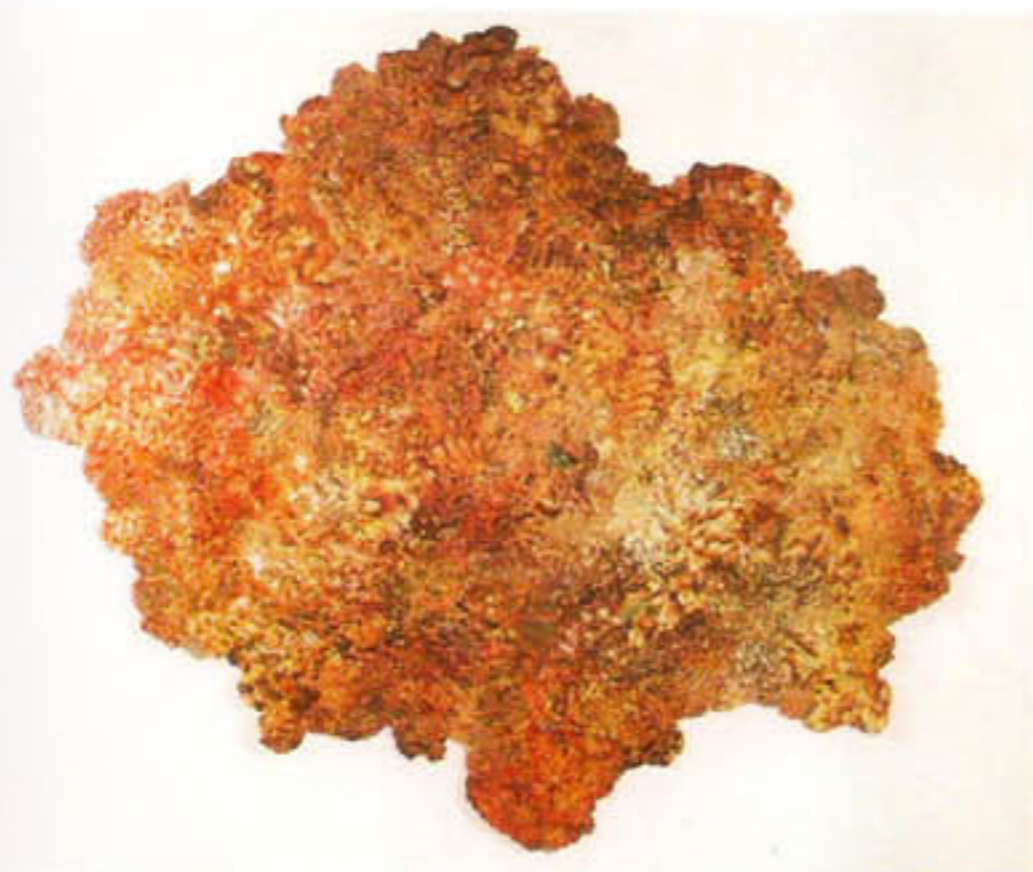


Experimental Eating





Elizabeth Willing



“You can manipulate confectionery so heavily”, Australian artist Elizabeth Willing says, “and people will still want to eat it”. A fine arts graduate of Queensland University of Technology and based in Brisbane, Willing often places sweets at the centre of her artwork because of the reactions they bring out in people; her key interests lie in the “sensory elements of food”, and the “ideology that accompanies these materials”.

One notable use of confectionery in Willing’s artwork is her installation *Goosebump*, created originally for Fresh Cut at Institute of Modern Art Brisbane and as part of the Sugar, Sugar exhibit at the Brenda May Gallery in Sydney, 2010. The piece consists of *pfeffernüsse* biscuits evenly lining the gallery wall. The biscuits were attached to the wall with royal icing, one of Willing’s favourite materials, which she calls “edible cement”. The biscuits were ready for consumption, but guests were not informed of this as they entered the gallery. They needed to use their senses to find the

work, which was camouflaged on the wall within an obtuse wallpaper pattern. Soon enough, the audience began to eat the work, revealing the brown interior of the *pfeffernüsse*. The result was a height graph of sorts, with only the biscuits at the hardest to reach points remaining intact at the end of the display. The name of the work is a reference to the gingerbread house in Hansel and Gretel; the house in the story is “an incredible sugar house many children, including myself, would have loved to have stumbled across”, Willing says. “But then there is the witch inside who wants to eat them; the cannibalism is expressed in the title of the work, eating goosebumps off the wall.”

Willing’s 2012 work *Stew* was also created for Sydney’s Brenda May Gallery and managed to draw an equally visceral reaction from viewers. The piece is a large-scale collage of different images of stews and casseroles from vintage cookbooks, dating from the 1970s and 1980s. These images, which Willing believes to be a part of “the uninspiring food photography” of the era, “make for a revolting spew-like blob far removed from the pleasures of a homecooked meal”. Though stews and casseroles are generally known as hearty, satisfying meals, the images presented have the opposite effect, visually repulsing viewers. Willing’s inspiration for *Stew* came, she says, from “a housemate of mine who used to make [one] a few times a week”, who would “more often than not leave it on the stove overnight, and perhaps for a day or so to get a bit rancid before throwing it in the bin or out in the yard. I learnt to hate the never-ending stew, and old casserole cookbooks were a physical representation of that”.

⊖ *Goosebump*, 2010, Pfeffernüsse biscuits and royal icing on wall, 900 x 400 cm. Courtesy the artist. ⊕ *Stew*, 2012, stew and casserole images from cookbooks, glue, 300 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist.