel Video  
Time . . . . . 11 minutes, 37 seconds

Ilana Harris-Babou is a sculptor and installation and video artist. Her work co-opts the visual tools of mass media, such as music videos and commercials, to investigate and trouble expectations around race, gender, labor, consumption, and pleasure. Harris-Babou examines everyday relationships of material and surface, with special focus on the Black experience as it is refracted through the media. Her practice is marked by the ability to subvert pop cultural touchstones, like the wellness industry, with deadpan humor and unlikely . . . . . materials.

In her video work *Cooking with the Erotic*, Harris-Babou assumes the persona of a cooking show cohost alongside her mother. The film has been shot, lit, and scripted in a familiar format that references tropes one might see on the Food Network. The camera oscillates from shots of Harris-Babou monologuing directly into the camera, to close-ups of her hands manipulating food, then hovers at a conversational distance as she and her mother speak. Her instructional dialogue is spliced, in subtle and overt ways, with Black feminist theory. Excerpts from Audre Lorde's influential essay "*The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*" are posed as an instructional recipe, as if Harris-Babou is teaching the viewer how to make a fancy pizza. The television structure is further punctured by the artist's use of inedible materials alongside regular ingredients, a technique that causes cooking to blend into a sculptural practice. Harris-Babou kneads food coloring into margarine, her mother lights a pipe, and the artist pours blue paint into what might be pea soup studded with unpopped kernels of corn. The humor hinges on the unexpected falling into a familiar format. Positioning the erotic as a resource for resilience, humor, and defiance, the video visualizes food as a proxy or conduit for the body through the sensual treatment of both actual . . . . . foods . . . . . and . . . . . nonedible . . . . . food-like . . . . . substances.

## BIBBE HANSEN

b. 1952

### *Sandwich* \* . . . . . 2016

Medium . . . . . Embroidery on Paper  
Dimensions . . . . . 8.5 x 11 in

### *Book of Holes* \* . . . . . 2018

Medium . . . . . Embroidery on Paper  
Dimensions . . . . . 8.5 x 11 in

#### BIBBE HANSEN

is a performance artist who took up a practice of embroidery in 2003. For her works *Sandwich* and *Book of Holes*, she first uses her home printer to print out stock images from the internet, then follows the outlines and details of each image with a needle and colored thread. Hansen began by selecting her images based on colors, and then moved into themes, which include international signs and symbols, food, accidents, and tragedies. She is interested in learning about everything, and transmuting that learning into a set of accessible visual markers . that . can . then . be . shared.

#### SANDWICH

features a picturesque club sandwich, made with wheat bread, cucumber, tomato, American cheese, cold-cut meat, and lettuce. The source image becomes a recipe Hansen follows. From far away, the final embroidered version images food itself, . . but . . up . . close . . the . . image is unexpectedly tactile. The micro-choices of each stitch's direction, thread color, and coverage are like cooking, where raw material and action are married through process. The final presentation is a meal, consumed in a second. The cookery is made invisible by the crisp finish of . . . . . the . . . . . product.

*Book of Holes* includes eight examples of holes that appear in bodies and food. The embroidered printouts are not of orifices, like mouths or ears, but of the tiny holes that appear in materials like bone and bread, revealing a symmetry between unexpected places. This comparison collapses human life to a set of repetitive formulas. Hansen is deeply invested in universal thinking and finding the connections between all things. Her encyclopedic knowledge, which she wishes to become ever more encyclopedic, is what led her to begin these embroidery works. *Book of Holes* samples Hansen's collection with somatics in mind, asking what similarities there are between ourselves and what we eat.

## BETTINA YUNG

b. 1989

### *Ode to Bean* dinner, author of zine ♣ . . . . . 2020

Medium . . . . . Four-Course Meal  
Dimensions . . . . . Dimensions Variable

#### ODE TO BEAN

began as a meal, and appears in this exhibition in the form of a short zine. It departs from the immediate body, expanding to the . . relationships . . between people, . . ingredients, . . and histories that are embedded in communal . . . eating . . . This collection of recipes, bean facts, and narratives breaks down the original *Ode to Bean* meal into a network of approaches to food.

#### IN DECEMBER 2018,

Bettina Yung gathered twenty-five people for a meal at High Tide Gallery in Philadelphia. Earlier that year she had begun hosting and cooking thematic meals for small groups of people in New York City. In composing the meal *Ode to Bean*, Yung incorporated multiple well-known bean varieties into each of the four courses, drawing upon American cooking techniques and Chinese recipes. Through various preparation tactics, ingredients, and cooking methods, Yung revealed the beans' flavors, histories, and aesthetics. Her efforts resulted in a well-researched and delicious meal . . that . . disappeared . . in . . an . . evening.

Yung's meals reveal the capacity for memory, history, and knowledge to be disseminated through the sharing of food in private spaces. By composing meals and inviting people to eat them, Yung brings together groups of people in temporary micro-cultures that dissipate after a night. Through the zine version of *Ode to Bean* exhibited here, Yung experiments with permanence, transferring the meal into a set of recipes and cooking tips that allow the research . . . . . to . . . . . be . . . . . further . . . . . disseminated . . . . . and . . . . . shared.

## MEL NGUYEN

b. 1992

### *Ode to Bean*, designer of zine ♣ . . . . . 2020

Medium . . . . . Laser print publication  
Dimensions . . . . . 4.5 x 7.5 in

Mel Nguyen is a New York-based artist and graphic designer. She is interested in the transmutation of language, symbols and visual codes within transnational cultures, and the dominant forms they currently take in advertising and the vernacular. Nguyen is concerned with how commodity capitalism and online attention economies affect identity and the self, and . . aims . . to . . subverse . . one's . . relationship . . to . . these . . systems . . of . . power.

The zine version of Bettina Yung's *Ode to Bean* acts both as documentation of the event, a celebration of the beans, and a look into their origins. As beans are seeds of a plant and symbolize beginnings, the zine plays with time and history in its visual styles, with sources ranging from from 20s vintage cookbooks to 80s Apple Macintosh digital elements. Evoking ideas of their taste and texture, beans are poised as a poetic trigger of sensations and personal memories. The zine revels in visual fragmentation, breaking a grid, and trespassing edges. Each bean is silhouetted and cut out, organically floating across pages and overlapping with photos and text, as if traversing space, time, and computer documents. The zine's cover uses the iconic symbol of a tin can, reminding one of its role in the preservation and . . . transportation . . . of . . . beans . . . across . . . places . . . and . . . people.

## HAYLEY MARTELL

b. 1990

### *Sowing with the Reaper* ♣ . . . . . 2020

Medium . . . . . Clam-shell take out containers, sand from Rockaway Beach, Scales  
Dimensions . . . . . Dimensions Variable

### *steady can* \* . . . . . 2016

Medium . . . . . Video  
Time . . . . . 2 minutes, 40 seconds

#### HAYLEY MARTELL IS A

conceptual artist interested in the body's transition toward healing. The two works Martell has contributed to *Somatic's Grocery* explore and complicate toxic eating habits. Her newly commissioned mixed-media sculpture, *Sowing with the Reaper*, explores the role of single-use plastics, transactional eating, and dysmorphic habits. Since the spring of 2019, Martell has saved every single-use plastic she has acquired from delivery food and delis. The resulting sculpture stands as a monument to what a person eats, and how it leaves a distinct physical bearing on the body as well as on the earth. In this piece, Martell uses numerology to convey a message through the weight of sand placed on seven scales. By arranging and sculpting the residual single-use plastics left behind from eating habits based around processed food, Martell evokes the liveness of the body's processing and its relationship to the land, emphasizing what gets left behind in the wake of consumption.

#### MARTELL'S

video performance work, *steady can* is a recording of the artist's computer screen. It routes the dual experiences of disordered eating and the changing of habits through the artist's moving body. Her hand appears in the form of an active cursor, which makes s . e . l . e . c . t . i . o . n and . . closes . . a . . set . . of

#### OPEN WINDOWS

on the computer desktop. The videos and images have visible file names, and through their collapsing, a poem is revealed. The order of the selecting and closing mimics a set of and the measuring that shapes Martell's changing approach to food and behavior. Each picture and video is a kernel of Martell's feelings around food and exercise. By moving through them, a seed is allowed to flower—the hope to adjust or shift those feelings. *steady can* reveals Martell's own somatic processing and highlights the generosity of inviting others into the process by illustrating how being in touch with the body can be a route back . . . . . into . . . . . conscious . . . . . eating . . . . . habits.