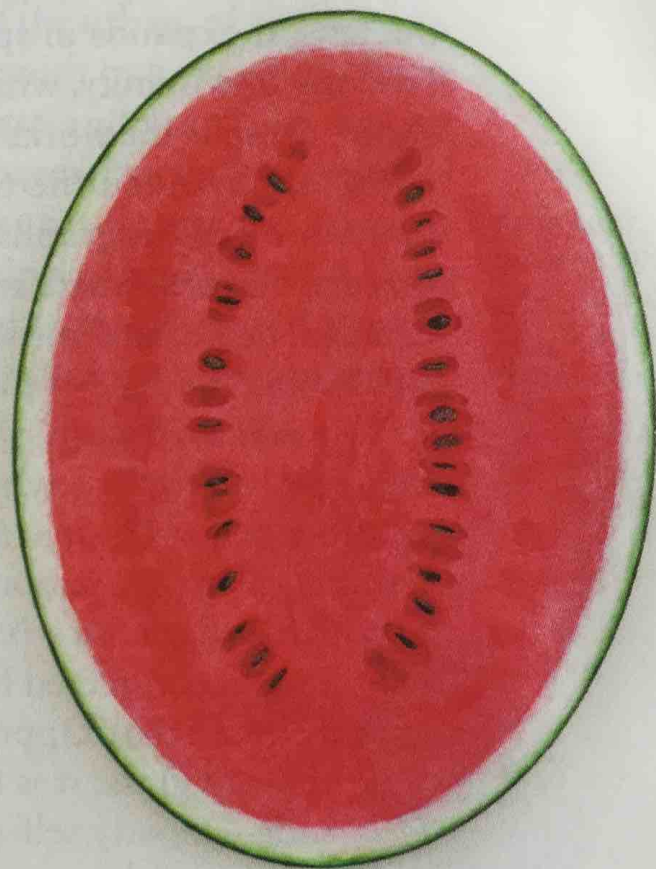


Adam Cruces

GALERIE JOSEPH TANG

Sometimes moving forward requires looking back. This seems to be the case for Adam Cruces, whose recent exhibition “Pastel” was spawned from one of the artist’s earliest works. *Still Life*, 1993, 1993/2016, a remake of a pastel done when Cruces was all of eight years old, is a far cry from the slick multimedia art for which the Houston-born, Zurich-based artist is known. Presented in a traditional gilded frame, Cruces’s textbook still life features an overflowing fruit basket with a knife and a metal pitcher arranged on red drapery. The studious composition conjures a vision of the young artist laboring over fabric folds and peach fuzz while attempting to master perspective and chiaroscuro. Revisiting his nascent artistic experience more than twenty years later, Cruces has found new ways to resolve and refresh the genre of still life.

Sixteen tondi of various sizes, each painted with a detailed radial cross section of a fruit, were the most obvious link to the 1993 pastel. Riffing on the quintessential still-life subject, Cruces’s cut-fruit parade—*Kiwi*, *Avocado*, *Apple*, *Peach*, *Tomato*, and so on, all 2016—was hung low across several walls. While sliced apples and oranges easily lend themselves to two-dimensional representation, Cruces does not use his subjects’ flatness as a cop-out. On the contrary, he insists on three-dimensionality. By painting the roughly half-inch-thick edges of his stretched-canvas supports to resemble watermelon rinds, coconut husks, and citrus peels, Cruces creates representational versions of Ellsworth Kelly’s abstract “painting-objects.”



Adam Cruces,
Watermelon, 2016,
acrylic on canvas,
15¾ × 11¾".

Bringing another still-life trope into the sculptural realm in a different way, four cloths hung on a row of low hooks implied an art school exercise turned inside out. Treating drapery as raw material instead of subject matter, Cruces digitally printed black-and-white patterns onto each cloth. Emblazoned with motifs inspired by famous artists—Vermeer’s marble checkerboard floors (*Kitchen Towel [After Vermeer]*) and Matisse’s fleur-de-lis (*Kitchen Towel [After Matisse]*, both 2016), for example—these decorative dish towels, which would not be out of place in a museum gift shop, uphold the still-life tradition of imbuing humble household items with artistic value.

A refrigerator placed by the entrance to the gallery provided a platform for experimentation, collaboration, and transition. Instead of typical fridge clutter—Post-it notes, greeting cards, snapshots, and whatnot—it was adorned with artworks, mostly by fellow gallery artists. Among these were a collage of airline-baggage-claim stickers by Daiga Grantina, a typed poem by Eleanor Ivory Weber, and a print by Jo-ey Tang. (Over the course of the exhibition, more artists added small works with magnets.) Inside the refrigerator, meanwhile, Cruces kept more of his two- and three-dimensional still lifes fresh. Turning the appliance into a kind of portal, a giant sticker covering its entire interior back wall was made from a digital photograph of a painting of wineglasses, a flower bouquet, and a bottle of wine (*Still life, 2001, 2016*). Stashed in the door shelf, two Coke bottles filled with a mixture of frothy yellowish resin and flowers (*Texas Bluebell Mix [Full]* and *Texas Bluebell Mix [Fuller]*, both 2016) suggested toxic smoothies—more food for thought. Cruces turns his studies of objects into objects to be studied.

—Mara Hoberman