From culture to cultivation, Jersey City women artists explore meanings of 'Superfood'

Jacquelyn Stryker's "Mixt Tapes/Mix Tapes" is part of _gaia's Wonder Woman Residency exhibit "Superfood" opening April 11, 2015. Photo courtesy of Meredith Goncalves

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Every year, the women in Jersey City arts collective _gaia gather to create art in what they call their Wonder Woman Residency.

They work together and give each other feedback on their developing pieces, exploring big themes like war, religion, education and immigration. This year, the women are taking on a seemingly more simple but equally universal subject of interest: food.

But is food that simple? _gaia’s Doris Cacoilo, who curated the residency’s resulting exhibit, “Superfood” with Meredith Goncalves, says food, cultivation and nourishment make big impacts in both producing and consuming communities.

"We wanted to tackle food and the culture of food but also global food systems," Cacoilo explained. "My co-curator and I are also breastfeeding, so we were inspired by women being a source of food in a biological way and culturally in a bigger way, the roles women play in the cultivation of food."

In "Superfood," 10 women artists explore their personal relationships with food and ask questions about food.

Standout pieces include Portuguese-American artist Lillian Ribeiro’s cutting board series featuring self-portraits and traditional Portuguese food images applied using a photo transfer process. Through the works, Ribeiro explores her relationship to the foods of her ancestors’ homeland -- eels, snails, sardines and pig snouts -- all far cries from the highly processed American foods she grew up with.

Inspired by word play, Jacquelyn Strycker mixes 80’s and 90’s mixtapes with tapas -- or in Catelan Spanish, "tapes." During the show, she’ll invite viewers to try Spanish and Mediterranean tapas while also making mixtapes of music, allowing audiences to express themselves by mixing their own culinary and musical ingredients.

If you’re more concerned with the financial and environmental consequences of food production and consumption, step up to the Emotional Vending Machine by Sarah Nelson Wright, which tells you how you’re feeling ("Frustrated by the amount of pesticides in your tomatoes," perhaps) and gives you a solution to your problem.

Other exhibiting artists include Melissa MacAlpin, Kate Eggleston, Cathleen Marie Therese Parra, Stephanie Tichenor, Claudia McNulty, Panda Suwann and Alyssa Lawler.

Cacoilo said she hopes the exhibit sparks conversation. "I want us to think about the roles we play in feeding each other and our families and also about the larger global food system -- how something can be so intimate and personal and joyful, but can have other implications we also want to think about."

"All the joy, fun, care and love that goes into feeding has to be informed with, What does that food really mean?"

"Superfood" opens with a reception on Saturday, April 11 from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Gallery Aferro, 73 Market St., Newark. Food will be served. (Of course.)

Saturday will also mark the launch of _gaia’s Kickstarter campaign to bring this year’s Wonder Woman Residency to Portugal. For more information, visit GaiaStudio.org.

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