

Gayle Chong Kwan works with large-format photography, video, sound, installation, and performance. Her work is often context specific, creates temporary communities or involves people in rituals of exchange, such as food or trade, to explore ideas of history, the senses and memory. The personal and global politics of food, trade and tourism have been a major focus of Chong Kwan's work to date.

Chong Kwan is based in London and has shown extensively in the UK and abroad. As well as a BA Fine Art from Central Saint Martins College of Art, she has a MSc in Communications from Stirling University and a BA in Politics and Modern History from Manchester University.

Recent exhibitions include: 'Tales from the New World', 10th Havana Biennial, Cuba; 'Terroir and the Pathetic Fallacy', ArtSway, New Forest, UK; 'At Your Service', David Roberts Foundation, London; 'Pot Luck', New Art Gallery, Walsall, UK; 'Memoryscape Moravia', Centro Cultural de Moravia, Medellin, Colombia; 'New London School in Berlin' at Galerie Schuster, Berlin; 'Government Art Fund', British Ambassador's Residence, Paris; 'Cantilever', Collyer Bristow Gallery, London Festival of Architecture, London; 'The Land of Peach Blossoms', Graves Gallery, Sheffield; 'Utopia', Museu Berardo, Centro Cultural do Belem, Lisbon; 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth', Platform for Art, London; 'Different Worlds', National Portrait Gallery, London; 'Follies', La Villette, Paris; 'Cockaigne', Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester; 'Veduta Romantica', MAC, Birmingham; European Forum Emerging Creation, Neumünster Abbey, Luxembourg; 'Stellar Dentrite', Tatton Park Biennial, Manchester.

Recent awards include: Pepinieres Europeenes Pour Jeunes Artistes Award; Arts Council England Touring, Vauxhall Collective Award for Photography. Recent residencies include: Coast International Residency, A Foundation, Liverpool; Venice Printmaking, Italy; Macroproyecto de Moravia, Colombia; UNIDEE, Fondazione Pistoletto, Italy; Ville de Paris Residency, Cite Internationale des Arts de Paris, Paris.

'Terroir and the Pathetic Fallacy'

Gayle Chong Kwan has created many mythical landscapes from disturbing arrangements of foods. She once created a Tower of Babel from sweating meat, and also photographed an oatmeal version of Brigadoon, the Scottish village legendarily supposed to appear from the mist. At ArtSway in the New Forest, Chong-Kwan has created, then photographed, a place she calls Terroir, an imaginary tourist resort whose inhabitants are in thrall to vegetables of monumental scale. This is just one stop in a long-term project to examine the Grand Tour, a cultural trip that was a rite of passage for privileged young men before the advent of mass tourism. Food enters the landscape as Chong-Kwan's metaphor for mastery – a kind of satire on those consumers of art, food, language and culture who imagined that they had digested entire worlds.

Laura McLean-Ferris

Exhibitionist: The Best Art Shows to see this week

Guardian June 2009

'Sculptural Photography'

Inspired by 'utopian legends and developments in global tourism', Gayle Chong Kwan's 'Cockaigne' project of other-worldly food sculptures appeared as Art on the Underground. 'Senscape Scotland' features images created from agricultural waste.

The Hot List

Independent on Sunday

February 2009

'En Route, The Grand Tour'

These works comprise part of a larger project – The Grand Tour – in which Chong Kwan has conducted ongoing research in response to several European sites. The grand tour was a traditional itinerary of travel undertaken by wealthy European from the seventeenth century until the advent of mass tourism. Those returning from Rome and Venice would return worldly wise and sophisticated, having learned of the art, culture and mannerisms of Europe. Chong Kwan's new body of work continues an artistic tradition of satirizing the grand tour that can be seen in the work of William Hogarth, for example. The grand tour is so pertinent to Chong Kwan's work not just because of the history of taste, however, but also because of the tour's relationship to digestion and mastery. As young men toured around Europe consuming particular art, food, language and culture, they thus imagined that they had digested entire worlds and histories, thus equipping them to lead with authority....Gayle Chong Kwan's Grand Tour is a lesson in the impossibility of total digestion and knowledge – directing us to the unnoticed remnants that are easily ignored, like a banana skin lying in the kerb. For it would be a slip up to believe that whole worlds, cities and cultures are quite so easy to digest from a tourist perspective.

Laura McLean-Ferris

Portfolio

Issue 49 2009

'Terroir and the Pathetic Fallacy'

A Tower of Babel built from processed ham? Brigadoon made from porridge oats? We feel a bit queasy. Thankfully Gayle Chong Kwan photographs or videos of her fanciful smorgasbords so visitors are not subjected to the real thing. Her premise is to do with the food trade and its damaging effects on the environment. Chong Kwan now turns her attention to the tourist industry, goading vegetables to do their worst, resulting in shadowy images of a place I hope never to visit.

Jessica Lack

Guardian Guide

June 2009

'Gayle Chong Kwan and Atlantis'

'Atlantis' is an enormous fantastical tourist resort created in miniature and carved out of clear food packaging materials: a huge installation covering almost the entirety of the large empty property in South Kensington, an off site project by Arts Co London. First mentioned in Plato's dialogues in around 360 BC, Atlantis is the name of a legendary island, which catastrophically sank into the ocean 'in a single day and night of misfortune' when an earthquake triggered the flood. Treated as a literary device, Atlantis entered into the popular imagination in the 1880s. The possible existence of a genuine Atlantis has been discussed throughout centuries, and expeditions continue to search, mainly in the Gulf of Mexico, for its remains. Mythologised for its abundance of beautiful temples, embellished palaces, harbours and luscious vegetation, but this version of 'Atlantis' has been carved out of used plastic waste food packaging, whose discarded remains may be found at the bottom of many of our rivers and seas

Cristiana Botigella

VERY

Issue 13, 2008

'Radical Women'

Number 9: Gayle Chong Kwan

Who: Artist

Why: At first glance Chong Kwan, 34, makes work that resembles the organisms that thrive under teenage boys' beds. Take a second look and you realise that her amazing photographs and videos are intricately carved from chocolate, cheese, and plastic milk bottles. Her work is currently on display as part of London Underground's Platform for Art programme.

She says: We are quite literally consuming and altering aspects of landscape to correspond to our ideals of paradise.'

Observer Woman

No 27 March 2008

'Contemporary Chinoiserie'

The vision of China represented in this exhibition is, as the title suggests, still a romantic and fanciful one, though more actively engaged and critical than its antecedents. Moments of darker reality do still pierce through uncomfortably, with Helen Couchman's paper works commenting on the changes in Beijing's built environment and Gayle Chong Kwan's detached observance of the deserted English-style satellite town on the outskirts of Shanghai.

Creative Crafts Review

November 2008

'Gayle Chong Kwan'

Food is sustenance, but for Gayle Chong Kwan it's also her medium. The 34-year-old, half-Scottish, half-Chinese-Mauritian artist sculpts arresting landscapes made entirely out of chow. Like a gastronomic version of the Epcot Center, Chong Kwan's pieces take the viewer on a journey across civilizations. Exploring the relationship between food, culture and what it means to take from the earth.

Her most prominent series 'Cockaigne' is a take on the mythical paradise made famous by the Brothers Grimm, capturing romantic landscapes with rolling vistas of lettuce leaf forests and pristine mounds of neatly churned butter. But they also reflect a world raked over by man. Rotting fruit and meat convey a sense of desolation, the dried out flesh suggesting an environment stripped to its dystopian core. "We often literally consume the landscape", she explains. "And it's important for me to show how people can work with the environment, instead of shaping it to correlate with our needs and wants."

Theme Magazine, New York

July 2007

'Cockaigne'

*Cockaigne, the 14th century mythical medieval land where leisure time reigns supreme and food is in abundant and infinite supply has been given a new and inspired lease of life by Gayle Chong Kwan...Cockaigne comprises twelve photographs showing the idle gourmand's paradise in all its decadent glory, but with a delicious twist: the landscapes themselves are made entirely out of foodstuffs.... But, just as Damien Hirst is making moves to replace his now-rotten shark in formaldehyde in *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), Gayle Chong Kwan has worked skillfully to capture the temporal for posterity. Her micro-worlds were created two years ago and have obviously been consigned to the waste bin long before now; but her photographic timing is perfect. The culinary treatment of a centuries-old, utopian legend makes us aware of the intrinsic decay within so great an empire, leading all too readily to its demise. And so the food is pictured just on the verge of turning bad. In *Resort* (2004), the stately cheese buildings are sweating; in *Babel* (2004), the strips of ham, pinned together to form a magnificent tower, are curling and rancid. Even the apple palm trees of *Avalon* (2004) are brown underneath. And therein lies a sobering moral to give us all a little food for thought.*

Kay Carson

24 Hour Museum, UK

July 2006

'Alma Mater'

On a softer note, Gayle Chong Kwan's installation produces a profound and insightful experience that also touches on the canal alongside the gallery. A tiny dinner table set with small samples of food can be enjoyed whilst blindfolded, accompanied by a headphone soundtrack. Meanwhile, menus on the table recount the experiences of local shop owners being displaced by the drive to regenerate the neighbourhood around the gallery.

Anthony Alexander

a-n reviews

April 2006

'Cockaigne'

Beautiful landscapes entirely made out of food...creating fantastical environments as a form of coping with shifting identities

Arts Preview, The Independent

Feb 2006

'Gayle Chong Kwan'

Gayle Chong Kwan is an artist based in London whose practice has periodically readdressed individual and collective ideas of paradise and utopia. However these relationships tend to be played out in contested public spaces rather than insulated gallery micro-climates, and are not generalised but intensely local and complex in tone. Her prior education in political science and a Masters qualification in Communications is an interesting element in a practice that routinely deals openly with the contested territory of utopia on an intimist scale.

Sarah Browne 'It's Going to Get Worse'

Visual Artist Newsheet, Ireland

November 2005

'Cockaigne'

These beautiful images are constructed from foodstuffs, which are verging on the repellent. The personal and global politics of food has been a major focus of Chong Kwan's work to date and here one is reminded of butter-mountains, cheap factory farmed products and BSE. Given the references to tourism and paradise, these images also carry connotations of western excess at the expense of the global south. Chong Kwan's complex photographs remind us that contemporary dreams of pleasure, ease and satiation are similarly ambivalent.

Fiona Candlin

Portfolio

Issue 41 2005