

We Are What We Eat — Liu Bolin, Edward Burtynsky, Jim Draper, Pepe Lopez and Vik Muniz



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**Globally, almost
50% of all fruits and
vegetables produced
are wasted**

**Over 20% of the 263
million tons of meat
produced globally is
lost or wasted**

From: Food Loss and Waste Facts, FAO 2015

We Are What We Eat

Aaron Levi Garvey, Exhibition Curator

Since the beginning of time, artists have been messengers of societal commentary. From the satirical works of William Hogarth criticizing the social inequalities in 18th Century England, to the Neo-Expressionistic activist works of Keith Haring raising awareness of the global AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, artists have held fast to their beliefs and have been catalysts for change. This is even truer in our current social and political climate, as they continue to create works of great significance and cultural impact that parody, shock, protest, observe and critique.

We Are What We Eat is an exhibition which explores the global food concerns mankind faces in the new millennium. Both industrialized and non-industrialized countries share growing concerns about viable water sources for human and livestock consumption, sustainable farming as well as food production. The selected works of artists Liu Bolin (China), Edward Burtynsky (Canada), Jim Draper (United States), Pepe Lopez (Venezuela) and Vik Muniz (Brazil) delve deeply into concepts linked to population and economic growth, malnutrition, free

range versus farmed proteins and over consumption. The exhibition is developed in conjunction with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2, to highlight the need for global food security through sustainable agricultural practices, and improved nutrition through activism and education.

The works chosen for this exhibition represent a cross section of international artists striving to raise awareness about global food concerns. Each of the artists in the exhibition uses their own voice and practice to convey unique and varied dialogs on resource sustainability. The works showcase specific regions that the artists visited, and where they observed alarming environmental scenarios.

Selections from Liu Bolin's *Mask* series combine the traditional motifs of Peking Opera masks and commentary on the profoundly commercialized and ever developing values of Chinese society. Liu uses the logos of popular food and beverage companies, both American and Chinese, to decorate his masks – thereby inserting modern day giants of consumption and industry into the delicate and refined world of Chinese opera. By replacing the traditional Peking Opera masks with industrial welding masks, Liu Bolin seeks to comment on the confrontational and

disruptive dichotomy of the Chinese economy and food industry. Two additional works from the artist's well-known ongoing *Hiding In The City* series are also represented in the exhibition. *Puffed Food* and *Vegetables* lend viewers a glimpse of the imbalance between fresh vegetables and processed junk food. The two arresting images, in which Liu Bolin has painted himself into the background of each piece as a representative of the Chinese people, displays a visual disproportion of these two commodities in sheer volume and scale. The abundant and lively *Puffed Food*, invokes the spectacle that is the processed food industry, through bright artificial colors and overflowing supermarket shelves. Whereas *Vegetables* counters that image and industry by exhibiting lush vegetation, and brilliant natural colors on well manicured and highly organized produce market shelves.

The sole work by Edward Burtynsky included in the exhibition is from his *Water* series. The photograph *Drylands Farming #32 Monegros County, Aragon, Spain* delves into the tradition of dryland farming in northeastern parts of Spain. The semi-arid land is prone to drought and high winds, resulting in scarce water sources and an immediate need for industrial irrigations systems. Aside from the small

amount of natural rainfall in this region, the only other natural sources of water are salt lagoons. The lack of viable non-salinic water in this region and in Burtynsky's documentation draws attention to broader growing concern for global water shortages.

Since the landing of Juan Ponce de Leon in the southeast of the United States in 1503, the populations of various indigenous animals have waxed and waned in the region as a result of the introduction of imported non-indigenous wildlife. Jim Draper's *Produce* series examines the long-term effects of introducing outside animal species into unfamiliar regions and the impact on native species. The subtle yet poignant serigraph suite presents a grouping of hybrid free-range animals found within the South East United States, which are now more common throughout the wild over indigenous species. The decline in quality and sustainability of these organic proteins has become a source of concern in the United States as well as other areas of the globe, due to the insertion of outside invasive species and over industrialization. The lasting effects on mankind's native animal protein sources have not only drawn concerns about the quality of the animals we harvest, but also the health of those who

consume these lesser proteins. Such concerns include low amino acid counts, affecting muscular health, and increased risks of cancers from processed inorganic proteins.

The *Guapísimas* (Gorgeous) series of work by Pepe Lopez focuses on the global interaction between industrialized and traditional production of food sources. With his four works, Lopez draws parallels between nearly forgotten traditional harvesting methods and the commercialization of sugar and coffee production, re-appropriating corporate logos of fast food companies onto traditional harvesting baskets. By stripping away the baskets' customary functionality, Lopez calls into question the ethics of consumption and the over processing of rich natural commodities by the corporate world of food production.

Vik Muniz's subtle and honest *Sugar Children* photograph series is presented in its entirety in the exhibition. These beautifully displayed portraits of child laborers, whom the artist befriended in the Caribbean, tell stories of life on a small farm and the socio-economic difficulties encountered there. Muniz also confronts the phasing out of small farms due to the industrialization of the sugar cane industry, thereby forcing an already at risk community of

workers into an every more unstable way of life, where wages and food are not guaranteed.

Together, this selected body of art comes together to make a profound statement in addressing the multileveled global food concerns facing our planet. The worldwide numbers on these issues are staggering and rapidly growing at an alarming rate. The hope of *We Are What We Eat* is to bring forward a unified voice in ending global hunger, malnutrition and water shortages.

Aaron Levi Garvey, 2016

**99 million children
are underweight**

**161 million children
are stunted due to
chronic malnutrition**

**51 million children
wasted due to acute
malnutrition**

A message from Jack Brewer, Ambassador for Peace & Sport, U.S. Federation for Middle East Peace

Issues of nutrition and food safety, throughout history, have existed in tandem. This pairing is especially highlighted in places and populations where food is scarce: as supplies decline, hygiene and safety controls slacken and there is an increase in less nutritious diets. This leads to public consumption of more foods that are considered “unsafe foods” – a term indicating that the ingredients contain hazards that pose severe health risks.

The Food and Agriculture Organization to the United Nations (FAO) defines food security as “existing when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Yet, to this day, hunger remains an everyday challenge for close to 795 million people worldwide, the vast majority – 780 million – who live in developing regions of the world.

In order to push momentum forward in tackling food safety and food security, malnutrition eradication should remain a key commitment of decision-makers

at all levels. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals proposes in Goal 2 that by 2030 “[to] end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.” As we see it today, the most targeted and susceptible groups are: children, due to their exposure to marketing; women, due to gender-focused marketing which perpetuates traditional and unequal roles in society; and low-income groups, as healthy food options are not readily available or accessible to them.

As Ambassador for Peace & Sport to the U.S. Federation for Middle East Peace, and in connection with The Jack Brewer Foundation, my focus stands with the groups within these underdeveloped regions. I aim to: empower women and children in impoverished communities through the implementation of initiatives that enable food security; promote access to education and initiate cultural exchanges; assist in medical aid and disaster relief; and build peace. It is important to focus global community outreach to those who are most susceptible to insecurity in their daily life, especially those in situations facing hunger and poverty.

Hunger and poverty remain as defining factors of developing countries and regions in transition, and will likely remain so for the coming decades. Throughout time, much has been done to encourage positive changes in food insecurity and safety, but yielding unsatisfying results. In supporting this exhibition, a powerful statement will be made with regards to the food security and food safety crisis we currently face.

Our aim, with the exhibition *We Are What We Eat*, is to begin the conversation about food and its necessity for ensuring proper health, in order to bring to light a devastating global issue that has continuously affected countless communities.

Jack Brewer, 2016

There are over 1.4 billion cattle in the world

Rice is the primary staple for over 1/2 the world's population

Plants provide over 80% of our energy intake

Art for Thoughts

Adolfo Pecchio, Founder and CEO APILA Capital

We would like to start by thanking all the artists and the team members involved, and acknowledge Ambassador Jack Brewer and his unconditional support in the *Art For Thoughts* project, as well as the flawless and impeccable leadership of Eli Klein.

After nearly 20 years of interactions with art, my wife Mariana and I found a common theme in the outward appearance versus the inward significance of it. We began questioning the idiom, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” This intrinsic value behind art has significantly impacted our family and friends and has guided our daughter Sofia’s education at home.

Drawing on our life experiences, we began to understand the virtue behind images that are constantly revealing themselves as subconscious messages, and in the process we became avid art collectors. Carl Jung referred to this phenomenon in his book *Man and His Symbols*. He clearly understood how we are all connected via our “collective unconscious” and how artists plug into that domain to express themselves. Thus these artists help us unite,

awaken and think when we are confronted with their work, elevating our capacity to understand ourselves and the complex world around us.

When we came across the masks of Chinese artist Liu Bolin, we were immediately attracted to the messages behind them. This triggered the conceptualization of a collaborative initiative where others could appreciate the role art plays in raising awareness in – and even, hopefully, acting on – social issues. A multidisciplinary team was brought together to create a platform, which we named *Art For Thoughts*.

This first, kickoff exhibition, *We Are What We Eat*, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, will provide us with the opportunity to host our dialogue. We also aim to inspire campaigns harnessing the potential of art and initiating peaceful reflections on social-political issues.

After two years of organizing this exhibition, we have demonstrated to ourselves the power of art in its ability to unite, ignite passion and act on principles.

“The soul never thinks without an image”
(Aristotle, *On The Soul*, Book III. part 7)

Adolfo Pecchio, 2016

**There are 20 billion
chickens in the world**

**Poultry accounts for
80% of all livestock**

**56% of chickens live
in Asia**

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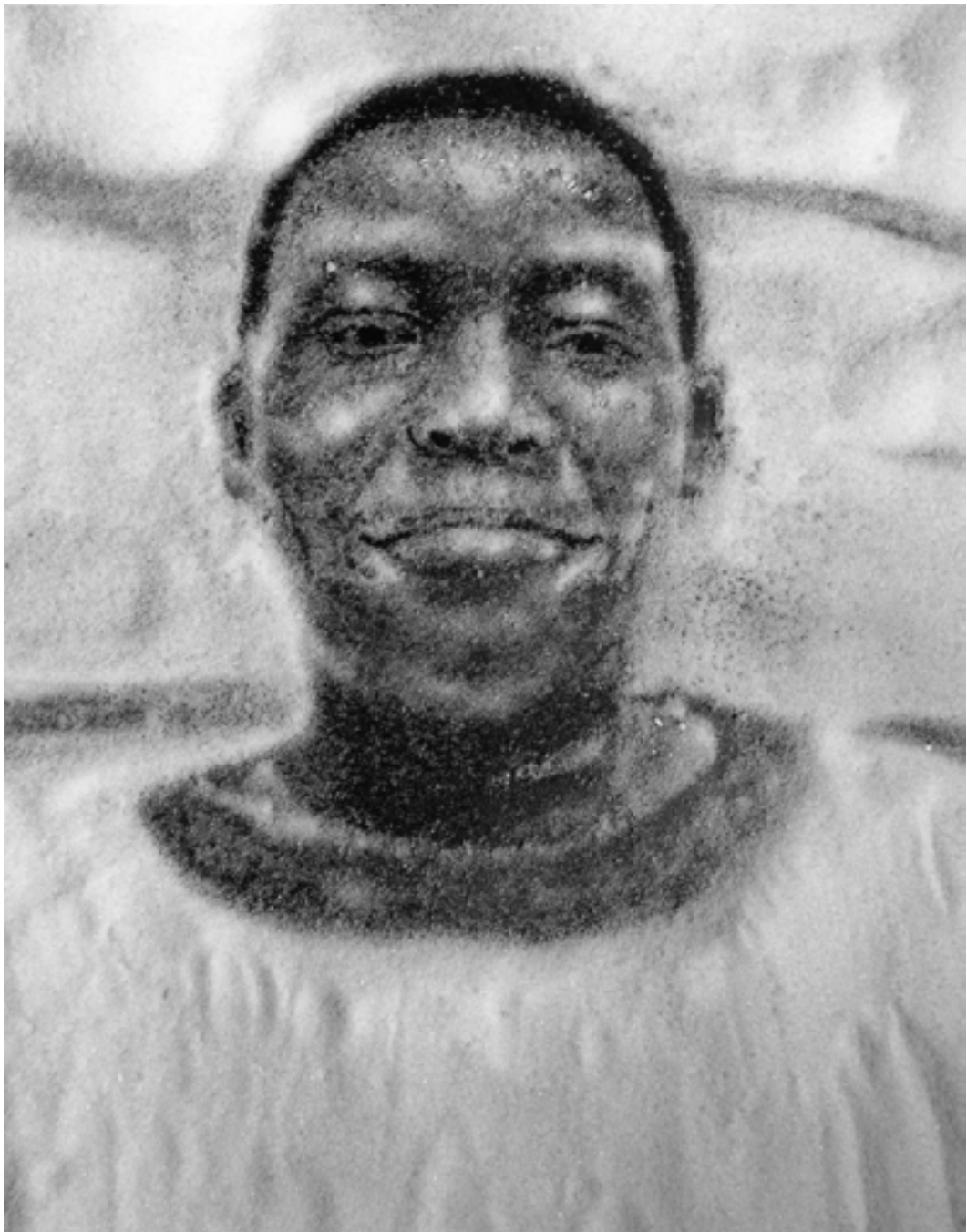
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Artist Biographies

1–13 Liu Bolin (China)

Liu Bolin is a multimedia artist and social activist born in 1973, in Shandong, China. He studied sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, graduating with an MFA in 2001. Liu has created photographs for his *Hiding in the City* series across the world, painting and blending himself into various backgrounds to initiate dialogues around socio-political action. Liu's works have been exhibited across the world in one-man shows including at Fotografiska Museet, Stockholm; Boise Art Museum, Boise; Kunstverein Ludwisburg, Ludwisburg; Museo H.C. Anderssen, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome and Ekaterina Cultura Foundation, Moscow.

14 Edward Burtynsky (Canada)

Edward Burtynsky is one of Canada's most respected photographers. His remarkable photographic depictions of global industrial landscapes are included in the collections of over sixty major museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and

the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California. Burtynsky was born in 1955 of Ukrainian heritage in St. Catharines, Ontario. He received his BAA in Photography/ Media Studies from Ryerson University in 1982, and in 1985 founded Toronto Image Works.

15–19 Jim Draper (United States)

Jim Draper grew up in Kosciusko, Mississippi. His work, which includes drawing, painting, photography, video and writing, is informed by journeys into the wilds of Florida and Georgia. He attended the University of Mississippi, where he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1974, and received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Georgia at Athens in 1978. Based in Jacksonville, he is currently a full time faculty member and exhibition director/curator for the University of North Florida's galleries, both on campus and at the annex gallery in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Jacksonville.

20–23 Pepe López (Venezuela)

Pepe Lopez is a Venezuelan visual artist who was born in 1966. He lives and works in Paris and Caracas.

He received a Bachelor of Applied Science in Civil Engineering from the Metropolitan University in Caracas and studied for two years in the master's program in Philosophy from the Simon Bolivar University. Pepe López is a complex artist, and his work is based on a vast trajectory of diverse transmutation. López explores aspects of the map of the social spectrum through the translation of aesthetic codes, while developing his perception and concepts in a prolific variety of mediums, such as installations, objects, collages, paintings, performances, photography, tapestry, video and sculptures.

24–29 Vik Muniz (Brazil)

Born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1961, Vik Muniz is recognized for his photographs of reimagined, largely art historical imagery, which he creates out of a wide variety of materials—from chocolate and sugar to junk and toys. His work has been exhibited widely throughout the globe and is included in numerous international public and private collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Tate Gallery, London; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil; and Fondation Cartier pour L'Art Contemporain, Paris.

Checklist and Art Descriptions

1

Liu Bolin, *The Future*, 2015. Archival pigment print, 53 1/4 × 70 7/8 inches (135 × 180 cm)

Project Everyone, Global Goals, Liu Bolin (China)

In September 2015, Liu Bolin was selected to create a special artwork by the United Nations-backed Global Goals campaign to launch an initiative to end world hunger, poverty and other meaningful targets. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 aims to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote

sustainable agriculture.”

This global goal serves as an important step towards zero hunger and ushering in a new era of sustainable development. Malnutrition imposes high economic and social costs. While 2 billion people do not consume enough vitamins and minerals, obesity rates have doubled over the past 30 years. Some 1.4 billion people are overweight, and 500 million obese. Feeding a growing global population while sustaining the planet poses a significant challenge but with the right partnerships, systems and practices, it can be achieved.

2

Liu Bolin, *Hiding in the City – Vegetables*, 2011. Archival pigment print, 46 × 59 inches (118 × 150 cm)

3

Liu Bolin, *Hiding in the City – Puffed Food*, 2011. Archival pigment print, 46 × 59 inches (118 × 150 cm)

Hiding in the City
Liu Bolin (China)

Liu Bolin takes the artist statement to another level — by actually disappearing into his message. Liu makes bold statements about consumerism by creating and wearing suits that allow him to blend

seamlessly into the background of his images. His work is often concerned with food safety, an issue that has cropped up in the past five years in China. The widespread and growing fast food industry throughout industrialized countries has resulted in the consumption of ultra-processed foods. Over consumption of processed and fast foods results in weight gain, obesity, various cardiovascular health problems and heightened risk of Type 2 diabetes. The global prevalence of diabetes in 2014 was estimated to be 9%. WHO projects that diabetes will be the 7th leading cause of death in 2030.

4

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 37*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

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Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 140*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

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Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 117*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

7

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 123*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

8

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 131*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

9

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 125*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

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Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 136*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

11

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 152*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

12

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 155*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

13

Liu Bolin, *Mask N° 156*,
2013. Plastic and
vulcanized fibre,
15 ³/₄ × 9 ⁷/₈ × 5 ⁷/₈ inches
(40 × 25 × 15 cm)

Liu Bolin (China)
Mask Series

Peking Opera masks are traditional forms of art that are used to depict heroes, legends, and gods found in Chinese history and culture. They are symbolic reflections of Chinese society and its values. By recreating these masks with labels of popular food and drink products seen throughout China, Liu Bolin addresses the rapidly changing, highly

commercialized values of Chinese society. By adding a necessary layer to these works—welding masks—Liu Bolin speaks to the dangers Chinese face in their contemporary society. Currently, many people worldwide do not trust product labeling and certification because of bad certification processes which directly affect food safety. There are over 200 diseases caused by unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, parasites, viruses, and chemical substances. With constant risk of food and drink contamination, eating and drinking can feel as dangerous as working with molten hot metal.

14
Edward Burtynsky,
Drylands Farming, Monegros County, Aragon, Spain, 2010.
Chromogenic color print,
48 × 64 inches
(122 × 163 cm)

Edward Burtynsky
(Canada)
Water Series

Burtynsky's photographs look at the tradition of dryland farming carried out over many generations in the northeastern part of Spain. It's an agricultural region where the land is semi-arid, sparsely populated and prone to both droughts and high winds. Despite a scarcity of water, generations of

farmers have continued to farm, so the photos depict the contrast between nature's untamed forces and man's attempts to harness it. Currently, 1/3 of the world's population lives in countries which are experiencing water shortages. The water crisis is the #1 global risk based on impact to society, as announced by the World Economic Forum in January 2015. Burtynsky's hope is that these pictures will stimulate a process of thinking about something essential to our survival; something we often take for granted—until it's gone.

15
Jim Draper, *Blue*, 2010.
Serigraph, 22 × 30 inches
(56 × 76 cm)

16
Jim Draper, *Job*, 2010.
Serigraph, 22 × 30 inches
(56 × 76 cm)

17
Jim Draper, *Otto*, 2010.
Serigraph, 22 × 30 inches
(56 × 76 cm)

18
Jim Draper, *Mary*, 2010.
Serigraph, 22 × 30 inches
(56 × 76 cm)

19
Jim Draper, *Red*, 2010.
Serigraph, 22 × 30 inches
(56 × 76 cm)

Jim Draper (United States)
Produce Series

Livestock support the livelihoods of livestock keepers, traders, and laborers throughout the developing world. Diseases affecting livestock can have a devastating impact on animal production, and on human health and, consequently, on the overall process of economic development. Sustainable Development Goal #2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) outlines the goal to increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural

infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks, in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries.

20

Pepe López, *Starbucks*, 2004. Guapísimas, guapas baskets and acrylic paint, 22 1/2 inches (57 cm) in diameter

21

Pepe López, *MacDonalds*, 2004-2016. Guapas baskets and acrylic paint, 39 inches (99 cm) in diameter

22

Pepe López, *Pepsi Cola*, 2004. Guapísimas, guapas baskets and acrylic paint, 23 1/2 inches (60 cm) in diameter

23

Pepe López, *Dunkin Donuts*, 2004. Guapísimas, guapas baskets and acrylic paint, 19 1/2 inches (50 cm) in diameter

Pepe Lopez (Venezuela)
Guapísimas

In *Guapísimas*, Pepe López paints and weaves retail industry logos on traditional Venezuelan baskets. López utilizes marketing strategies to illuminate the realities of

global production, connecting a commercial image with its forgotten origin. These baskets, symbols of indigenous culture traditionally used to carry food, are stripped of their customary function to become the very product of consumption, ultimately engaging in the global trade itself.

24

Vik Muniz, *Jacynthe Loves Orange Juice*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

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Vik Muniz, *Valentina, the Fastest*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

26

Vik Muniz, *Lil' Calist Can't Swim*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

27

Vik Muniz, *Valicia bathes in Sunday Clothes*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

28

Vik Muniz, *Big James Sweats Buckets*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

29

Vik Muniz, *Ten Ten's Weed Necklace*, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 11 inches (36 × 28 cm)

Vik Muniz (Brazil)
The Sugar Children Series

The Sugar Children series consists of photographs of drawings Vik Muniz made in sugar on black paper, of children whose parents and grandparents have worked on the sugar plantation on the island of Saint Kitts in the Caribbean Sea. Sugar was the traditional mainstay of the St. Kitts economy. However, confronted with a sugar industry that was facing difficulty in earning profits, the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis officially closed the sugar industry in 2005 and embarked on a program to diversify

the agricultural sector and stimulate the development of other sectors of the economy. Growth in agriculture is one of the best ways to spur the kind of economic growth that reduces poverty.

Image Credits

1–13

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14

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15–19

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20–23

© Pepe Lopez, courtesy the artist and private collection

24 – 29

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Art for Thoughts

