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## Led into temptation

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# **LED INTO TEMPTATION**

A Thesis  
submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by  
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A.A. St. Louis Community College, 1996  
B.F.A. Kansas City Art Institute, 2000  
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## **ABSTRACT**

I am leading the viewer to experience a room full of sinful, sensual and guilty pleasures through a visual feast of sugary excess. I create a tactile environment of anticipation, desire and delight. Using sugary sweet colors, smooth curvaceous forms dressed with spikes, nipples, bumps and knobs, and objects of scale. The objective is to make the viewers salivate, confusing desire with need, leaving them to question, “What is temptation?” A visceral visual sugary landscape is created where food and vessel co-exist, each relying on the other to be complete and fulfilling.

## LED INTO TEMPTATION

“I’m interested in foods generally which have been fooled with ritualistically, displays contrived and arranged in certain ways to tempt us, or seduce us, or to religiously transcend us.”

-Wayne Thiebaud, painter

Life is a series of experiences centered on pleasurable and non-pleasurable outcomes. Pleasurable experiences can be emotionally or physically created and often both. Whatever the cause of the pleasure, our bodies respond differently to pleasure from day to day, moment to moment. *Led into Temptation* is an exploration of pleasure. I have fabricated a world of dessert cups, crème brulee dishes and cake stands that embody the playful celebration of the pleasures formed by desire, denial and gratification. The landscape of this world is made up of sugar and color and mapped out by a horizon of icing, strawberries and mountains of sugar. The festive surprises of pleasure within the landscape are the pieces. Gluttony and overindulgence are a place of comfort for me connected to love, family and the home. The work is a celebration of my family, childhood experiences and the aspects of my soul.

My family is centered on food. The irony is that I come from a family of six overweight weight-conscious people. I am known affectionately to my family as “jelly buns”, a bitter-sweet nickname coined by my father as a term of endearment. Growing up, I learned prematurely what role food would play in my life. I was constantly reprimanded or given “the look” by my parents whenever I ate something I shouldn’t have or snuck a cookie. Why were the cookies there if we weren’t supposed to eat them? Later, I found out why the cookies were there. A continuous cycle of secrets of overindulgence followed by guilt and remorse encompassed the family. Gluttony quickly

turned to rebellion when I became a teenager. I would revel in joy to hear my parents tell me what I didn't need, while I ate it in delight right in front of their noses whether I wanted it or not. I quickly developed a relationship with food revolving around manipulation. I could simply adjust my parent's mood by eating or not eating something. As a whole, my family struggles with the desire for food, followed by its denial.

A Cascanett family occasion centers on food, the pleasures of eating and overindulgence. Summer weekends, as a child, were spent at a lakefront cabin in the Ozarks. Each weekend felt like a holiday, visiting, relaxing and eating. Every Easter, our baskets were brimming with candies, so full that the handle would pull with tension and strain if we dared try to lift them. On Christmas and Thanksgiving, we would get it all, turkey and ham, three types of potatoes, macaroni and cheese, two kinds of stuffing, and some vegetables, usually disguised in a creamy, cheesy casserole. We have an entire table devoted to cookies, candies and nuts, this not including the cakes and pies. We spend the entire Holiday season eating, loving every minute of it. And birthdays are always celebrated with a giant cake, one or two pies (just in case you don't want cake), and several flavors of ice cream. My family would validate the joy of living when we shared the pleasure of gluttony. It was during these times that my love affair with food could flourish. I no longer had to sneak forbidden pleasures or repent for them.

Around the same time I learned of foods pleasurable indulgent qualities, I began to learn of the pleasure of sex. I confused desire with need as my body became reliant on the full gratification of ecstasy. I would spend my days indulging, mingling the delights of sexual interaction and sugary sweets in a single afternoon. Food became a powerful tool for pleasure, no longer a means of satiating, but rather of indulging in sinful and



guilty pleasures. “Food and sex are analogous instinctive needs and there is a lifelong connection between oral pleasure and sexual pleasure.”<sup>1</sup> The banana and sauce holders combine the functional aspect of eating a banana as food with the pleasurable experience of peeling its skin back and dipping it into sweetness with each bite. Both whimsical and overtly sexual, the piece questions our naivety as well as our naughtiness. Our mouths are the open and waiting receiver of delight, the pleasurable sensation of touching the lips, the tongue, our breath, the feeling inside the mouth, consuming us inside into ecstasy during sex and during eating. Our bodies often seek the highest level of pleasure with little persuasion. As a result our knowledge of the pursuit of pleasure is altered, craving ecstasy, causing stress and release. I believe our bodies need pleasure to exist.

Clay, in its unfired state, is a sensual, visceral and tactile material that brings me pleasure. I first chose to work in clay for these properties. There is a joy in building an object from a lump of clay, to understand the full potential and capacity of the material and to become aware of the object from the inside out. I later discovered that clay could correspond to the same qualities in its finished fired state. I use color and form interspersed with tactile patterns to convey this in a sensual way. When someone enters my studio, they feel compelled to caress the soft curve of a lid or fondle its spiky knobs and nipples as if they were being naughty. Through the use of these elements in my work, I draw the viewer into the intimate and sensual qualities of the material that I experience first hand as the maker. The intimate scale of the individual cake plates allows each person to have their own personal relationship with it. Feeling compelled to lick the knob and suck berries off of the spikes allows the admirer to create a private sensual relationship with the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Counihan, p.63

As a potter, I am innately drawn to function. I choose to make functional objects for a variety of reasons. Functional objects carry a long history and association to home and family. I see function as making an immediate connection and providing a place of familiarity for the viewer. An everyday object, such as a bowl, becomes invisible in the daily visual landscape. The act of making the familiar everyday object unfamiliar assigns it a new context in the domestic sphere. I take the form of the dessert cup and add vibrant color and knobby additions to create unexpected whimsy. I use function in an intimate and sensual way that invites us to touch. Physical contact with an object gratifies our need to explore objects with more than just our eyes. Through use, a sensual and intimate relationship develops;

“Nothing touches the lips more than that from which we drink.”

This sensual experience with the ceramic object is inherent in my work through the addition of spikes, unexpected bumps and dots and creamy “lickable” colors.

Undeniably, I choose function for its direct and permanent relationship to food. Food is an intrinsic layer in my work. The decisions I make about color, form and surface are based on the intended food for that vessel. I choose colors that resemble the color and textures of the food, realizing that they compete with the food itself. My intention is to make the viewer aware of the excess of the experience joining the vessel and food as one overloaded entity. The response to the object causes the viewer to salivate wanting to touch, lick and consume.

As an artist, I am aware that I am unable to control the destiny of the object; how, when, why and if it will be used. However by controlling the sensual qualities of the material, I try to steer the viewer toward a particular relationship with the object. The

large cake stand is the validation and acceptance of the behaviors of overindulgence. The large scale of the piece overwhelms its users with sugary excess. The platters rim holds a reservoir of syrupy sauce to further the feeling of sugary indulgence. The crème brulee dishes are a joyous parade of the individual feasting of greediness. Each person is able to gorge their own dessert in satisfaction. Crème brulee is a dessert about excess, made with butter and sugar until it becomes a thick sweet custard like pudding. The heaviness of its manner resembles the heaviness of my body. The foods in the pieces are chosen for their sensual, tactile and overtly sexual qualities; the banana, melon balls in heavy sweet crème, crème brulee, rich cheesecake, lemon tarts, mini-cakes with swollen holes of berries, sugary and syrupy sauces, and the large cake covered in creamy frosting.

“Food represents the most primitive form of love and nurturing, in that receiving milk from the breast is the infant’s first encounter and fusion with another human being.”<sup>2</sup> Sweets have always been considered luxuries. Since they are inessential in human existence, their denial was once seen as the affect of economic hardship. Today, the candid denial of sugary temptations is seen as strength over our junk food packed culture. I recall a TV commercial for Pepperidge Farm cookies where a housewife is depicted indulging in cookies from secret stashes throughout the house. These intimate pleasures with food are the driving desire in my pieces. Placing sugary and tempting dessert onto the pieces in the gallery setting feeds this relationship further. When a person enters the gallery they transcend the everyday and enter a sugary, indulgent landscape full of pleasure. To know the feeling of sugar on the hands, stuck to the cheek, around the lips and the mouth, coating the top of the tongue, creates arousal. The strawberry and cream wall, sugar covered shelves and tables interspersed with colorful,

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<sup>2</sup>Meadow & Weiss, p.11.

erotic vessels and tempting desserts stimulate the viewer to want to touch and lick, proposing a readiness to consume. The objects convey the desire for repeated, private gratification and indulgence. An intimate, individual scale is chosen to convey this private relationship.

Food is one of the intimate pleasures in life. Making pots is also an intimate pleasure in life. I am an artist for this reason. The intimate pleasure that food provides in my life is the inspiration for the pieces. In *Led into Temptation*, the viewer is escorted through a landscape of sensual, sugary, edible desires. The whimsy of the work allows us to enjoy the playful sensation of food. The erotic context lets us feel a little naughty while enjoying it. Those closest to me know that I have a provocative sense of humor bordering on vulgarity. The readiness of the viewer to lick and touch, experiencing and gratifying sinful and guilty pleasures is my delight as the maker.

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1. Led into Temptation; installation view



2. Led into Temptation; installation view



3. Cake Stand



4. Cake Stand



5. Banana with Chocolate Sauce Server



6. Banana with Strawberry Sauce Server





7. Blueberry Mini-Cake Stands



8. Lemon Twist Tart Server



9. Berry Mini-Cake Stands on strawberry and crême wall



10. Berry Mini-Cake Stand



11. Dessert Cups



12. Dessert Cups



13. Crème Brûlée Towers



14. Crème Brûlée Towers



15. Crème Brûlée Towers

## VITA

Pamela E. Caskanett was born on April 20, 1972, in St. Louis, Missouri. She attended high school at Lindbergh Senior High School in St. Louis where she first became familiar with clay as a medium. After high school, Pam attended St. Louis Community College at Meramec where she concentrated on painting and drawing for several years, eventually settling into ceramics prior to receiving an Associate of Arts in 1996. After receiving her A.A., Pam wanted to focus on ceramics solely and attended the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri, where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in ceramics in 2000. While studying at KCAI, Pam had the opportunity to study on full scholarship at Penland School of Crafts in Penland, North Carolina, during a summer workshop with Nick Joerling and Silvie Granatelli. Upon graduating from KCAI, Pam went straight to graduate school at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. During her three years of research at LSU, Pam developed as an instructor and had the opportunity to spend a summer month studying architecture and landscape architecture in Mexico City. She will receive her Master of Fine Arts in ceramics from Louisiana State University in August of 2003. Pam plans to move to St. Louis where she will set up a studio and continue to work in clay. She plans to continue to teach in ceramics and focus on the development of the ceramic arts community in St. Louis.