

Jell-O breaks out of its mold at art show

By Meg Dedolph
Oregon Daily Emerald

It wiggles, it jiggles, and it's cool and fruity. It's eaten by children at summer camps, and sneered at by gourmets, except when they call it aspic and make it from vegetables. It's a staple on hospital trays and Midwestern buffet tables where it's cherry or strawberry, made in a Tupperware mold and mixed with canned fruit cocktail or sliced bananas.

It may be colorful, it may be malleable, but is Jell-O art? Eugene's Radar Angels would have you think so. The Radar Angels are the collective mind behind Eugene's sixth Jell-O Art Show and Tacky Food Buffet.

The Radar Angels are a women's group that's existed since 1978, when members from three other women's groups met to have a "frivolous tea," said member Indra Stern. "We dressed up in strange outfits and started sharing fantasies and ideas. The Jell-O Art Show was one event."

Stern said the first Jell-O Art Show came after an especially long Eugene winter with lots of rain in the mid-1980s.

"We pulled the first show together in two and a half weeks, but no gallery would take us. They thought, 'Jell-O, what a mess!'"

But finally, the New Zone Gallery agreed to host the first show, which was a huge success, she said. After the first year, other galleries asked to host subsequent shows.

"Last year, we didn't have one because of illnesses among the members," Stern said. "People I didn't even know would come up to me in the supermarket and say, 'When are you going to have a Jell-O show?'"

The show, which was a fund raiser for the Maude Kerns Art Center, featured not only gelatinous art but live music by Hoof and a performance by the Radar Angels, which depicted, through both song and monologue, famous "Jell-O Babes" from history.

The tacky food buffet, also a staple of the evening, leaned heavily toward food kids might relish, which Stern said was normal.

"Nine-tenths of this will be eaten by the children who come here," she said. "Cheez-Whiz will end up here tonight, and food with colors that are non-realistic. You don't generally find food in the wild that's this vibrant."

The buffet table, once fully laden, held yellow and pink sugared marshmallow Easter creatures, powdered pink doughnut holes, crustless cucumber tea sandwiches with green olives, pimentos intact, and pink and white frosted animal crackers.

For the more adventurous, there were Fruity Pebble marshmallow bars, meringue swirls dusted with pink, green, yellow or blue

stripes, blue Kool-Aid, and a tutti-frutti Jell-O loaf, contributed by Nancy Schafer. The loaf had two layers of blue and green Jell-O, separated by banana slices and scrambled eggs and garnished with Cheerios.

"It's good," Schafer said. "I even tried a little piece."

Schafer's contribution to the art show, spawned of her "warped and twisted imagination," she said, was titled "Jell-O Molds" and took its inspiration not from the wobbly, fruity rings found at family picnics, but the white furry blobs found in dark refrigerator corners.

Her piece consisted of a group of Petri dishes, each with a different mold and a label. Visitors could use a magnifying glass to examine "Jell-O that fell on the floor," "Bathroom sink stuff," "Yogurt — good bacteria gone bad," "Compost bucket 'tea'," or "The stuff that gets past the sink strainer, but not the drain," as well as three or four other equally sour-smelling specimens.

'It's a great opportunity to not take life seriously ... and embarrass my children.'

— Nancy Schafer
Jell-O Artist

Schafer, who is a jeweler, has entered pieces in five Jell-O shows, and said she likes working with a material that doesn't last.

"It's a great opportunity to not take life seriously," she said. "And embarrass my children. I have two, 18 and 21, and they've often wondered out loud why they can't have a normal mom."

The Radar Angels' families tend to be forgiving when it comes to things like Jell-O art. Joan Gold Cypress, who entered a piece called "Holy Mackerel," an orange Jell-O fish decorated with religious paraphernalia, said she had a very supportive family.

"I came all the way from Tennessee," said Shirley Gold, her mother. "I think it's a lot of fun, more fun than I'd have at home."

The coincidence of April Fools' Day and Good Friday might have been the reason for the number of Jell-O works with religious themes, including "Christ's last supper on a TV tray," by Pam Sherman, a Hult Center stagehand.

Sherman said her dinner of gelatinous spaghetti and wine was "what he (Christ) real-

ly had after the disciples went home."

Sherman combined the dinner with "Jellovision," an empty TV cabinet which held a tilted fish tank filled with blue Jell-O. A tape player behind the TV provided the sound effects — taped soap opera dialogues.

Sherman said "Jellovision" was a regular feature at the show, with changing soundtracks each year.

"The first year," Stern said, "it was set up in a little alcove, and people would be sitting and chatting, and gradually conversation would die off and people would start staring at it just like when they watch the boob tube."

"The best part was when there were these two kids sitting there, and one said to the other, 'Go on, change the channel,' and the other said, 'I don't think you can.' Then the tape got to the end and started over, and the kids said, 'Oh, that was just on.'"

One of the newcomers to the show this year was local artist Mike Randles, who brought a 4-by-5 foot painting and cubes of green, red and orange Jell-O for visitors to throw at the canvas.

Randles spent some time throwing Jell-O himself, wondering aloud if it might stick to the painting better if the Jell-O were warmer. His black sportcoat flapped and one foot came off the ground as he hurled the cubes at the canvas.

"This is the first time I've ever gelatinated," Randles said. "I was a salad chef and I used to have to make Jell-O at this density for these really absurdist, elitist desserts, like baked Alaska, where the middle was all flambéed and it was surrounded by Jell-O," he said.

"We used to get into Jell-O fights back in the salad chef area and I noticed it used to stick to the walls and quiver," he said.

Unlike Randles, Eugene resident John Bauguess is a regular at the Jell-O art shows.

"I like the people who turn out for these things," he said. "They're friends and acquaintances of mine and remnants of the arts community that used to be more prominent in Eugene and became more submerged," Bauguess said.

That evening, the Radar Angels' portrayed Marie Curie as a Jell-O melting scientist and Michaelangelo as the first Jell-O sculptor. People came, threw Jell-O, laughed at the art, ate tacky food and petted the wandering dog who arrived near the end of the evening.

If Eugene's art community really is submerged, as Bauguess said, the sixth Jell-O Art Show and Tacky Food Buffet might have been the place where it came up for a breath of air.

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19 April 3:00 p.m. 115 Lawrence, 1190 Franklin Blvd.

Christian Creativity in Eastern Orthodox Icons (illustrated lecture)

A. Dean McKenzie, Professor Emeritus of Art History, UO

19 April 4:00 p.m. Warner Gallery, Museum of Art, 1430 Johnson Ln.

Tour of the UO Icon collection, Professor McKenzie

19 April 7:30 p.m. 115 Lawrence, 1190 Franklin Blvd.

Athos, the Holy Mountain (illustrated lecture)

Frank R. Horlbeck, Professor of Art History, University of Wisconsin, Madison

20 April 4:00 p.m. 100 Willamette, 1371 E. 13th Ave.

Christianity and the Arts

Doug Adams, Professor of Religion and the Arts, Pacific School of Religion

20 April 7:30 p.m. 238 Gilbert, 955 E. 13th Ave.

Christianity and Architecture

Thomas Gordon Smith, Chairman and Professor, School of Architecture, University of Notre Dame

21 April 4:00 p.m. 231 Gilbert, 955 E. 13th Ave.

Christianity and Literary Artistry: William Kennedy's

Purgatorial Vision, Ted L. Estess, Associate Professor of English and

Deaf of the Honors College, University of Houston

21 April 7:00 p.m. 110 Willamette, 1371 E. 13th Ave.

Panel Discussion Professors Adams, Estess, and Smith

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RELATED EVENTS (admission fee charged)

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