

A SWEETER LIFE: A CELEBRATION OF DESSERTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
The School of Art
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Jennifer Gawronski
B.S. in art education, Pennsylvania State University, 2001
B.F.A, Pennsylvania State University, 2001
August, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my committee that has helped me with conceptual, and visual insight during my three years in graduate school, Mikey Walsh, Chris Hentz, Pat Bacot, Mark Zucker, and Tom Neff.

I have an endless amount of thanks for my close friends that have been so generous in their support. Thank you Sadie Thomas, Amy Johnson, Gabrielle Garner, Shannon Parker, Melissa Rudnick, HaeJung Lee, Brian Dieterle, Meg Hartwig, and Michelle Kolososki.

Lastly I would like to thank my wonderful family for always supporting me in my ceramics and traveling pursuits. Without your support I would not be where I am today and again, I am forever thankful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iv
A SWEETER LIFE.....	1
CONCLUSION.....	11
VITA.....	12

ABSTRACT

My thesis show, *A Sweeter Life: A Celebration of Desserts* is an exploration in using clay to create a celebratory event. Throughout my graduate studies I have been interested in creating memorable moments for my audience through the use of functional ceramic objects. The utilitarian forms are inspired by specific foods. This body of work celebrates the pleasures of springtime desserts through the use of unique table settings. Each setting has its own theme of fruit or delicacy to highlight the joy of desserts. I am interested in how desserts can be enhanced by their serving pieces and how a collection of desserts can relate to each other in shape, size and color. Through this interaction, the serving objects create a memorable experience for the audience. The exhibit comprises of a collection of five different circular dessert tables. The circle is a foundation for all of my dessert table settings because of its inherent connection to the idea of a cycle. I am interested in the importance of cycles within our lives and their possibilities for marking time, place, and recalling memory. In considering how cycles can mark time, I have chosen to work with seasonal cycles, focusing on spring. Throughout my life I have felt as if I have perpetually wanted to exist in the springtime because the sentiments that are associated with the spring season give rise to the feelings of renewal, freshness, and hope. These are all feelings that I cherish and have inspired the ceramic work I create.

A SWEETER LIFE

Introduction

My thesis show, A Sweeter Life: A Celebration of Desserts, is an exploration in using clay to create a celebratory event. Throughout my graduate studies I have been interested in creating memorable moments for my audience through the use of functional ceramic objects. The utilitarian forms are inspired by specific foods. This body of work celebrates the pleasures of springtime desserts through the use of unique table settings. Each setting has its own theme of fruit or delicacy to highlight the joy of desserts. I am interested in how desserts can be enhanced by their serving pieces and how a collection of desserts can relate to each other in shape, size and color. Through this interaction, the serving objects create a memorable experience for the audience.

Cycles

The exhibit comprises a collection of five different circular dessert tables. The circle is a foundation for all of my dessert table settings because of its inherent connection to the idea of a cycle. I am interested in the importance of cycles within our lives and their possibilities for marking time, place, and recalling memory. In considering how cycles can mark time, I have chosen to work with seasonal cycles, focusing on spring. Throughout my life I have felt as if I have perpetually wanted to exist in the springtime because the sentiments that are associated with the spring season give rise to the feelings of renewal, freshness, and hope. These are all feelings that I cherish and have inspired the ceramic work I create. With this exhibition I hope to compose a memorable experience for my audience that will create an association between the eating of the desserts and the sentiments of springtime. By connecting my work with the season

of spring, I hope that the memory of my show and the celebration that takes place during the closing reception will be remembered as the seasons cycle back around to spring every year.

Continuing with the notion of a cycle, the duration of the show itself becomes a series of cycles. Beginning with its inception as a complete collection when they are seen together for the first time. The work will then be shown for four days in that state, as empty table settings, awaiting their full potential as serving pieces. The work's size and meaning will continue to develop as the show heads into its final two days of exhibition. At the closing reception, the ceramic pieces will be filled with the desserts to entice the audience into choosing which desserts they will indulge in eating.

Upon entering the gallery at the closing, the audience will begin to understand their role in experiencing this dessert celebration. The first table they encounter will be a rectangular one with baskets of flowers and baskets of delicately folded napkins. The napkins are colored, cut, and folded to match the aesthetic of the ceramic work and also to entice the audience as to what is about to happen. There will be a small note card inside the folded napkins that will encourage the viewers to investigate all the table settings and desserts and begin to whet their palate for a night of indulgence. The card will explain that at 8pm there will be the sounding of a bell that will signify the beginning of the celebratory eating. As this happens, the show will transition into another phase of meaning as the work has reached one version of its potential by giving my audience a unique and extravagant celebration. The cycle of the show's life will be complete as the exhibition ends and hopefully the work finds a new home within the lives of other people.

The object has now transitioned into a new phase of its existence, one where its new user will determine its function.

Memorable Experiences

I consider myself to be both an object maker and a memory maker. These two roles are connected by their reliance on each other to succeed. I am interested in the inherent qualities that an object possesses: its functional purpose, visual aesthetics, and how the object feels when being used. By taking all of these elements into consideration, I hope to create objects that will provide memorable experiences for my users. The hand-made object has the opportunity to communicate with its user in a way that can be very personal. As a maker and a user, I have realized that the most meaningful experiences I have had with objects are with pieces that are highly specialized and focus on a specific function. For example, as a young girl I was drawn to the Jewish Menorah as a unique object that held a deep historical and contemporary meaning for me. The eight-branched candlestick is connected to a story, a holiday, and a time of year that was spent with my family. As I have grown older I still carry those memories with me and look forward to using it again. That formative experience has heightened my interest in specialized or historical objects that inspired the work for this show. In Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries three exotic beverages were introduced: chocolate, tea, and coffee. Chocolate was the first to be introduced, and it came in the form of a bitter cold drink made from crushed cacao beans and water. At first these new drinks were reserved mainly for royalty, but with the Age of Enlightenment came a new enjoyment for a wider range of people. I am interested in the specialty pieces that were designed and created to enjoy these new drinks, most specifically the chocolate pots created in both ceramics and

silver. In both materials the chocolate pots have recognizable forms, lids with movable finials, and handles. Learning about these highly specific objects has compelled me to create my own special objects of my own.

Throughout my life I have been obsessed with the idea of making people feel special. For me it was creating celebratory moments. I use the word obsessive because I am always thinking about it. I have the dates of all my friends' birthdays memorized, and I always have a plan in mind or a special treat for someone. I have become addicted to making people feel special, to smile, to help them create a memory of feeling good. Nothing makes me happier. The most genuine way I have found in my pursuit is to create the object in clay with my own hands and mind. This makes the moment truly ours, and not mediated by a company that has mass-produced the pieces I use as catalysts for my friend's experience. The creation of my thesis show has been the fix for my addiction over this past year. Having time to work on such a large scale has allowed me to conjure a massive event of pure celebration and the coming of spring. Growing up in Minnesota with its seven-month-long winters, the coming of spring meant many things to me. It meant the new growth of flowers, and fruit, along with a new optimism that came with the warmth of the spring and summer seasons and life without a heavy jacket. I want to celebrate this occasion with an event centered on desserts. I have chosen desserts because they inherently have the quality of delicacy and richness. The desserts that I have chosen are quite extravagant and when served on handmade ceramic pieces will create an indulgent celebratory experience. I hope that this dessert experience will be so grand that it will develop into a personal memory for my audience, one that can be recalled either

when seeing the ceramic object again, by eating a special dessert, or with the coming of the spring season.

Table Settings

Each of the five tables has a specific fruit or dessert theme that inspired each table setting. The use of fruit in desserts is significant during the spring season as many fruits are ripe, succulent, colorful, and act as a natural sweetener. By dividing up the table settings to specific fruits or delicacies I was able to create collections of desserts that complemented each other in taste, color, shape, and size. When designing the different tables I began by choosing the desserts for the tables, starting with a main dessert that stood as a focal point within the themed table. I then selected a collection of different desserts that complemented each other and worked within the chosen theme. Each of the tables also has its own design scheme composed of different formal elements of the desserts, methods of eating the desserts, and patterns of floral growth. These concepts are illustrated through the forms of the ceramic objects. The serving pieces are different interpretations of how to eat desserts, which vary in form, size and color.

The different table settings are inspired by the dessert themes of berries, lemons, French macaroons, chocolate desserts, and a serving table. The berry table is designed around a primary dessert, which is a grand berry cake. This cake is presented on a tall cake stand that is the focal point of the table. All of the other pieces on the table grow from the base of the stand. This table's schema is a conceptual rendering of flowers sprouting up from the ground and blooming, as happens every spring. The tall cake stand acts as a taller stem or tree-like structure, with smaller flower-like pieces sprouting beneath it. Radiating out from the cake stand are six double-spaced saucers that each

serve two beautiful petite pastries. These saucers have a decorative rim that references the petals of a flower and the two small serving plates are removable. On either side of the double saucer are specialized cake plates, including a space for a fork, to eat the main cake. They reference the shape of a slice of cake, utilizing a gentle triangular form. Around the entire collection of berry desserts are 30 small tartlet plates that hold berry tartlets. The mini dessert plates complete the dessert table setting by encircling the stand and saucers.

The glaze colors were chosen to enhance and glorify the colors of the desserts. The color palette is a light sky blue, light mint green, a very pale pink, and white. The surface of the glaze is an opaque buttery satin which is visually attractive and luscious in its thickness and shine. The combinations of the glaze colors display the desserts on a stage to entice their audience with both their shape and color. The form of the serving piece references the form of the dessert, which creates a comfortable fit between the dessert and the object. This connection between the dessert and the object generates an experience of eating that is grander than if the pieces were served separately.

The second table in the show is based on lemon sweets. The taste of a lemon is associated with the freshness of spring. The focal point of this table is an exquisite large lemon meringue tart for which I have created a unique cake plate that has a piece removed so that we can see the tart's inner profile. One of the most beautiful aspects of lemon meringue desserts is the contrast between the bright yellow lemon curd and the lightly toasted cream topping. This focal cake stand allows the audience to experience that inner beauty before the dessert is served.

The schema for this table is based on the internal structure of the small lemon bar trays that surround the cake stand. The complementing dessert to the lemon meringue tart is a traditional lemon bar, cut into small triangular pieces. Eight trays each hold four of these triangular lemon bars. The internal spaces of the trays have an X-shaped form that nestles the triangular bars. The trays are then placed in a larger X-shaped form that uses the cake stand as its invisible center. In the spaces between each of the X-shaped trays there is a different interpretation of an individual cake plate, shaped to cultivate a piece from the large lemon meringue tart. Flanking the right side of the cake plate is a special fork plate that fits the fork's length perfectly. In the remaining spaces there are domed covered plates that when opened will reveal mini tartlets. The colors chosen for this table are pale blues, pinks, greens, and yellows. I used colors light in saturation so that the intense yellows of the lemon desserts will be the focus of the viewer's attention. The cake plate is glazed in a light green to compliment the lemon meringue tart covered with small pistachio nuts. A strong association is formed when there is a hint of color used in the serving plate that is also found in the dessert itself. The dessert belongs on its serving piece and creates a powerful visual image.

The last two tables have themes that move away from specific fruits towards other dessert delicacies. The French macaroon table features small, 1.5-inch cookies made from two light almond meringue pads that are sandwiched with luscious creams. This table comprises a collection of sixty-two macaroon cookies in the flavors of a black current cream, a chocolate semisweet ganache, an orange marmalade-orange mousseline, and pistachio Sicilian cream. Together these cookies form a beautiful collection of flavors and colors. The schema for this table was inspired by a more playful interpretation of

springtime. The table represents an exploration of different methods of serving cookies using small baskets and trays. Returning to the concept of the cycle, the baskets and trays are placed in a large circle in a recurring pattern of size and color. The cycle begins with a basket and corresponding tray that holds one macaroon, which then proceeds to hold one macaroon, to two and then three. The forms of the trays are created in response to the circular form of the cookie. The short walls of the trays elegantly flow around the macaroons, making the small cookies seem grand. For this table setting the color black will be introduced into the color palette. The baskets are glazed in a black satin glaze that forms a rich background for the different macaroons to be presented on. The trays are glazed in different colors that correspond to the different flavors of macaroons, reinforcing the tray's relationship to the cookies.

Chocolate is the theme of the final table and comprises desserts that have the ingredients of both chocolate and fruit. The schema for this table is based on the concept of the growth of flowers in the spring. The pieces grow in height, size of petal shapes, and value of color. As with the berry table, there is a tall cake stand in the center of the table that will act as the focal point. It will serve magnificent chocolate velvet bombe cake. An inch below the tall stand, raised plates will be serving strawberries dipped in chocolate. Just below the raised plates, specialized cake plates will also be raised to an unusual height. When plates are removed from their stands the audience will find eating utensils. This is meant to surprise the user and to encourage a curious exploration of all the forms on the table. White chocolate cake with white chocolate shavings as accents will appear on the cake plates. These cake plates are also created to mimic the shape of the piece of cake. The rounded triangular shape of the cake plates gives the user a new

experience in eating cake because of its unusual placement on a stand and in a form that will create a memorable experience. An inch below the cake plates is a pair of cupcake holders. Each holder has a base that supports a removable dish that fits the cupcake perfectly. The small dish can be taken off and held in the user's hand for closer enjoyment. The final layer of the table is a raspberry chocolate mousse that is served in a small teacup and saucer. Beside the teacup is a small petal plate for another round of cupcakes. In total there are six cups of chocolate mousse and six petal plates for cupcakes. The schema for this table is based on growth, and that can be seen throughout the entire table. To begin, the pieces seem as though they are in the process of growing as flowers. The outer pieces of the setting are two inches tall, and with each change of dessert the serving piece gains inches in height, ending with the tallest and largest dessert, the cake stand serving the bombe cake. There is also a growth in the ornamentation in all the pieces. Beginning on one side of the circular table, all of the pieces in that quadrant have the smallest size of decorative rims or petal forms. As one moves around the table to the next quadrant, the size of this decoration grows. This is found around the whole table, giving the viewer another perspective on growth. The final element that completes the table is the change in color value that correlates with the increase in size of the piece's decorative rims. The work begins with a light shade of the chosen color and as the viewer travels around the table the colors get steadily darker in shade. The colors that I have chosen are colors that I think can best display the richness of different shades of milk and dark chocolate. The color palette fades from blues to greens to orange.

The final table shown in this show is connected to the chocolate table, a cake cutting and serving table. This table includes a series of stacked plates that can be used in

the serving of the chocolate velvet bombe cake. The plates are designed with an aesthetic similar to that used for the chocolate table. The plates are stacked in groups of three. They offer the users three different sizes, depending on the size of cake served. These plates are also glazed in the same palette as the chocolate table so as to form a connection between the tables.

CONCLUSION

My thesis exhibition is an exploration in creating memorable experiences for an audience. I chose to create a celebratory event that was inspired by the sentiments of spring and the sweetness of desserts. The show is a collection of five table settings, each designed with their own theme of dessert and design and display. The objects within the table settings were designed for specific desserts, with the forms mimicking or enhancing the desserts themselves. I hope the audience will experience my work as a celebration that will be remembered with the coming of each new spring.

VITA

Jennifer Gawronski was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in December 1978. She was raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she graduated from South High School in 1997. She then completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in ceramics, and a Bachelor of Science in art education from Pennsylvania State University at the University Park campus in 2001. In 2005 she moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree at Louisiana State University, which will be awarded at the August Commencement, 2008.