

# Garden of Eden

selected reviews

Kawartha Lakes This Week, September 6, 2012

Garden of Eden challenges view of what is natural

author:Catherine Whitnall

Exhibition hopes to inspire discussion of man's relationship with nature and civilization's direction.

(LINDSAY) Most people have a basic idea from where their food comes; they don't think it magically appears at the grocery store.

However, Yarker artist Andrzej Maciejewski has painted an even more descriptive image of how the journey food makes to the plate differs from the past.

Garden of Eden is a series of 24 photographs currently one exhibit at the Lindsay Gallery until Sept. 22. Inspired by old masters of painting, Mr. Maciejewski's work shows modern fruits and vegetables, bought in the supermarket, complete with label stickers or plastic wrapping.

"The 21st century society has created a new Garden of Eden, where everything looks perfect and flawless," stated the Polish-born artist who emigrated to Canada in 1985. "But many things, like the taste, the singularity and often even the humanity, have been lost during this process."

While, for many people, a sticker is just a sticker - something that gets removed with no thought - Mr. Maciejewski finds them "weird" and "artificial."

He notes society has become so focussed on perfection that it has been forgotten that most foods purchased from countries such as Mexico, South America and the US can be grown in one's own backyard; just like it was done as little as 50 years ago.

"They won't look as good, but they will taste better," he said of apples, strawberries and peppers grown without chemical or genetics. "The farmer, the orchard; the way we think of these has changed. . . There's this whole clash. Gifts of nature versus the computerized PLU codes and plastic stickers."

Mr. Maciejewski hopes the exhibition helps open up conversations on culture and lifestyle and is already working on new projects that build on the momentum of Garden of Eden. One incorporates machines and appliances while the other focuses on the technology behind such everyday consumables such as soap and toothpaste.

"We're using things but we really don't know what they're made of," said Mr. Maciejewski. "I'm not expecting to change the world, but I hope I get people thinking."

Mr. Maciejewski's work has been exhibited across North America, Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Finland and Uganda. He has published three books, *Bread*, *Toronto Parks* and *After Notman*; the latter becoming a Canadian bestseller.

In addition to touring and working, Mr. Maciejewski also teaches photography at the Haliburton School of Fine Arts.

Interia360, May 2, 2012

Garden of Eden in supermarket

author: Marta Póltorak

"Garden of Eden" is the title of series created by Andrzej Maciejewski. The series consists of 24 still-life photographs of contemporary food products. These compositions have been photographed using tungsten lights and an old, analog, Sinar camera.

This series is designed not so much for lovers of classical, baroque still-lives, but rather for lovers of the detail and taste, brought by still-life to visual arts. In case of Andrzej Maciejewski's photographs, the inspiration coming from paintings of Caravaggio, Fantin Latour, Melendez, Grazia or Flemish Masters, is clearly visible, however under the obvious level, the modern catch is hidden. Use of a theatrical light, without digital effects, was meant to imitate light effects used by painters of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Andrzej Maciejewski says about his project:” Our civilization created naive approach to the nature, glorifying her fertility and opulence. In same time are in constant war with the nature, trying to harness and enslave her. Fruits and vegetables from supermarket, standardized, packed, numbered, are a perfect example of what really is our attitude towards the nature. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century society created artificial paradise, where everything, at least at first look, is pretty and flawless. But during this process we have been losing various values, like taste or uniqueness. My project contrasts these two contexts – idealistic picture created by ages of our culture, and reality created by our greedy civilization.”

Garden of Eden according to Maciejewski is a supermarket, where not the quality, but the quantity and look of the gifts of nature, are important. Is it really still the nature? Or is it simply a product - such an important concept in the contemporary market-oriented society.

Each of the objects, represented here, is a product, not a plant, appropriately marked and certified. But if we go beyond the appearance and sweet advertisement-like colours, you may see that all the fruits are artificial. You may see it in details: the fibrous inside of the tomato cut in half; the lettuce suspiciously feathery, like it was made of paper; snow-white garlic, like made of wax; cucumbers in long sleeves of plastic foil, or shiny red strawberries – all of them may rather make you sick than excite your appetite. But you may see this level only, when we realize what is the hidden, however not obscure, sense of the exhibition. The genetic modifications, which were supposed to solve the problems of quality and logistic issues, in fact express our disdain for the nature. But also disdain for humans, who are part of the ecosystem. Is eating artificial food any kind of success? Is the cauliflower or potato good only when it's certified? Or maybe the pineapple without instruction how to cut it, won't taste so well?

There is no answer to these questions. The exhibition doesn't give direct answers. It rather simply provokes to thinking – are the fruits that do not go bad, still real?

My personal thought is, that these plastic wrappings and label stickers, say something our society. It's an allusion to people creating fashion, or style – the fashion for a perfect body, which cannot be created by nature. It is also a symbol of careless consumption and omnipresent global unification, which affects every aspect of our lives, including our food. Soon we will all look the same, we will all use the same products, we will all eat the same, no matter where we leave and what is the natural rhythm of produce. The traditional still-lives were created to show the elusiveness of life. But also to warn against excessive consumption of volatile attractions of life. On the other hand they were supposed to present the wealth

and affluence of Netherlands of the time, for example by including exotic fruits in the composition. These exotic delicacies used to be available only to rich people, nowadays everybody may get them cheaply in the supermarket.

The exhibition of images created by Maciejewski, tries to show the viewer the essence of contemporary man and his similarity to people of Baroque, which was an age full of contradictions and anxiety and omnipresent symbolic of death. The fruits and vegetables in these photographs, become the negative protagonists of our age – the celebrities, promoted by popular media, with their futile life-style. It's about the marketing machine, which pushes into us the unreal products of mass imagination.

The likeness to still-lives does not, however, interfere with aesthetic reception of these photographs, so much similar to advertising posters. Perhaps our stereotypes tell us that the wealth of various products must serve some purpose. And here it serves the art only, the art both critical and continuing tradition. Even if the tradition has been long destroyed, when the gifts of nature were replaced with artificial mystification. As they say, you are what you eat.

The exhibition will be presented until May 31<sup>st</sup>.

(translated from Polish by anna Rau)

Gazeta Wyborcza Lublin, July 9, 2012

### Exhibition in Gardzienice Gallery – A treat for photography fans

author: Kamil Kurdyba

Since last Friday, in the Gardzienice Gallery in Lublin, you may see two exhibitions by artist photographer Andrzej Maciejewski. The artist wanted to show how artificial our society is and how volatile the weather is. The technique of the works is particularly praiseworthy.

Andrzej Maciejewski begun his career with commercial photography, but for past 20 years has been focusing on artistic projects. Describing his activities, he emphasizes that he is interested mainly in documenting everyday, or even trivial, phenomenons and objects. He does it, however, in an amazingly original and technically interesting way.

In the Lublin gallery we can see two of his shows. First one, “Garden of Eden” consists of 24 still-life photographs of contemporary food products. Products modified, certified, with label stickers. You can

clearly see that the artist wanted to imitate the works of painting masters of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century, specifically Flemish artists. Thanks to masterfully manipulating tungsten light and composition Maciejewski achieved almost perfect resemblance to paintings. If we consider the fact, that the photographs were taken with analog camera, without using any graphic editing program, it is art on its own right.

But also the message conveyed in “Garden of Eden” is artistic. Of course you may interpret these photographs in many different ways. For someone, these artificial fruits may be a metaphor of how humans are losing their connection with nature and plunge into beautiful, shiny and perfect, but tasteless, simply artificial world. Someone else may go one step further, and compare the chemically modified food products to icons of modern world, so called celebrities, whose image is as false as tomatoes on these pictures, but still many people would like to be like them – forever young and beautiful, even if it means the risk of losing “taste”. Certainly many others among the viewers won't be looking for the hidden senses. For them this exhibition will be simply an example of photographic art.

The other of two shows by Maciejewski is titled “Weather Report”. It consists of 36 photographs, taken with Camera Obscura, small shed, of size 180 by 180 by 300 centimeters, built by artist himself. On the photographs we can see the road and part of the garden next to Maciejewski's house in small Canadian village called Moscow. For one year, artist was documenting the changes of the weather (each image is accompanied by detailed information on weather conditions, like temperature, humidity or wind direction). This idea, together with archaic technology, causes surprisingly interesting results. Each photograph, however taken in our times, looks like an image from the past.

Both exhibitions by Maciejewski may be seen in Gardzienice Gallery, 5a Grodzka Street in Lublin, until August 2<sup>nd</sup>, from Monday to Friday, 11 to 18h.

(translated from Polish by Anna Rau)