



# Sweetness and Light

Art made of or about Candy, Cakes, and Sugar

Curated by Linda Griggs

**Richard Baker**

**Tom Bogaert**

**Ya Ya Chou**

**Sally Curcio**

**Lori Ellison**

**Emily Eveleth**

**Linda Griggs**

**Julia Jacquette**

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**T. Charnan Lewis**

**Christina Marsh**

**Tracy Miller**

**Mary Schiliro**

**Rebecca Siemering**

**Lynn Talbot**

**Mary Jo Vath**

**Jessica Westbook**

**Chris Wright**

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

*Sweetness and Light*

Hampden Gallery

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Curator's Statement © Linda Griggs

Essay © Wesley Gibson

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**FINE ARTS CENTER**  
hampden gallery

## **CURATOR'S STATEMENT**

**From the birthday cake to the wedding cake to the grief buffet; food is not merely sustenance but a marker and ritual. Our foodways define us as much as our folkways and wordways. From pecan pie to rugalach to skull candy, from Fat Tuesday to Lent, food defines where we're from and what we believe. We are what we eat, and what we don't.**

**The artists in this show use candy, cakes and sugar as an image or a medium to either understand a cultural convention or circumvent the habitual thinking that results from it.**

**For some, the sumptuous tactility of sweets becomes a logical and natural starting point for indulging in luscious painting or the repetition of candy becomes geometric abstraction.**

**Others use food as a metaphor for genocide in Rwanda, the economics of the colonial American slave trade, sublimated sex, disappointing relationships or to illuminate the hollow nutritive value in food that may be edible but perhaps shouldn't be eaten.**

**Sugar may be sweet but it is not innocent of meaning.**

Richard Baker's installation of papier mache, cast and carved donuts sit on the gallery guard's desk, your introduction to the show. Like the subjects of Baker's small scale, still life paintings, they are taken from everyday life. Baker is influenced by Duchamp and "his belief that the audience completes the work of art." In this case, the audience must first determine if Baker's chocolate, old fashioned and powdered sugar donuts are real or not and then gauge the guard's involvement in the installation. There's Duchampian humor in it.

More donuts. This time it's Emily Eveleth. Known for her monumental paintings of donuts. Dramatically lit, fleshy, and oozing red jelly, appallingly naked and seductive, they are luscious vehicles for painting. Even in a smaller scale piece like the one in this show, the viewer may feel a voyeuristic guilt from the painting's rich sensuality.

Tracy Miller's *Tiny Bubbles* is both voluptuous and celebratory. Pastries, champagne, cookies and jello molds riotously fill the entire picture plane. She finds excitement in the "gaps in the paintings—between abstraction and representation, between recognizable objects, between paint colors and surfaces, between shallow and deep space."

Lynn Talbot shares similar interest in the place where abstraction and representation overlap. Miller's work involves piled paint and embraces "the mess of daily life, the spills and splatters of light and shadows..." but Talbot's work is tightly painted. She creates a still life in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch or Spanish tradition and from it extrapolates a geometric abstraction that appears above or around the still life. She writes, "In these paintings I hope to expose the fundamental parity between realism and abstraction, and between the objectified and the subjective nature of the world."

Strangely, four artists in this show have used candy buttons as a material and three have examples in this show.

Sally Curcio's *eyecandy* is a multi-layered pun. Curcio removes select candy buttons from their original paper strips in order to spell "eyecandy" in Braille. She notes, "A non-blind literate person generally cannot read Braille, but can see the bright colored candy and experience it figuratively as 'eye candy.' Alternately, a blind person cannot visually experience the piece however they can read it with their fingers, literally, as 'eyecandy.' And finally the work is

actually 'candy' dots adding to the conflation of meanings."

This visually arresting pun reveals the limits and opportunities of our subjective worlds, and how the same object can have its meaning skid between the figural, literal, and actual. It is a lesson in the instability of meaning undermining the certainty of certainty. Here and elsewhere in her paintings and installations, Curcio revives the irony, absurdity and cultural critique of Dadaism.

Lori Ellison's *Sugar Hiccups* are an extension of her series mesmerizing geometric abstractions. She notes that, "Often discussions of painterly abstraction incorporate philosophical or spiritual systems but spirituality is in the inner eye of the beholder. This discussion is less often applied to geometric art but geometries, decorative and sacred, have their roots in pre-history and remain meaningful today."

Mary Schiliro's *Candy Buttons for CODEPINK* is a tribute to the women's anti-war organization, CODEPINK, founded in 2002 to protest the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq. Schiliro's *Candy Buttons for Code Yellow* refers to the color-coded security alerts instituted by Homeland Security during that time. Using candy buttons to create drawings evolved out of her abstract, process-based paintings using acrylic paint and Mylar. For Schiliro, candy buttons are "the perfect ready-made dot of color."

As part of her candy series, T. Charnan Lewis makes her own candy buttons in order to expand her palette. For this show, however, she presents documentation from a project that was created for the city of Baltimore in 2004.

Taking a junkyard Ford and covering it in royal cake frosting, Lewis created a police car decoy. The sculpture slowed speeding commuters and deterred crime while calling into question the ways in which authority is exercised in our society. When it rains, the markings of power wash away and leave the viewer to contemplate our fragile and imperfect justice system.

Injustice is very much the subject of Tom Bogaert's *Plaine Au Mille Souris* which refers to a Malthusian theory stating that genocide is the preordained result of the impersonal forces of poverty and overpopulation. The mice that overpopulate the picture plane are cast from the licorice candy that is distinct to Belgium and acknowledges Europe's disastrous influence in African affairs.

In “Good Ship Lollipop”, Christina Marsh also uses candy to tackle the legacy of Europeans in Africa, specifically the economics of the Atlantic triangular slave trade, in which European goods were traded for slaves who were sold in America. Then the rum and molasses were sold to Europe. Marsh’s cast sugar, lollipop slave ships reminds us of the human cost of this intricate transaction.

Both Julia Jacquette and Linda Griggs incorporate text. In Jaquette’s piece, *To Kiss Your Lips*, one word from the title appears under each of the four desserts—a sundae, a jello mold, ambrosia and a slice of brownie pie—making issue of the strong connection felt by many between food, love, and sex, a bond traditionally celebrated in songs and poems. When presented visually, however, the absurdity and pathos of substituting food for sex or love becomes apparent. Jaquette describes all her artwork as an attempt to admit her own feelings of longing and covetousness. Food here acts as a visual metaphor for what is desired but never realized. The lovely desserts will never get to be consumed.

In Linda Griggs’ painting, *Suddenly Last Birthday*, the text tells this story.

*“The night before my birthday, my Barbie disappeared from my room. She appeared the next afternoon at the party resplendent in a dress of pink cake and taffeta frosting. We were enraptured.*

*She was a Goddess, a Princess, Developed. She was the most glamorous thing we’d ever seen. She was everything we wanted to be. Then we ate the dress off her.”*

The title refers to Tennessee Williams’ *Suddenly Last Summer* in which Sebastian Venebal is devoured by children, an echo of the Dionysiac rituals of Euripides’ *Bacchae*. The painting’s background and the placement of the cake are copied from Velázquez’ *Las Meninas* to emphasize Barbie’s role as princess. Likewise, Barbie’s pose and the looping globules of frosting are reminiscent of the Goddess depicted in the so-called, “Many-Breasted Artemis.”

Mary Jo Vath’s intimately scaled still lifes of mundane objects are so carefully observed and rendered that they take on a life and story of their own. In this piece, an overturned sugar bowl alludes to a less than serene domestic situation. Her intensely labored surfaces are time consuming to make and in turn demand contemplation from the viewer. As Vath notes, “There are some fancy ways of putting this, Norman Bryson talks about ‘inducing reverie,’ Richard Wollheim

calls it ‘expressive perception.’ Whatever you call it it is that state of perception that occurs when you look at something and it seems somehow extraordinary while remaining its ordinary self at the same time.”

Chris Wright works in a similar vein. He writes, “There are certain objects, moments and conditions that inspire a painting experience. I paint through direct observation of everyday, commonplace objects that have a peculiar purpose or a purpose that is telling of an aspect of our culture. I consider the materials, textures, colors, and graphic qualities of the objects and the light and space in which they exist, building the surface with *alla prima* layers. I gradually clarify the image over several months of concentrated effort in an attempt to capture the qualities of the initial fascination.”

Rebecca Siemering’s cake sculpture, *A Fine Balance* comes from her ongoing series entitled, *Wanting the Good Life*, which explores the needs and desires of women and men by investigating marriage, work and household management. Siemering notes that with weddings especially, expectations and high ideals coupled with familial discord created tremendous distress.

The cake becomes a manifestation of those ideals. With *A Fine Balance* Siemering’s towering, gloppy, overdone cake is the humorous embodiment of the delicate equilibrium all relationships must strike. She has worked with sugar as a medium for sculpture since 1997.

Ya Ya Chou’s sculpture, a functioning Gummi Bear chandelier, came out of her series questioning the safety of the brightly colored snack foods designed to attract children. It is a stunningly beautiful object one would never eat, perhaps like gummi bears themselves.

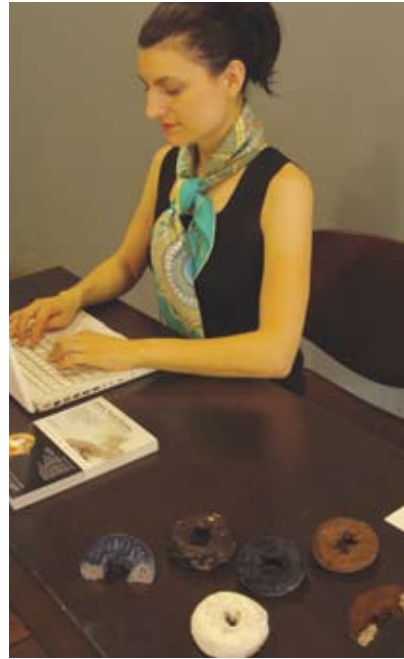
Jessica Westbrook is a media artist working with photography, graphics, animation, interactivity, video, and sound. Her motion graphic loop, *IF/Then* from *Living System 2005* was an experiment in autobiography and data visualization. This work lived as an installation at Cress Gallery, Chatanooga, it’s primary component being a motion graphic projection depicting a day’s blood sugar index. This reminder that sugar effects the body every moment of the day is a fitting close to this show.

—Wesley Gibson



Emily Eveleth  
*Untitled*, 2009

*Untitled*, 2010  
(installation)



*Untitled*, 2008



*Untitled*, 2008



Richard Baker  
Assemblage of six "Untitled" pieces, 2008

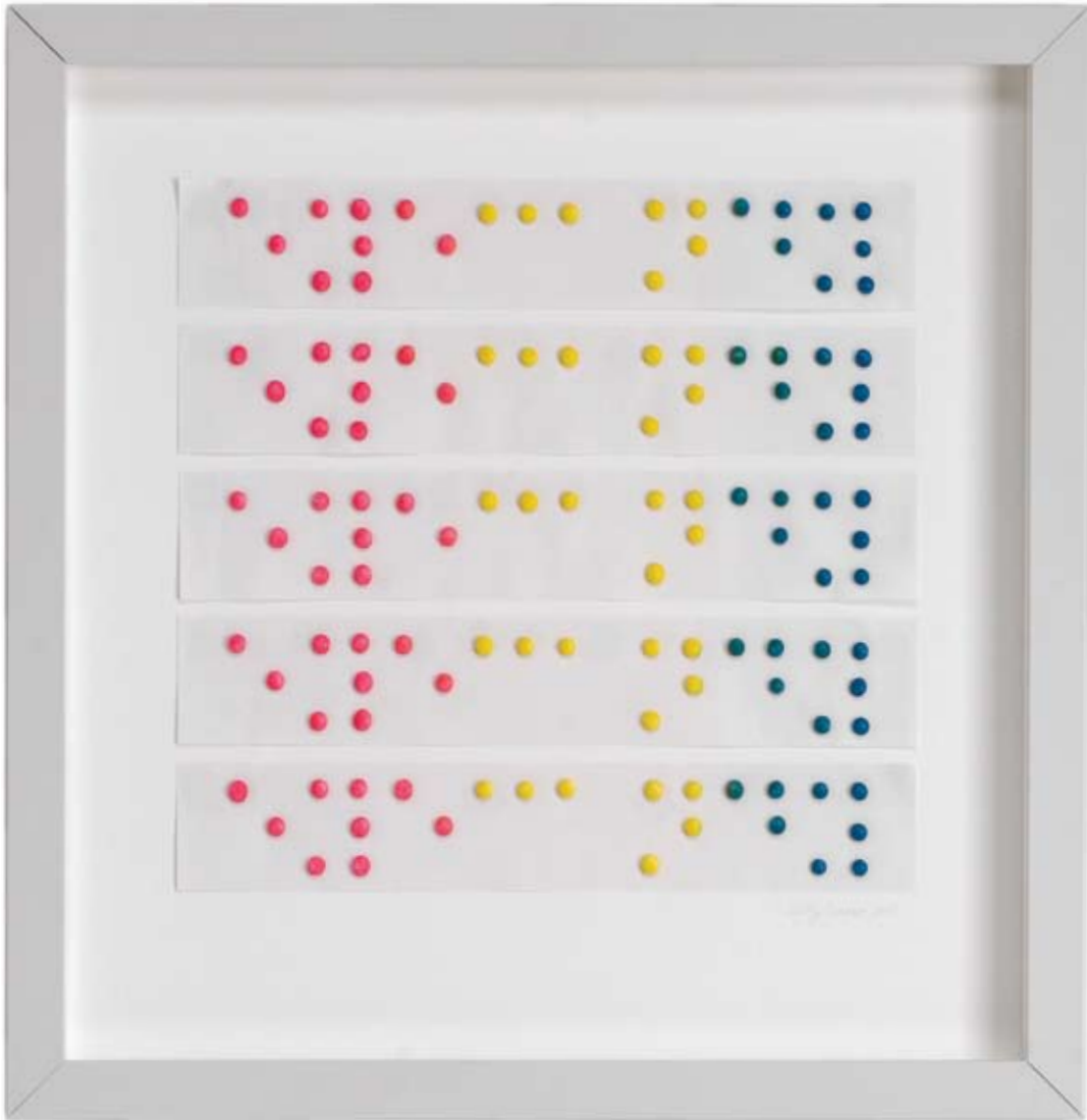




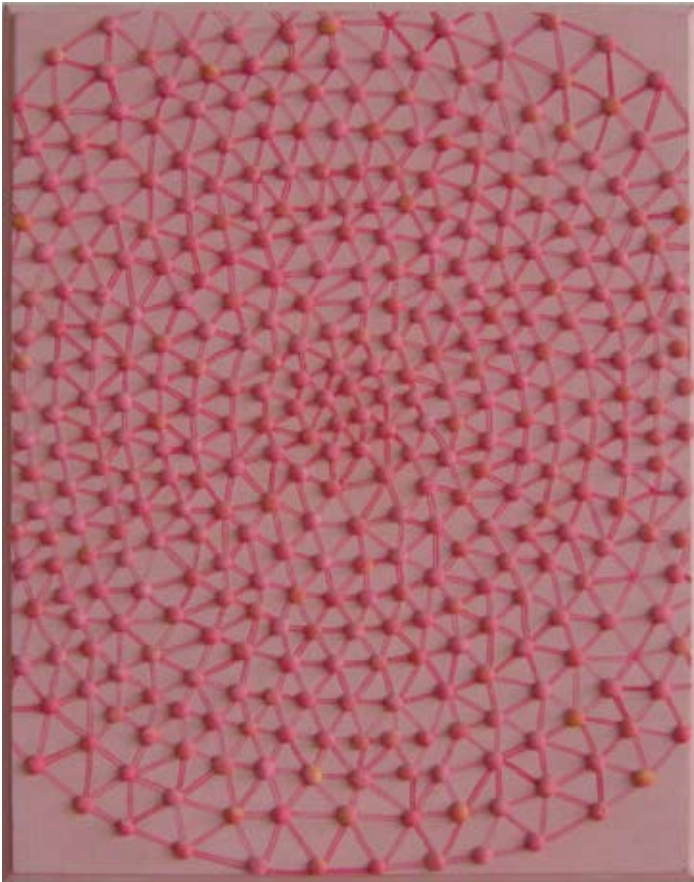
Tracy Miller  
*Tiny Bubbles*, 2004



Lynn Talbot  
*Permanent Illusion*, 2008



Sally Curcio  
*eyecandy*, 2005



Lori Ellison  
*Sugar Hiccups*, 2008



Mary Schiliro  
*Candy Buttons for CODEPINK and Code Yellow*, 2009



To



Kiss



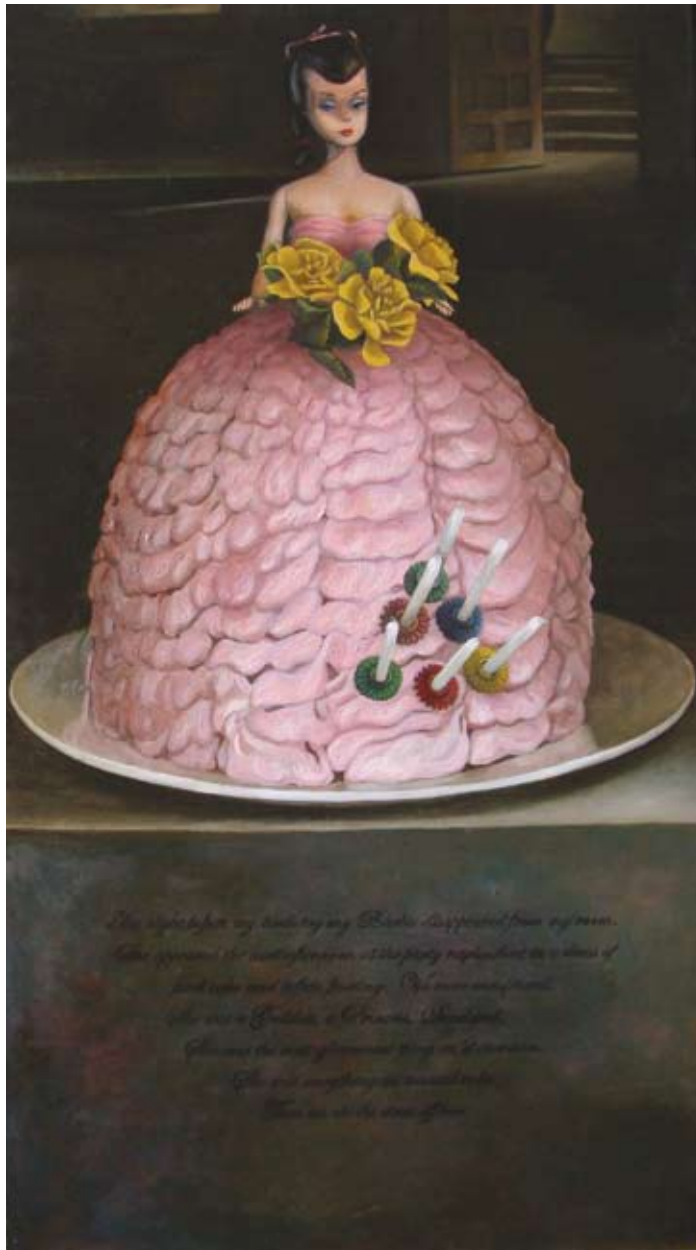
Your



Lips

Julia Jacquette  
*To Kiss Your Lips*, 1999

Linda Griggs  
*Suddenly Last Birthday*, 2001



The spotlight my head my eyes  
Blinds disappeared from my vision  
The joyous the excitement of the party  
replaced by a sense of  
dark void and a lone figure  
Who was my friend  
Who was a friend of mine  
Who was the most precious thing  
I ever knew  
There was no one else

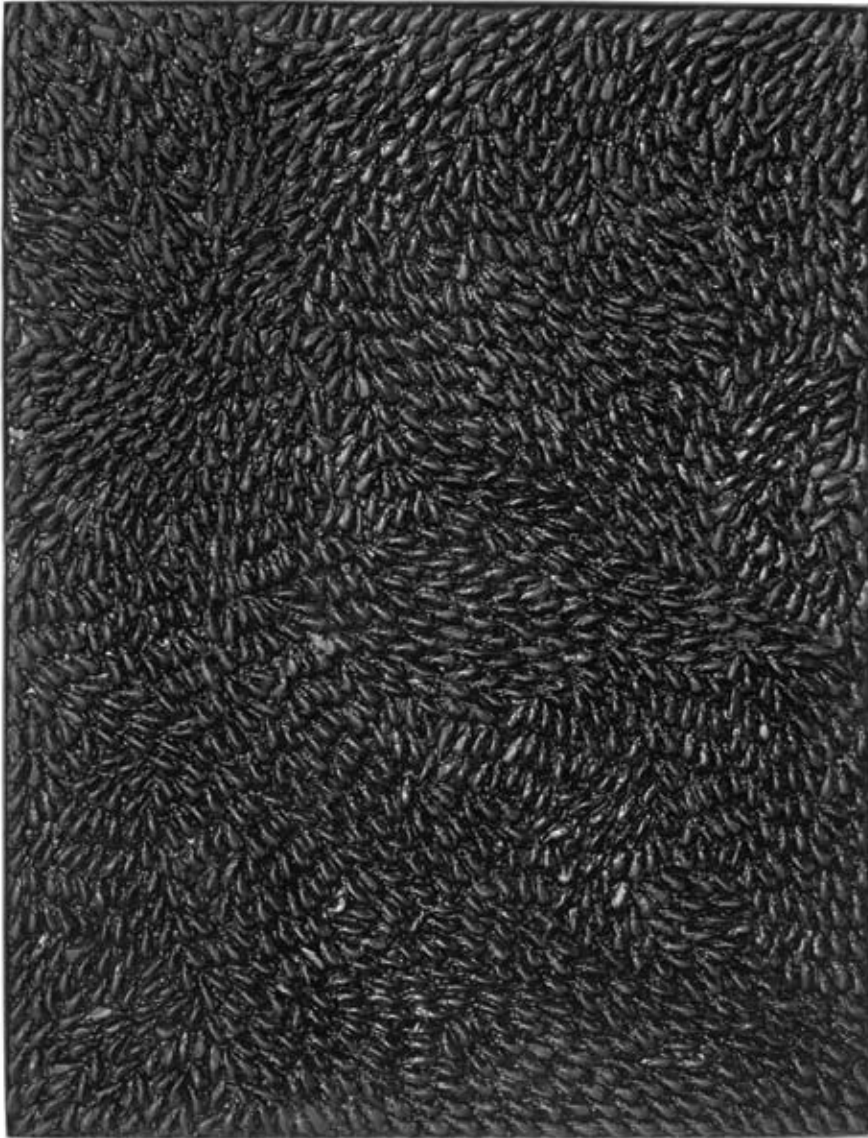


Mary Jo Vath  
*Sugar*, 2004



Chris Wright  
*Cake Study No.1, 2007*





*Plaine Au Mille Souris –  
Serie II (detail)*

Tom Bogaert  
*Plaine Au Mille Souris – Serie II, 2009*

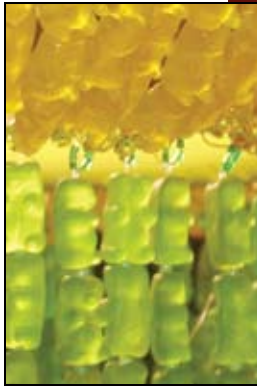


*Good Ship Lollipop (detail)*

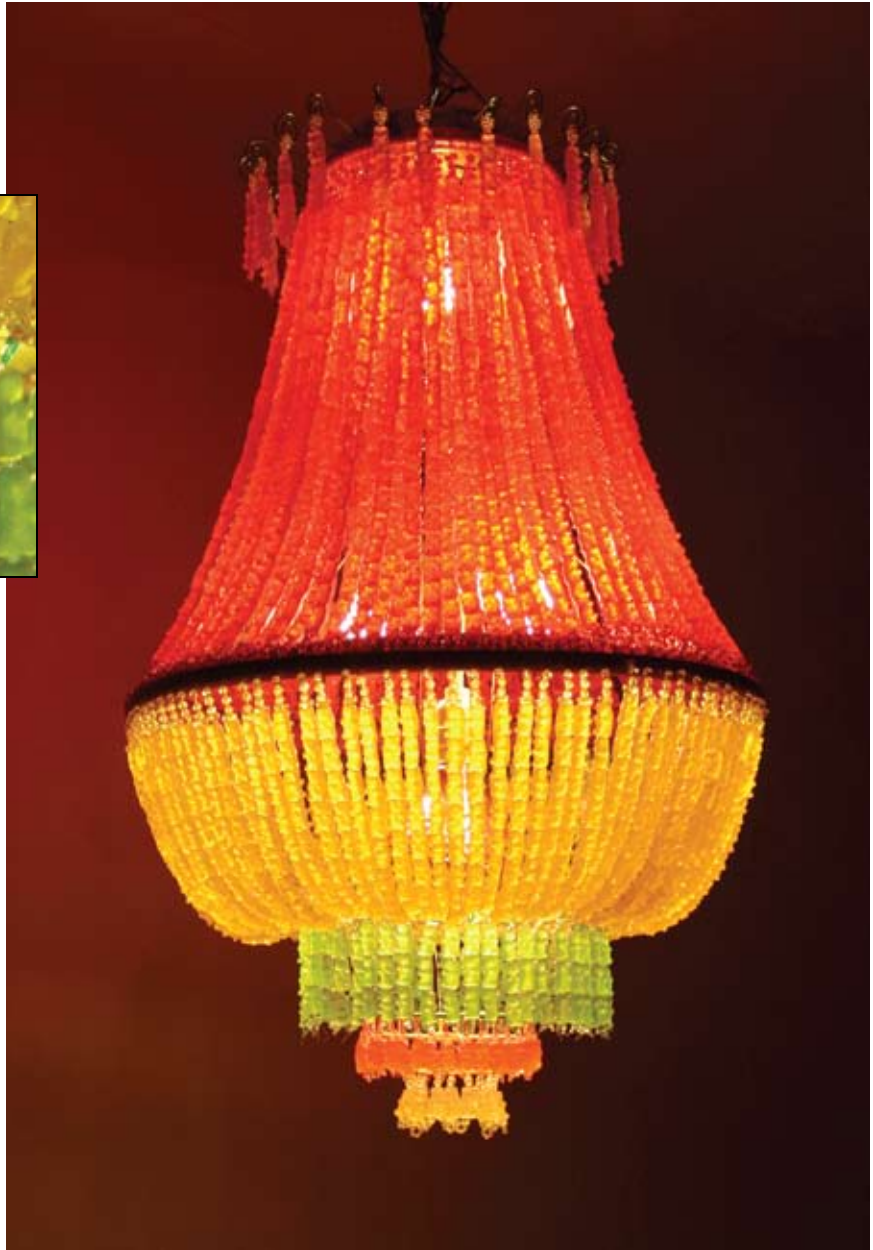


Christina M Marsh  
*Good Ship Lollipop*, 2010 (installation)

*Chandelier II*  
(detail)



Ya Ya Chou  
*Chandelier II*, 2010

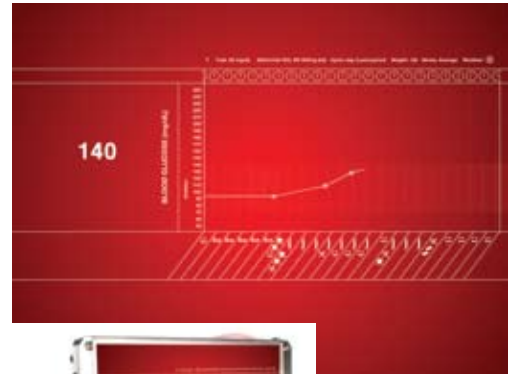




Rebecca Siemering  
*A Fine Balance*, 2006



*A Fine Balance*  
(detail)



Jessica Westbrook  
*Living System 2005*, 2005

Sweetness and Light  
Checklist

**Richard Baker**

*Installation of  
Untitled (Chocolate Donut), Untitled (Chocolate  
Donut, small), Untitled (Powdered Sugar  
Donut), Untitled (Old Fashioned Donut),  
Untitled (Chocolate Donut Fragment 1), Untitled  
(Chocolate Donut Fragment 2)*  
2008  
mixed media  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York

**Tom Bogaert**

*Plaine Au Mille Souris – Serie II*  
2009  
Rubber and steel  
30 x 29  
Edition of 9, 7/9  
Courtesy of LMAK Projects, New York

**Ya Ya Chou**

*Chandelier II*  
2010  
30 x 15 x 15  
Gummi bears, beads, monofilament, metal  
and light bulbs  
Courtesy of the artist, Los Angeles

**Sally Curcio**

*eyecandy*  
2005  
Button candy on paper spelling 'eyecandy'  
in braille  
17 x 16-1/2  
Courtesy of William Baczek Fine Arts,  
Northampton, MA

**Lori Ellison**

*Sugar Hiccups*  
2008  
candy dots and gouache on wood support  
14 x 11  
Courtesy of the artist, New York

**Emily Eveleth**

*Untitled*  
2009  
oil on board  
18-1/2 x 18  
Courtesy of the Danese Gallery, New York

**Linda Griggs**

*Suddenly Last Birthday*  
2001  
oil on canvas over panel  
47 x 26  
Courtesy of the artist, New York

**Julia Jacquette**

*To Kiss Your Lips*  
1999  
Color etching  
17 x 17, each panel  
Published and printed by Landfall Press  
Courtesy of the artist, New York

**T. Charnan Lewis**

*Documentation for an Iced Police Car*  
2010  
mixed media  
2, 9 x 12  
courtesy of the artist, New York

**Christina M Marsh**

*Good Ship Lollipop*  
2010  
mixed media  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist, Baltimore, MD

**Tracy Miller**

*Tiny Bubbles*  
2004  
oil on canvas  
72 x 60  
Courtesy of Feature Inc., New York

**Mary Schiliro**

*Candy Buttons for CODEPINK and Code Yellow*  
2009  
mixed media on Mylar  
2, 12 x 9  
Courtesy of the artist, New York

**Rebecca Siemering**

*A Fine Balance*  
2006  
paint, wood, found objects  
60 x 36 x 36  
Courtesy of the artist, Providence, RI

**Lynn Talbot**

*Permanent Illusion*  
2008  
Oil on linen  
18 x 18  
Courtesy the artist and Pierogi, New York

**Mary Jo Vath**

*Sugar*  
2004  
oil on panel  
8 x 10  
Courtesy of the artist, New York

**Jessica Westbrook**

*Living System 2005*  
2005  
motion graphics  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist, Chicago

**Chris Wright**

*Cake Study No. 1*  
2007  
oil on linen mounted on panel  
14x 14  
Courtesy of George Billis Gallery,  
New York

Dimensions are in inches;  
height precedes width precedes depth.