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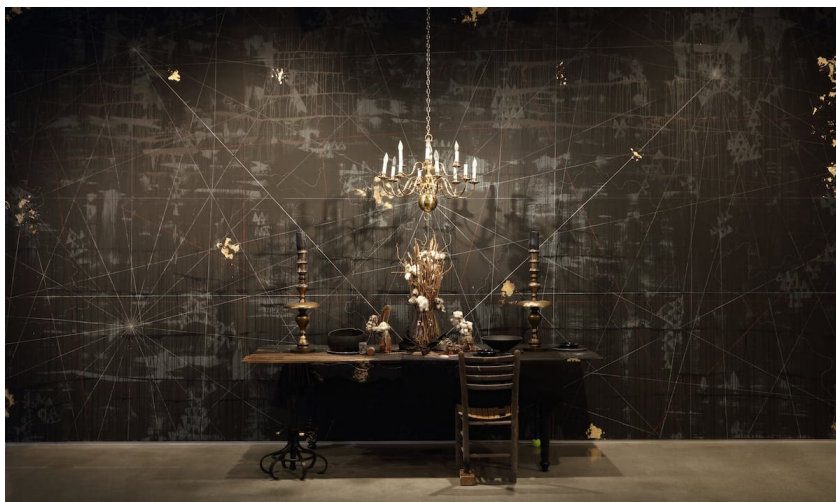
JERRY CULLUM APRIL 18, 2017

Gut Feelings, at the Zuckerman Museum of Art through May 7, is curator [Sarah Higgins](#)' first solo curatorial contribution to the Zuckerman's ambitious program of exhibitions tackling multilayered artistic and intellectual issues. I should probably say now that in this review, I intend to give these issues at least some of the depth they deserve. People looking for a quick capsule summary should stop here, with the brief advice: "Go see this show if you can, and do your best to attend the [Wednesday, April 19 symposium](#)."

Multiple perspectives on food, cooking and kitchenware are embodied in the painting, sculpture and video in *Gut Feelings*. The perspectives and the artworks touch on issues of nature and culture that have bedeviled civilization from, perhaps, the beginning. Not for nothing does a major religious tradition's origin story involve "the tree from which you must not eat."

Folk tales, too, extrapolate on the cultural uses of edible materials, and the tale of Snow White and the poisoned apple is memorably reproduced in one of the works in the show, Jeremy Jacob's *Desiring Image*, a cartoony drawing from 2015.

Eating is indisputably a fundamental biological function with inexorable biological consequences. Consume poisonous toadstools (or apples), and unhappy outcomes follow. Other dietary choices are presumed to clog arteries. Not eating at all, whether by choice or circumstance, eventually leads to a similarly fatal conclusion. But all of those biological facts arrive with culture already clinging to them; only in the most extreme circumstances does uninflected instinct kick in. All of this body of fact plays a part in *Gut Feelings*.



Michi Meko, Studying the Silences: we used to eat this back home, 2017. (Image courtesy of the Zuckerman Museum of Art.)

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Culture and nature collide most spectacularly in the Western Hemisphere encounter between European colonizers and the several peoples they enslaved. Slaves imported from Africa brought with them such foods as okra, along with distinct ways of growing and preparing them. The different foods cooked by the slaves for themselves and for the tables of the masters evolved into regionally distinct ways of eating, of which the origins have largely been forgotten. Michi Meko's installation, *Studying the Silences: we used to eat this back home* (2017), explores this through a whole series of stunning visual metaphors for the complex process by which an African-American heritage has to be rediscovered through lines of descent and preserved by honoring the ancestral lineage through which it came — in this case, by dedicating the black-painted table and chair to the legacy of a specific aunt. Each element of this stunning work of art, from the black-painted furniture and wall to what the checklist describes as "stolen Alabama cotton," could be explicated extensively, and given more time for dialogue, I would take delight in trying to do so.

Michi Meko himself may address such questions in the previously mentioned panel, "Listen to Your Gut," scheduled at the Zuckerman at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, April 19.