Prize Fruits
The Art of Maremi Hooff
MAREMI HOOFF IN HER LORTON, VIRGINIA, STUDIO
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September 1 – October 16, 2005
Flossie Martin Gallery
Maremi Hooff: Prize Fruits (And Vegetables)

Thin slices of mushrooms and bell pepper; loose, swirling patterns of onions and avocados; carefully composed symmetries of Swiss cheese and bacon. These are the elements of Maremi Hooff's paintings done over the past four years, and they make me hungry every time I see them.

But, Hooff is not particularly interested in food. Where we see the ingredients for gazpacho and borscht, pumpkin-filled ravioli or Sloopor Soup, she speaks of the balance between the abstract shapes and patterns of the backgrounds and the representational material in the foreground. She resists making connections between the objects depicted in her paintings and her life — "My family did not grow their own vegetables. I don't consider myself a chef or a cook." Rather, she treats food as a vehicle for connecting with people, enticing them to look at what seems to be the subject matter so she can talk about what she wants to talk about — contrasts of color and form, the coolness of shapes played off against the warmth of the texture of paint on canvas, the tension between what she calls "tiny microcosms of data" and the larger pattern or field.

As a subject for painting, food has had a long history and been given a wide range of treatment. Metaphors of abundance and vanitas informed the seventeenth-century Dutch still life painters; an interest in taxonomy — classifying and cataloging the differences between things, be they vegetables or mixed-race peoples — undergirded many Spanish colonial paintings of foodstuffs. Osias Beert's *Banquet Piece* (right) draws our attention equally to the reflections in the glass carafe as to the food. In doing so, it is representative of a third approach, where an artist's virtuoso evocation of textures — note also how the hard, glossy skin of the chestnuts plays against the soft, pliant milkiness of the oysters — was sufficient in itself to justify the work.

While Hooff's paintings share some points of contact with these predecessors — a concern for detail, the sense that the artist enjoys the myriad patterns with which nature
endows the visual world—they are fundamentally different in effect. Like any master chef, Maremi Hooff includes both the conceptual and the social in her art. She likes the process; she talks about the warmth of the craft of painting. And she is interested in presentation (an earlier series was based on gift wrapping). But there is something else going on here. There are no people in her works, although the chopped vegetables indicate a preparator, and the recipe paintings suggest the handing down of ideas from one generation to the next, or of a gift from one culture to another. We all eat; we can all approach these works on some level because the life force that food represents is part of our being. Hooff wants to partake in that life force, and offers it to the viewer, without putting too much of herself in the work. Yet traces of her presence remain in the visual evidence of choosing the food, cleaning and slicing and arranging the pieces so carefully. Maremi Hooff is a cook—but she employs the alchemy of paint, rather than the heat of a stove, to transform her ingredients into art.

These paintings then are the prize fruits of her effort to distill social relations into spatial and chromatic ones; they are handcrafted gifts that remind us of our shared humanity.

Preston Thayer
Director
Radford University Art Museum
Finger Fancy Series
DEVILED EGGS
BROCCOLI
RADISH FLOWER
6 x 6 x 3 in, mixed media on panel, 1997-1998
I transitioned from candies to hors d’oeuvres and garnishes at the end of graduate school and continued painting [the Finger Fancy series] for about a year. These paintings were triptych structures on three-dimensional wood boxes. The subject matter was painted in a pattern down the center. I used metallic paints and other enamels to create different effects on the boxes. The repetition of subject matter became important as a means of content and process.
TWIGS
8 x 10 in, oil on canvas, 1999

DIRT (2)
24 x 24 in, oil on panel, 1997-1999
There was a period when I was painting dirt, sticks, weeds, seedlings and other natural elements. I had tired of the production of the Finger Fancy works. The preparation of the structures and getting the appropriate subject matter had become tedious and these more natural [compositions] were a welcome relief. The subject matter was simple, bare, elementary and empty. These works are also more abstract. When I look back it all seems so cyclical — eventually I missed the content and moved back to food imagery.
Salad Series

CHEF SALAD

48 x 48 in, oil on panel, 1999
Salad Series
CALIFORNIA SLICED FRUIT SALAD
48 x 48 in. oil on panel, 2000
Recipe Series

PAELLA
28 x 36 in, oil on canvas, 2002
Recipe Series
HAWAIIAN PIZZA SUPREME
36 x 32 in, 2002
Recipe Series
SLOOPER SOUP
36 x 32 in, oil on canvas, 2002
Recipe Series
BROADWAY DELUXE
36 X 32 in, oil on canvas, 2003
I want a viewer to connect with the work immediately and instinctively. Food . . . is such a versed and everyday thing. Everyone has a relationship with food on some level. I want a viewer to be lured and enticed to look and enjoy the work further. My goal is to offer a level of comfort and support with the hope of generating a more conceptual dialogue.

Recipe Series
GOOD FORTUNE — EAT IN
36 x 60 in, 2003
Recipe Series

PUMPKIN STUFFED RAVIOLI IN ORANGE ZEST SAUCE

36 x 32 in, 2003
Recipe Series

BORSCHT

36 x 32 in, 2003
Recipe Series

QUESADILLA

36 x 32 in, 2003
TWO AT THE WHARF
30 x 48 in, oil on canvas, 2003
ITALIAN PLUM
RED BANANA

WATERMELON
PEANUT

Botanical Series

8 x 10 in, oil on paper, 2004
ASSORTED TOMATOES AND GARLIC
24 x 48 in, oil on canvas, 2004
ASSORTED ONIONS AND POTATOES
24 x 48 in, oil on canvas, 2004
INTERNATIONAL MARKET 1
33 x 42 x 3 in, oil on canvas, 2005
INTERNATIONAL MARKET 2
33 x 42 x 3 in, oil on canvas, 2005
ASSORTED PEPPERS
24 x 48 in, oil on canvas, 2004