In jail, Batle translated his drafting abilities into tattoos, portraits, and greeting cards for fellow prisoners, who, in return, protected him. “The prison artist was a commodity,” notes Batle. “He was like a magician. Even the toughest convicts were in awe at the artist’s skills. I was that commodity.” Still, that didn’t shield him from witnessing numerous beatings, stabbings, and riots and experiencing firsthand, the pain and suffering of prison life. After serving his time, Batle moved to the Philippines three years ago. There, a friend gifted him a hollowed-out ostrich egg, on which he felt compelled to depict what he’d seen in prison. The shell proved surprisingly sturdy.

The same artistic skills that put Gil Batle in prison may have saved his life behind bars. Batle’s intricate forgeries landed him more than two decades in California prisons, including San Quentin, after substance abuse caused him to lose his job, family, and control of his life. “I had to create a way of making money, literally,” he has said of that period. “I was making my own traveler’s checks, money orders, fake IDs and even credit cards. In a twisted way, I saw it as art.”

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Batle, using a dental drill, carved meticulous scenes and intricate designs into its surface and went on to create nearly two dozen in all. Each piece takes him about a month to create. “I actually have to go back mentally to prison to capture that feel of being inside that place,” he says. “It’s a relief of gratitude when I look up from the egg, and I’m reminded that I’m not in there anymore.”
"THERE IS NO LOVE SINCERER THAN LOVE OF FOOD." — GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

WELCOME DEVOTEES OF DELICIOUSNESS!

You are now our guests at a visual feast featuring the works of 35 visionary artists in a combo platter with insights from farmers, scientists, environmental activists, moms, poets, and humorists to publicly explore humankind’s complex, multi-layered relationship with food.

Betty Fussell, in her book, My Kitchen Wars, put it plainly, “Food, far more than sex, is the great leveler. Just as every king, prophet, warrior, and saint has a mother, so every Napoleon, every Einstein, every Jesus has to eat.”

Every year, our American Visionary Art Museum playfully explores one very serious and timely subject worthy of your focused attention. Most of us have pretty complicated relationships with food, its impact on our health, our memories, and even our budget. Conversely, each of us impacts food, too. Author/farmer activist, Wendell Berry reminds us, “How we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used.”

Be it sculptures entirely made from marshmallow Peeps, carved burnt toast, or a life-sized Gummy Candy self-portrait, our wide selection of art, film, and food research has been lovingly served up to enlighten, spice and fortify your own personal relationship to food.

The biggest food story of all is well-evidenced in this Earth population chart (left). Best projections indicate in three short decades we will attain a record population of around 9.5 billion—that’s a whole lot of hungry mouths to feed! The visionary and compassionate thinking required to meet this challenge has no precedent. Therefore, we look to the food wisdom of our past and the flights of new possibility that food fantasy permits, to arrive at a happier, healthier, and kinder food future here on earth.

With hearty delight, Yummm! introduces my mentored, first-time guest co-curator, John Lewis. Together, with all our Museum’s Board, staff, and volunteers, we invite you to help toast our American Visionary Art Museum’s 21st Anniversary as a national museum unlike any other. With the wit of famed imbiber, W.C. Fields, let us now ask, “Why limit happy to an hour?” NUNC EST BIBENDUM!

Rebecca Alban Hoffberger,
AVAM Founder/Director
PHILIP CAREY, Self Portrait of My Health History, 2015, mixed media, courtesy of the artist. Photo Charlotte DiNunzio
Breast feeding releases oxytocin, calming moms and babies.

Breast feeding saves as much as $4,000 annually in formula cost, daily burns as many calories as a 7-mile run.

Nursing moms have far less breast and ovarian cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis later in life.

Human milk composition is closest to donkey and mare’s milk, not cow’s.

Mom’s milk fights viral, bacterial and parasitic infection and has even been used on wounds.

Breastfed kids grow to have less diabetes, leukemia, asthma, tooth decay and obesity and may even gain up to 8 IQ points.

Food for Life

Everything that lives—people, plants, animals, birds, fish, insects, even microbial life—“eats” something to sustain its life. Food can be electrons, sunlight, peanut butter, worms, seeds, or other animals. The great satirist Ambrose Bierce put it best in his 1906 humorous work, The Cynic’s Word Book, later re-titled, The Devil’s Dictionary:

Edible, adj.: Good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm.
ABUNDANCIA! So much of what we eat today was wholly unknown to Europeans until after their arrival in North and South America. These New World edible treasures have since revolutionized world cuisine. They include: corn, potato, tomato, bell pepper, chili pepper, vanilla, tobacco, beans, pumpkin, cassava root, avocado, peanut, cashew, pineapple, blueberry, sunflower, wild rice, cacao (chocolate), and squash.

AMERICANS ARE CORN-FED. Corn has become so embedded in the U.S. food chain and household products that its distinct carbon footprint turns up in everything from disposable diapers to one-quarter of all supermarket foods. Today, an analysis of an average American's hair protein would reveal that we consume much more corn and corn derivatives than our neighbors in Mexico, where tortillas are a food staple but diets are actually far more healthfully varied!
GLOBAL WARMING IMPACT ON FOOD

IN 136 YEARS OF MODERN RECORD KEEPING, JULY 2016 SET GLOBAL HEAT RECORDS, surpassing only last July, 2015 for the hottest month ever recorded. May 2016 was the 13th consecutive warmest May on record. Temperatures in Kuwait and Iraq hit a record of 129, with a life-threatening heat index of 164. Scientists now believe that much of the Middle East and parts of Africa will be uninhabitable before the end of this century. The global heating of earth and sea will escalate incidence of violent storms, sea rise, cooling of Gulf Stream from glacier melt, and create radical, climate change. Climate greatly affects our human ability to cultivate food. Great cities of the past have been abandoned when water and food could not sustain their populations. The rapid trajectory of broad geographic climate change will further add to the number of refugees that will flee their home countries in the effort to sustain their lives.

FOOD & CLIMATE Food production is greatly influenced by the dance of weather, soil quality, seed stock integrity, and the devotion and know how of the cultivator. Rapid snow cap melt will likely alter the Gulf Stream’s ability to effectively heat northern Europe, reducing crop yield and resulting in places like the United Kingdom and Norway losing the window of their viable growing season. Changes in seawater salinity will also threaten ocean fish populations. Within this century, areas of the Middle East are projected to be uninhabitable after recording the hottest temperatures on earth the last three years in a row.

Global warming causes wild temperature swings, producing both record heat and record cold. The last 13 years have seen the hottest overall mean earth temperatures since modern records have been kept (1880). Each successive year has broken the heat record set by the previous year. The current rate of desertification reduces 25,000+ square acres of farmland to un-plantable dust each year. Climate change, poor land and water management, and continued bee colony collapse are forces of nature that together will greatly impact our ability to feed the planet’s population, just at the time when our numbers will be greater than ever before. This challenge to meet our future food needs equitably and healthfully, while avoiding food and water wars, will require our best visionary minds and the triumph of our most noble, non-exploitative natures.
There are 430+ species of Maryland bees. Bees are known as the “angels of agriculture.” They pollinate 71 of our world’s top 100 food crops. Last year, Maryland beekeepers lost 61% of their hives, the year prior to that nearly 50%—a die-off rate twice the national average. Globally, bees are dying off in record numbers. Responsibly, in 2016, Maryland became the first US state to pass the most hopeful law to curtail domestic use of neonicotinoid pesticides in a sincere effort to protect its star pollinators. Passage of this legislation was in large part due to hero bee activists like Bonnie Raindrop and researcher/author/activist/bee photographer Sam Droege, whose extraordinary bee photographs are shared here.

Bee photograph: Sam Droege—profoundest thanks for the importance and beauty of his life’s work.

Key Bee Facts

- Honeybees will fly over 55,000 miles and visit 2 million flowers just to make 1 pound of honey.
- One worker bee will make 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey over its lifetime.
- Out of 20,000 species of bees, only four make honey.
- Kept in sealed, air and moisture tight containers, honey is a miracle food that can uniquely remain edible over thousands of years. The honey found sealed in Egyptian King Tut’s ancient tomb could be safely eaten today.
- Honey has effectively been used to kill many forms of bacteria, even acting as a teenager’s best friend to deeply cleanse skin pores of acne.
- If you enjoy fruits and vegetables, a glass of wine, or even like wearing cotton, you need to work to protect and support our pollinators, chief among them: bees, butterflies, birds (especially hummingbirds), ants, and bats. You can plant bee-friendly flowers, not be so fast to cut down flowering weeds, and stop treating your garden or lawn with chemicals and pesticides that have been implicated in bee kill-offs.
Today, much as in biblical times, starvation and enforced embargo of food, medicine, and other basic goods essential to life continue to be wielded as a strategy of war. These cruel tactics target civilian families, as well as soldiers. In 2016, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad intensified his program, “starve or kneel,” to force towns that had dared oppose his regime into total submission. Any attempt to flee made by desperately hungry citizens was met with arrest or immediate execution. Despite widely accepted international accord that specifically condemns the use of forced starvation in any conflict, this extreme form of hardship continues, mirroring infamous past tragedies in Biafra, Leningrad, and during our own U.S. Civil War.
If you look the right way you can see that the whole world is a garden. – Frances Hodgson Burnett

Nothing is more completely the child of Art than a Garden. – Sir Walter Scott

WENDY BRACKMAN, BRACKMAN’S BOTANICAL BONANZA! 2016, hand painted paper plates, straws, ping pong balls, paper towel tubes, endless staples, courtesy of the artist.
SUPPORT THE AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

AVAM is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit institution. As such, we rely on the generosity and support of individuals, corporations, and foundations who love our museum, visionary art, and spirit. If you’d like to see our programs and works of art continue to flourish, enlighten and inspire, please contact our Department of Development at 410.244.1900 x247 or at abby@avam.org. AVAM members and donors are critical for the museum’s glowing future!

FIFI AND THE KINETIC SCULPTURE RACE

FIFI! The Pink Poodle is an icon of American Visionary Art Museum’s annual KINETIC SCULPTURE RACE. Made with over 1500 yards of pink tulle and retrofitted with a recumbent bicycle, inflatable pontoons, and a strong cycling team, Fifi participates in this annual event of creative sport and artistic engineering. Part Huck Finn, part Rube Goldberg, with a dash of Amelia Earhart, the Kinetic Sculpture Race promotes creative thinking and grassroots ingenuity. The Race clearly supports AVAM’s educational mission to uncover, encourage, and empower ordinary (actually, extraordinary) amateurs and skilled engineers, adventurers, and problem-solvers who will create imaginative, 100% human-powered works of art designed to travel 15 miles on land, through mud and sand, and over deep Baltimore Inner Harbor waters. The Kinetic Sculpture Race takes place each year on the first Saturday of May. When she’s not racing, Fifi is on view in the museum’s Jim Rouse Visionary Center. For more info about the race: www.kineticbaltimore.com.

SOCK MONKEY SATURDAY SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016

FREE! 10am–2pm. Now an AVAM holiday tradition for friends and families—making your own sock monkey! A great last minute gift and more importantly a day of creative family fun. FREE, but you must bring 2 pairs of (clean) socks and your own scissors to get in! Instructions, stuffing, needles, thread, visionary baubles, and camaraderie provided.

FLICKS FROM THE HILL ON THURSDAYS IN JULY & AUGUST 2016

FREE! Outdoor family films on Federal Hill screened under AVAM’s Golden Hand at The Hughes Family Outdoor Movie Theater. Museum is open & free 5–9 pm on flicks nights with pre-flicks activities!

AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM extends sincerest thanks to all—individuals, foundations, and corporations—who have made generous financial and in-kind contributions throughout the year. Kindness, innovation, sharing new creative visions, and harmoniously connecting across creative disciplines and cultures... all of it would be diminished without the security of continued stabilizing commitment of many! Contributed funds enable AVAM to maintain and grow our exhibitions and programming for visitors from around the world.

We are honored to recognize the following Major Donors who made gifts during the 2015-2016 exhibition year: The Aber D. Unger Foundation, Inc. Absolutely Perfect Catering • American Trading & Production Corp. (ATAPCO) • Virginia McGlinchey & Scott Arterburn • Paul Babikow The Citizens of Baltimore County & The Baltimore County Commission on Arts and Sciences • Baltimore National Heritage Area Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake & Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts Creative Baltimore Fund • Bank of America • Barron Family Foundation Stuart Cooper & Rebecca Besson • BGE • Biddle Street Catering • The Henry and Ruth Blaustein Rosenberg Foundation, Inc. • Bloomberg The Lois & Irving Blum Foundation Inc. • Marc & Lenore Blum • Eddie & Sylvia Brown • Noreen Buckfire • Lynn Butler • Bunting Family Foundation CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield • Charles Levine Catering • Linwoods Catering • Chipotle Mexican Grill • Cho Benn Holback & Associates, Inc. The Classic Catering People • Michael Crowell • Jane & Worth B. Daniels, Jr. Fund • Delaplaine Foundation • Stony Point Kitchen, Inc. • DLA Piper The Charles Edlin Family Charitable Foundation Trust • Lois Feinblatt • Feldman Family Fund, Inc. • Josh Feldstein • Norman J and Doris Fisher Foundation Francis Gooch Charitable Lead Trusts • Freedom Services, Inc. • Iva Gillet • Gooch, LLC • Matthew and Michele Garra • John Sandein and Emily R. Greenberg • Constance Grimaldis • Toni & Jay Grinwald • Homer and Martha Gudelsky Family Foundation, Inc. • Douglas and Toogis Hamilin Jr Foundation • Pat & Peter Handel • Recht-Levi Foundation, Inc. • Here Foundation • Howard County Arts Council & the Howard County Government • Patrick and Charlotte Hughes • JAP Associates • John J. Leidy Foundation • Just Folk • Mimi Kaplaff • Jennifer Klein • LIE Klein • George Lambillotte Marilyn Lynott • The M&T Charitable Foundation • Katherine Israel and Francis Gavin Markert • Maryland State Arts Council • Maryland State Department of Education • Marilyn Meyerhoff • Elizabeth Nose • The Olshans Foundation • The Pastry • Dean and Zoe Pappas Nancy Patz • PNC Financial Services Group • PNC Foundation • Princeton Area Community Foundation • Putting on the Ritz • Rita & Jim Regins Joseph E. Reisch Fund, The New York Community Trust • Lisa and Paul Revson • The Francis and Anne Rienhoff Fund • The Rothschild Charitable Foundation, Inc. • Rouge • Jim and Patty Rienhoff Charitable Foundation • The Samuel J. Holtzman Family Foundation, Inc. • Seena Gudelsky Jacob S. Shapiro Foundation • M. Sigmund & Barbara Shapiro Philanthropic Fund • Esther Sharp • Kathy & Joel Sher • Nick Sheridan Simply Elegant Catering • Janet M. Smith & Bart Harvey III • Space Telescope Science Institute • Eric Steinmann • George & Holly Gudelsky Stone Studio 921 Salon & Spa • Sylvan/Laureate Foundation • T. Rowe Price Foundation • Ullmann Family Foundation • United Therapeutics Corporation David & Chris Wallace • Marjorie Wyman Charitable Annuity Trust • Zeффer & Gold Catering

RUBY C. WILLIAMS

Assorted paintings

Courtesy of Holly Urritia

Courtesy of Tom Hall and Linell Smith

Courtesy of Bobby Savinis

Courtesy of Holly Urritia
A box without hinges, key or lid, Yet golden treasure inside is hid.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit