

2024: The Year of Jell-O

PREGAME THE ANNUAL JELL-O ART SHOW WITH JELL-O SHOTS INSPIRED BY EUGENE'S FINEST JELL-O ARTISTS

By Emerson Brady

Every December my dear friend Isaac and I make a list of trend predictions for the upcoming year. We argue over whether bobs are making a comeback and if truffle fries are finally #out. One thing we know for sure is that Jell-O is sweeping the nation yet again.

Consider this your warning: It's a Jell-O world now and we're just living in it.

For some Jell-O isn't simply a trend; it's an art form, and Eugene's annual Jell-O Art Show is the Louvre of Jell-O art. Established in 1988 by feminist performance group The Radar Angels, the annual Jell-O Art Show provides a space for Jell-O artists of every skill level to showcase their ooey-goey art.

This year's show takes place at Maude Kerns Art Center and begins at 5 pm Saturday, March 23. Anyone can submit a piece so long as they can contribute \$3 for their display. And if it wasn't already obvious, any art submitted must be made of Jell-O.

"The thing I love about Jell-O art is that there's no critical structure," says Diane McWhorter, aka *The Jell-O Queen*. One of the first Jell-O Art Show artists, she adds, "There's no bad Jell-O art. You know, there's no winner; just self expression."

McWhorter got into Jell-O art after her Radar Angel friend and future Jell-O Lady in Waiting Indira Stern-Hayworth convinced her to submit a piece for the first show.

She recalls her first piece was a dried Jell-O Barbie with a slug on its leg. "I was listening to people talk about it, and they were like, 'I can't even believe a woman would make that,'" she says of the Jell-O art. She says, "It made me realize that, wait, art is super fun — and Jell-O allows me to be an artist."

Stern-Hayworth and the rest of the Radar Angels crowned McWhorter Jell-O queen in 2012 after a broken heel earlier that year almost kept her from submitting a piece.

visual arts



DIANE MCWHORTER, THE JELL-O QUEEN, AND INDIRA STERN-HAYWORTH, HER LADY-IN-WAITING, POSE WITH MCWHORTER'S DRIED JELL-O CREATIONS.



ISAAC DISPLAYS THE BLUE CURAÇO 'UNDER THE SEA' JELL-O SHOT.

Photos by Todd Cooper

Photos by John Ofstedal

"It was a no-brainer," Stern-Hayworth says. "There is just nobody else who could be Jell-O queen."

A few years later in 2016, David Pibbs was knighted by McWhorter after participating in the show for 20 years.

"I just love entering an art show alongside 8-year-olds and 80-year-olds," Pibbs says.

Both McWhorter and Pibbs' houses resemble dried Jell-O art museums. Vases full of Jell-O flowers line her kitchen table, and brightly colored Jell-O crowns sit on the piano. Jell-O stars and mustaches live on Pibbs' tables. McWhorter points across the hall and says, "That's my actual Jell-O art room but it's too crowded in there."

The kitchen is what one might refer to as a Jell-O studio. Counters are littered with Pyrex bowls of thick, brightly colored Jell-O that hardens at room temperature. McWhorter lets it sit on her counter, tending to it periodically until it's the right texture to mold it into whatever shape she pleases.

This year she says her piece is going to resemble a koi fish bowl with various plants and fish "somehow suspended" in the bowl. Pibbs is also inspired by fish this year and is making a goldfish aquarium made up entirely out of wet

Jell-O, which is what Jell-O artists call the consistency it is after being refrigerated.

"It may or may not work," McWhorter says. "You're always working up to the last minute."

Feeling inspired after meeting Jell-O royalty McWhorter and Pibbs, I decided to enlist Jell-O trendspotter Isaac to help me create a Jell-O concoction of my own. Except instead of an elaborate art piece, we decided to create the perfect Jell-O shot to pregame the Jell-O Art Show.

Both the Jell-O queen and knight were influenced by fish (adding marine life to my 'ins list' as we speak), which means an oceanic-themed Jell-O shot was in order. Two envelopes of gelatin, a half cup of Blue Curaç� and three-quarters cup of tequila are the driving forces in our 'Under the Sea' Jell-O shot.

First you're going to pour two-thirds cup of sweetened lime juice, a third cup of water and gelatin in a saucepan and let it soak for a few minutes. Then turn the heat to low until the gelatin is dissolved (should be about five minutes). While the gelatin is dissolving, take out your plastic shot glasses and put a Swedish Fish in every cup. Remove the saucepan from heat and stir in the liquor. It may melt the fish but it looks cool. Finally, pour the Jell-O into the shot glasses and let it refrigerate for several hours.

After the Jell-O is solidified feel free to decorate with graham cracker 'sand' and a little beach umbrella or swim goggles.

"If you don't like the taste you can always swallow it whole," Isaac says. "That's half the fun."

The Jell-O Art Show is 5 pm Saturday, March 23 at Maude Kerns Art Center 1910 E. 15. The show will feature a performance from the "Inimitable Radar Angels" at 7 pm. There is a suggested donation of \$3. If you wish to have your art featured in the show you can drop your piece off at Maude Kerns between 3-4:30 pm. To learn more about the Jell-O Art Show and how to submit a piece go to Mkartcenter.org/jello.html

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