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APPEALINGLY UNPEELED: THE LAYERED LEMONS IN DUTCH GOLDEN AGE AND CONTEMPORARY ART

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Abstract

In seventeenth-century Dutch painting, the lemon holds a prominent visual, economical, socio-cultural, and moral position. This trend would then be repeated in contemporary art, beginning in roughly the 1970s. This thesis, in two parts, will explore the significance of the prevalence of the lemon and their recurrent presence in both Dutch Golden Age art and modern and contemporary artwork. This multivalent approach will look at lemons as not only a visual representation of fruit, but a symbol of larger concepts such as globalization, commercialism, colonialism, sexuality, religion, linguistics, mythology, and pop culture.

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Acknowledgements

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Al jefe de mi departamento, quien me pidió varias veces dejar este maestría… ¿qué te parecen estos limones?

Part One: Lemons in Dutch Golden Age (17th century)

Interpreting a seventeenth century Dutch baroque *stilleven* or still-life painting as a contemporary viewer requires a multivalent approach, as the Netherlands were one of the more worldly and prosperous societies of the time. With a global trade network bringing in a wealth of new commodities from world-wide markets, a prosperous stock exchange cultivating a thriving upper class, and highly literate populace, the contemporary Dutch audience had access to an abundance of information through which to view these works, and would have been familiar at perceiving these symbols that are only disguised today through the distance of time and culture. Present-day audiences may now be less familiar with specific, inherent pictorial interpretations of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literate populace, but we have no issue understanding our own modern pictorial symbols– the ever-present emoji. In the following analysis I will use a multivalent historical, cultural, and literary approach to attempt an interpretation of one aspect of the still-life genre, the lemon, as it appears mainly in northern Dutch Republic *vanitas* still-lifes, in particular by looking at Wilelm Kalf's 1662 *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Fruit*. (Fig. 1)

Figure 1 Willem Kalf, Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Fruit. 1662, Oil on Canvas, 79.4 x 67.3 cm

Lemons are a seemingly ubiquitous visual component in seventeenth century Dutch paintings. According to one

analysis, between 1500 and 1650, lemons are depicted in fifty-one percent of their sampling of all Netherlandish paintings, as opposed to sixteen percent of Italian works.[1] The Dutch Golden Age, spanning most of the seventeenth century, saw the Netherlands as world leaders in trade, science, art and economic power. A product of Dutch imperial success, lemons arrived on ships or were grown in special citrus hothouses. As a visible and edible symbol of the wealth, luxury, and decadence which this period of supremacy granted citizens, they were highly desirable. Formerly seen through the lens of emblem books, objects such as lemons appearing in still lifes have much richer cultural capital than to be didactic or moralistic (emblem books suggested they were a criticism of the excesses of the Dutch Republic's new wealth). Lemons are a reflection of contemporary Dutch life and prosperity of the 1600s. Eddy de Jongh suggests that many seventeenth century motifs serve these dual functions: "they operate as concrete, observable things while at the same time doing something totally different, namely expressing an idea, a moral, an intention, a joke or a situation."[2] Peeled, cut in half, or whole, the prominence of lemon imagery suggests several functions: literal, metaphorical, moral, and technical.

The meaning of lemons unpeels much like the fruit itself, unraveling to reveal a highly varied and significant fruit. A pictorial example of the preeminence of the Dutch trade empire, lemons were a representation of Dutch primacy in trade and imperialism. As a very real and consumable object, lemons were a highly exotic commodity, indicative of the successful trade network established by the Dutch Republic after their independence movement from Spain. With the creation of the Republic in 1581, the Dutch aristocracy and new middle-class *burgher*s emerged with money to spend on luxury goods, particularly food– including the alluring lemon.[3]

[1] Brian Wansink, Anupama Mukund, and Andrew Weislogel, "Food Art Does Not Reflect Reality", p 3.
[2] Eddy de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning*, pp 16-18.
[3] Julie Hochstrasser, *Still life and trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, p 10.

The abundant appearance of citrus fruits at this time is emblematic of the Netherlandic victory in their David versus Goliath struggle against the Spanish Hapsburg empire, whose access to the Mediterranean had formerly given them a near monopoly on the warm-weather fruits. Costly and coveted in the rest of Europe, lemons are a visual illustration of the rise of the Dutch Golden Age, showcasing the nation's dominance in trade. A well-known earlier example of the status of citrus fruits as wealth-signifier in painting can be found in Jan van Eyck's 1434 *The Arnolfini Portrait*, featuring four oranges among its many symbols of status. (Fig 2) One of the items the Italian-born merchant Arnolfini,[4] painted here in his residence in Bruges, was oranges, also notably a symbol of fertility and nuptials.

Figure 2 Jan van Eyck, The Arnolfini Portrait, 1434, Oil on oak panel, 82.2cm x 60cm

Lemons first grew as an under-story in forests on the foothills of the Himalayas, and according to Tyôzaburô Tanaka, the great Japanese citrus expert of the twentieth century, all oranges came from Assam and Burma, where they were known as *naranga.* More recent research by botanists working in the Chinese region of Yunnan has revealed so many primitive citrus forms that there's reason to believe many species originated in China and were brought to Italy. During the Moorish occupation (711-1492), Arabs planted lemons in southern Spain, North

[4] Margaret Koster, "The Arnolfini double portrait: a simple solution," pp 3-14. Now believed to be possibly his cousin, Giovanni di Arrigo.

Africa, and Sicily, which would later be transported by boat from the Mediterranean and overland across the Alps, to Dutch markets. With the establishment of Dutch trade routes to the East Indies, citrus fruits and plants were able to arrive directly in Amsterdam by boat,[5] heading to markets and the tables of any who could afford them. The Dutch imported both fruits and fruit trees; in order to protect the cold-sensitive plants from northern winters, citrus greenhouses called 'orangeries,' with large windows and opening skylights were created to house the potted trees that could be moved in and outside depending on the weather.[6] These orangeries, with their expanses of costly Venetian glass, heated from underneath by coal braziers, were the ultimate symbol of wealth, and Dutch architects were key in advancing the technology that made it possible to showcase the fragile plants in the cold northern climate.[7] Cultivating these exotic gardens was one way of declaring Netherlandic national identity; the creation of Frederik Heindrik, sovereign Prince of Orange and stadtholder's [8] immense gardens and orangeries at Honselaarsdijk coincided with the foundation of the Dutch Republic and the plans were copied across the Netherlands and even inspired the orangery at Versailles.[9] (Fig 3) The pride in citrus fruits may have itself been an expression of nationalism, in reference to the House of Orange.

Figure 3 Unknown, Clingendael Estate in North Holland with plan of the garden, in Views of Country Houses & Gardens of Holland. c1690, etching, double page.

[5] Hochstrasser, *Still life and trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, p 73.
[6] Helena Attlee, *The Land Where Lemons Grow*, p 49.
[7] Billie Britz, "Environmental Provisions for Plants in Seventeenth-Century Northern Europe," pp 133-44.
[8] Stadholter = steward, de-facto Dutch head of state starting in the 16th century, the Prince of Orange ruled Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Guelders, and Overijssel in the Dutch Republic. The principality of Orange originated in Orange in the south of France before eventually becoming the title of the Dutch monarch.
[9] Vanessa Sellers. *Courtly Gardens in Holland 1600-1650*, p 13.


DE
VERSTANDIGE KOCK,
Of Sorghvuldige Huyshoudster:
HOLLANDTSE SLACHT-TYDT.
VERSTANDIGE CONFITUURMAKER,

Figure 4 De Verstandige Kock, of Sorghvuldige Huyshoudster. Amsterdam : Marcus Doornick, 1667

For a literal interpretation of the abundance of lemons in Dutch still lifes, we must look to food. Available at market and in orangery gardens of the wealthy, lemons quickly made their way into Dutch cuisine, as reflected in both still lifes and cookbooks. With the advent of the Golden Age, food consumption increased, the average Dutch family moving from three to four meals per day.[10] Examples from the definitive Dutch cookbook published in 1668, *De Verstandige Kock, The Sensible Cook* (Fig 4), include lemon hart (a large meatball), custards, and many dishes of oysters and lemons, using every part of the lemon except the seeds and the pith.[11] Lemons are found in over two thirds of recipes from upper class cookbooks and thus seem to have been a vital element of a proper seventeenth century Dutch diet. However, due to their costly husbandry needs, citrus fruit, including lemons, remained a signifier of class through the seventeenth century, as only the elite members of society could afford to grow and consume them.[12] To this day, a common household proverb touches on the epitome of deceit in selling someone '*knollen voor citroenen,'* or cheap turnips in place of lemons, a testament to their status and value.[13]

Figure 5 Jan Davidsz de Heem, Still Life with a Glass and Oysters ca. 1640. Oil on wood, 25.1 x 19.1 cm.

Another common item in Dutch still lifes, oysters are rarely seen without lemons, their acidity working to dry

[10] Donna Barnes, "Dutch Paintings in the Seventeenth Century," p 10.
[11] Ibid, pp 41-84.
[12] Hochstrasser, *Still life and trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, p 78.
[13] Ibid, p 74.

the oysters' cold moisture. Oysters themselves were a quintessential part of the seventeenth century diet, the Dutch East Indian empire as they dominated the pearl fisheries, and Dutch painter's vocabulary, another standard of opulence and luxury with an extra, erotic twist: oysters were rumored to have aphrodisiac powers.[14] (Fig 5) This leads us to the next possible reason for lemons' predominance in Dutch Golden Age still lifes: their presumed ability to offset the 'warmer humors.' Lovesick maidens were given lemon to cool their fiery bodily humors, as recommended by Aristotle for women suffering "uterine fits," "hysteria," overactive sexual desire and other erotic ailments.[15] Jacques Ferrand, in his 1610 *Treatise on Lovesickness*, gives several recipes that include lemon juice or peel as "remedies for love and erotic melancholy."[16] Several examples of this can be seen in the work of Jan Steen, whose lovesick maidens are frequently seen with slices or wedges of lemons on nearby tables, but perhaps the best visual is by Richard Brakenburg after Steen with *A Medical Practitioner Taking a Girl's Pulse and Holding a Flask of Her Urine* from around 1670, (Fig 6) in which a swooning young woman is seen holding an orange to her groin, presumably to calm her erotic warm humors.[17]

Figure 6 Richard Brakenburg after Jan Steen, A Medical Practitioner Taking a Girl's Pulse and Holding a Flask of Her Urine with four other figures on the left and a maid opening a door on the right. Late 17th century. Oil on wood, 51.4 x 41.9cm.

[14] Liana Cheney. "The Oyster in Dutch Genre Paintings: Moral or Erotic Symbolism," p 13.
[15] Mary Piepmeir, "The Appeal of Lemons: Appearance and Meaning in Mid Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings," p 23.
[16] Jacques Ferrand, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*," p 360.
[17] Laurinda Dixon, *Perilous Chastity,"* p 159.

Lemons also served a more practical medicinal purpose; van Beverwyck in 1672 claims "…It can render powerless or eliminate the hot or gallish vapors that lie in the stomach: it causes the lost appetite to return, is very pleasant for the stomach, and counteracts poison."[18] Citrus fruits were also proposed as an antidote to poisons, according to a proverb described by Greek rhetorician Athenaeus and cited in van Beverwyck,[19] another reference to lemons as 'repelling the poison of snakes and vipers' can be found in a medieval Persian book, '*Aja'ib al-makhluquat* (*Wonders of Creation*) by Zakariya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini (d 1283).[20] They were certainly used to balance flavor in the crude, oversweet white wine, served in *roemers*; (Fig 5) probably this began as a preventative for poison that ended up having a much more practical use. Early still lifes of lemons on or near tipped wine glasses may have invited caution but seem to have evolved to become part of the daily consumption habits.[21] In *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Fruit*, the lemon next to a cup of wine could perhaps be seen as a reminder to partake of the lemon before imbibing the wine, just in case, though most likely it is simply culinary and cultural markers that inform Kalf's composition.

It is still quite likely that at least some seventeenth century Dutch art consumers had morality on their mind when looking to still lifes. The Netherlands faced moral quandary, handling their booming market and economy while dealing with Dutch Reform Calvinist morality that cautioned temperance and moderation. [22] Exotic lemons, obvious signs of wealth and luxury, would have been a clear symbol of vain luxury, and depending on context could also

[18] In Hochstrasser "Feasting the Eye," p 75-76.
[19] Ibid, "as Athenaeus established with a strange example, of two criminals who were sentenced, according to the laws of Egypt, to be given over to the adders, and on the way a warden out of sympathy gave them a citron, which they ate up, and thereafter being bitten they suffered no harm from the sharp and poisonous snakes. Over which the judge was amazed, and learning that they had eaten a citron, the next day allowed the one to be given a citron, and the other one not, and… nothing happened to the one who had eaten the citron, but the other turned completely blue directly after the bit of the adder and died immediately."
[20] He Xiangyu, *Yellow Book*, p 14
[21] Ibid, p 76
[22] Mariët Westermann, *A Worldly Art*, p 15.

Figure 7 Jan Steen, In Luxury, Beware, 1663, oil on canvas, 3′ 5″ x 4′ 9″.

reference lust, sloth, indolence, and greed. For an example, see Jan Steen's 1663 *In Luxury, Beware* (Fig 7), a painting full of pictorial symbols and messages. In the chaos of the disorderly scene, the lemon could be overlooked, but left sitting on a ledge, its bright peel spiraling downward it draws the eye still, a quiet marker of decadence. An exotic species whose trees retain their green leaves year-round, the citrus fruits are also easily poised as symbols of immortality and eternal youth, as promised in the Christian paradise. As with the eternal battle of good and evil, lemons are both bitter and sweet, the aroma pleasant but the fruit deceptively sour and the pith bitter. Similarly, the pleasure of excess luxury is transient, since it satisfies in the moment but ultimately leads to moral decay.

If looked at through this lens, *vanitas* paintings denote the transient nature of life, alongside themes of temperance. The lemons in these pictures, particularly when peeled, are ripe, and we know they will quickly begin to decay. The carpet will fade, the wine will sour, silver will tarnish. The Gospel of Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Wealth and excess are hand in hand with several of the seven deadly sins, death comes for us all; it is the great equalizer. The *vanitas* genre of paintings may have partly developed for this audience as

cautionary devices, to visually represent their social and moral predicament.[23]

Despite Svetlana Alpers' 1983 *Art of Describing* changing the way we look at Dutch still lifes, peeling back their many layers of meaning and purpose, *vanitas* remain largely defined by the earlier iconographic readings and the belief that these paintings served as warning to the newly-minted Calvinist citizens of the Dutch Republic, cautioning the danger of pride, gluttony, and excess. Today, scholars agree that these were more likely indication of the rise of consumerism and national pride in their new affluence and status. Perhaps this was tinged with guilt, most likely found pleasure in abundant displays of wealth and comfort, as collecting both items and images of expensive and rare items.[24]

Ultimately, though, the lemon was utilized frequently by artists as an object of technical fascination, one that fit within popular notions of seeing and depicting. A lemon has a large variety of textures and can exhibit a painter's range of skills as it sits, half peeled to reveal juicy fruit as the elongated, spiraling, nubby rinds drape over the edge of the table, drooping with gravity. The interplay of color, light, texture, and form were all formal qualities that were highly regarded among seventeenth century Dutch painters.[25] Still lifes were a virtuoso test of an artist's skill; an investment of hours of labor layering paint to showcase artistic

Figure 8 Jan Davidsz de Heem, Still Life with Peeled Lemon. c. 1650, Oil on Canvas, 59 x 42 cm

[23] Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*.
[24] Alan Chong, "Contained Under the Name of Still Life," pp 29-31.
[25] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, pp 90-91.

competency and evoke the senses. Kalf's 1662 *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Fruit* is a good example of this, his illusionistic, trompe l'oleil lemon almost evoking salivation, it seems so real. The lemon in particular seems to have served as a challenge for painters, appearing again and again in the work of den Uyl, van Beyeren, de Heem, van Utrecht, Steen, Claesz, but reaching their pinnacle in the later works of Kalf.[26] The latter achieved success with his sumptuous and precious object-infused *vanitas* works; his exquisite control of light and texture highlighted against dark backgrounds.[27]

Clearly, all depictions of lemons should not be reduced to a singular symbolic object. As part of *pronk*, or ostentatious, ornate, and sumptuous still lifes, the interpretation of every lemon would be informed by what surrounded them. Kalf's 1662 *Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Fruit* surrounds the deftly peeled lemon with other elements of the Dutch trade industry, while *Still Life with Peeled Lemon* by Jan Davidsz de Heem circa 1650 (Fig 8) surrounds the lemon with other fruits. Plump strawberries, grapes, and oysters could all have connotations of sexuality; in particular grapes, which were often related to fertility and virginity.[28] (Fig 1, 5) In a recent lecture for NYU Abu Dhabi, "The Emergence of the Lemon Twist in Dutch Still Life," Mariët Westermann stated, "These painters never set out to paint the economy," but the repeated motif of the peeled lemon in so many works was a symbol of the predominate interests in Dutch society at the time; commerce, natural history and art... the inclusion of a meticulously painted lemon was not an artistic afterthought, but the key to understanding society at the time."[29] In the end, however, lemons were most likely emblematic of themselves; a luxury comestible that for the wealthy art buyers would have a prominent

[26] Chong, 70.
[27] Hochstrasser, *Still life and trade in the Dutch Golden Age*, p 84.
[28] Jan Bedaux. "Fruit and Fertility," p 155.
[29] Mariët Westermann. "The Emergence of the Lemon Twist in Dutch Still Life."

association with daily life, and a display of an artist's ability to render a plethora of surfaces. In short, a juicy treat all around. Whether as celebratory or as cautionary tale, implying abundance or temperance, the lemon's ubiquity in Golden Age Dutch painting cannot be discounted. As the Netherland's great empire waned, so did this genre of painting, which seems fitting, as if the *vanitas* predicted this decline.

Figure 9 Jan Jansz den Uyl, Pewter Jug and Silver Tazza on a Table, oil on canvas, 1633

Part Two: Lemons in Modern and Contemporary Art

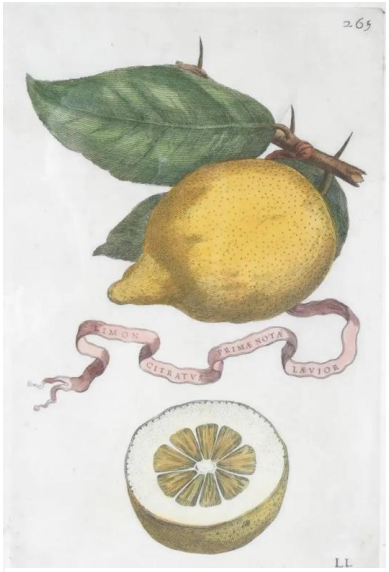

Figure 10 Lemon Botanical Engraving Attributed to Fiovanni Battista Ferrari, c1646

Lemons did not lose their appeal as the Dutch Golden Age wrapped up during 1672's *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year), when the Franco-Dutch War and War of Spanish Succession, along with other costly conflicts, fueled an economic decline. Lemons have cropped up throughout art history, before and since the Dutch Golden Age, including in works by Van Gogh, Edouard Manet, Henri Matisse and Ellsworth Kelly (Fig 49). In this survey of modern and contemporary uses of lemons by artists, we will see lemons appear in one of three major categories: in reference to art history– specifically Dutch *vanitas*, as pop culture and linguistic reference, or as a quotidian object of visual fascination. In all of these, however, the echoes of seventeenth-century Dutch lemons can be felt; an object forever tying the world together through a history of globalization, colonialism, trade, and juicy appeal– visual and sexual.

Already a staple in many Asian, Arabic, and Mediterranean cuisines by that point (for example, lemonade was invented in ancient Egypt) and solidly a part of Dutch daily life, the was rapidly becoming a household staple worldwide. Analogously, they maintained a continuous, if quieter, presence in art. Quieter, that is, until the 21st century, when the lemon would be re-established as a popular subject for artists, this time with a much broader vocabulary. We will pick up with the use of lemon imagery during a brief resurgence in the 1970s Pop Art movement, utilized most famously by Andy Warhol (*Space Fruit: Lemons*, Fig 11) and Roy Lichtenstein (*Still Life with Glass and*


Figure 11 Andy Warhol, Space Fruit: Lemons, screenprint, 1978.

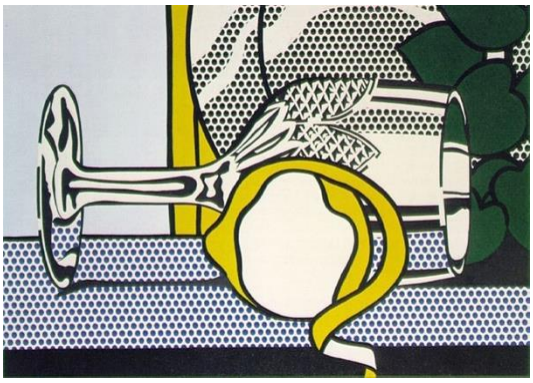

Figure 12 Roy Lichtenstein, Still Life with Glass and Peeled Lemon, 1972.

Peeled Lemon, Fig 12). Both Warhol and Lichtenstein focused a body of work in their later careers on still lifes, Warhol playing with shadow and composition while Lichtenstein rendered his updated contributions to the genre with his signature flat, outlined shapes and dot-matrix backgrounds.[3031] Lichtenstein was directly referencing the *vanitas* Dutch 17th century still lifes, while Warhol's *Space Fruit* series was more interested in lemons as one of many articles of everyday modern life.

Following these came Donald Sultan's series of lemons and black lemons in the 1980s (*Black Lemons*, Fig 13), abstract minimalist works that have an anxious, ominous presence.[32] Sultan's interpretation of the still life genre speaks to industrialization, liminal spaces and the balance of artificiality and nature that defines modern life. Says Sultan,

> My work is a blending of process and imagery . . . There's a lot to question: Is this shape solid? Is it space? What is it really about? There's a filling in of sexuality and there's also trying to make the image very real.[33]

Sultan's lemons, sensually swelling ovals with nippled ends, push the boundary of the modern lemon's domestic role as garnish and cleaning product, though it does reflect the many connections made in Dutch art between lemons and sexuality, lust, and lovesickness. Inspired by a trip to the Musée d'Orsay, where Sultan encountered Manet's small 1880 still life, *Lemon*, he was

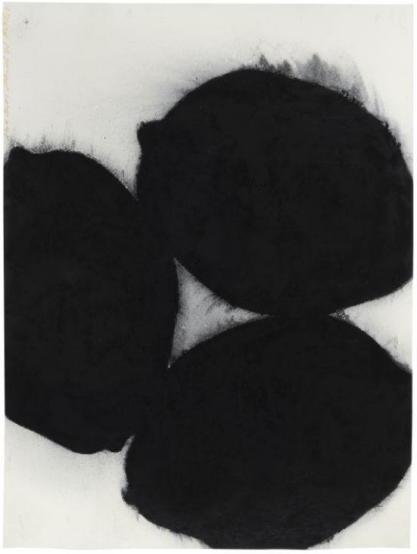

Figure 13 Donald Sultan, Black Lemons, aquatint, 1984.

[30] Guy Hepner, "Space Fruit."
[31] Gagosian, "Roy Lichtenstein."
[32] Donald Sultan, Lynne Warren, Ian Dunlop, and Art Chicago, *Donald Sultan*, pp 54-55.
[33] ibid.

struck by the "perfect shape, the simplicity"[34] as well as the industrialized quality of lemons, standardized for mass consumption, distanced from nature. They are lemons, and not lemons, bodies and body parts, death and delight, pleasure and sadness, both clearly formed and with hazy, blurred and mysterious outlines.

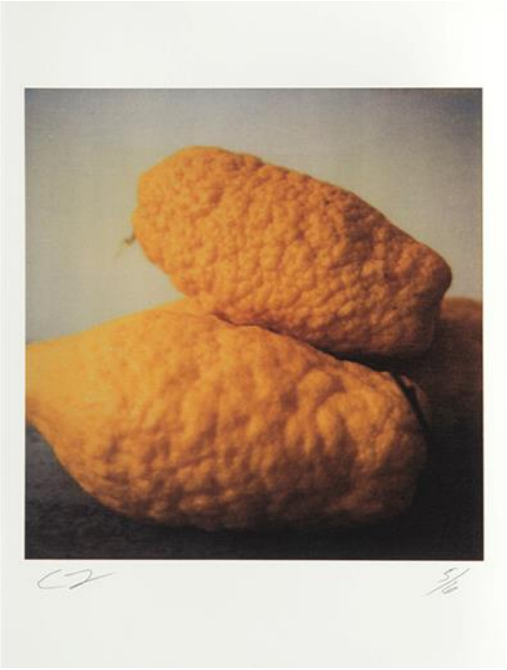

Figure 14 Cy Twombly, Lemons- Gaetà, color dry print, 2005.

In the early 1990s, another famous artist who would turn his attention to the lemon would be Cy Twombly. Twombly, best known for his large, abstract gestural paintings, had been photographing daily life since his student days. In the 90s, he began using specialized copiers to enlarge Polaroids onto matte paper (Fig 14). Between the distortion created in printing, enhanced colors, and the zoomed aspect, the European lemons appear monumental. Again, we find reference to the Dutch *vanitas*, as his friend and photographic colleague Sally Mann stated,

> [Twombly] brought to his work a certain vulnerability, an ambivalence about the fleeting nature and mutability of beauty itself, a vexed awareness of mortality...but also Homeric scope, intensity, exultant joy, and a Proustian passion for the ephemeral.[35]

Mostly, lemons mainly occupied the domestic space during the 20th century. A renewed interest in Dutch Golden Age works, specifically of the *vanitas* genre, appears to have sparked a revival of lemon imagery in the late 20th and early 21st century. The evidence for this is the wealth of artwork in a variety of media being produced today. The still life has long been a staple of the *atelier* and modern art school; most every student of drawing, painting, sculpture,

[34] Brigitte Baer, "Donald Sultan's Black Lemons."
[35] Cy Twombly, *Cy Twombly*.

photography, and even mixed media is required to complete at least a few studies. Traditional oil painters never relinquished still lifes, but a recent upsurge in Dutch Golden Age inspired still lifes would suggest a renewed interest in the genre. Modern society has become more and more globalized, reflecting the Dutch culture that originally inspired the *vanitas* genre. Concerns about excess consumption and consumerism, a deepening wealth gap, a desire to consume more whole foods over processed goods, concerns over climate change and impending doom and our own mortality have all contributed to modern artists' interest in *vanitas* imagery and themes. The genre provides a large vocabulary and workspace for tackling these topics.

Both Warhol and Lichtenstein looked to still lifes in their later years. Photographers in particular have seemed drawn to the medium, finding the same visual vocabulary that so captivated 17th century painters just as fascinating for all its textures, symbolism, allegory, and aesthetic glory. Paulette Tavormina, Mat Collishaw, Krista van der Niet, Jeroen Luijt (Fig 15), Laura Letinsky, Olivia Parker, Sharon Core, Richard Kuiper are all wonderful examples of photographers whose technical experimentation with the composition style of the old masters has rejuvenated the *vanitas* style and brought the lemon back front and center. It is interesting to note many of these artists are from Belgium and the Netherlands, where Dutch Golden Age works are national symbols and found both in the many museums as well as on every-day advertisements. These artists have had frequent exposure to the ubiquitous painted lemons.

Figure 15 Jeroen Luijt, Vanitas, photograph, 2019.

Figure 16 Marian Drew, Crow with Salt, photograph, 2006.

Australian photographer Marian Drew put a nationalistic spin on the genre with her series *Australiana Still Life*, drawing on the European still life to explore human's relations to Australian wildlife (Fig 16). For this 2003-2011 series, Drew photographed native Australian animals– all roadkill– in domestic interiors, exploring the role of history, colonization, climate change, cultural and historical perception of the wildlife that share our environments. The recognizable framework of the still life, juxtaposed with dead parrots, magpies, wombats, quokkas, and kangaroos, highlights the unique nature of Australia, a nation that is at once untamed wilderness and ecologically devastated by human-fueled climate change. Here, just as in the 17th century version, Drew is using the *vanitas* as both a way to capture contemporary life and comment on issues of national and cultural concern.

United States-based artists have had inspiration outside of textbooks and museums. Dutch Golden Age art and culture has had quite a bit of impact on the silver screen. Tracy Chevalier's novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) was adapted into a 2003 film of the same name starring Scarlett Johansson and Colin Firth, and heavily award-nominated. *Tulip Fever* followed a 17th century Dutch painter's (Dane DeHaan) obsession with a woman he'd been commissioned to paint (Alicia Vikander). The film was deeply researched with scenes directly based on contemporary paintings, including Jan Steen and Pieter de Hooch, among other artists. *The Night Watch* (2007),

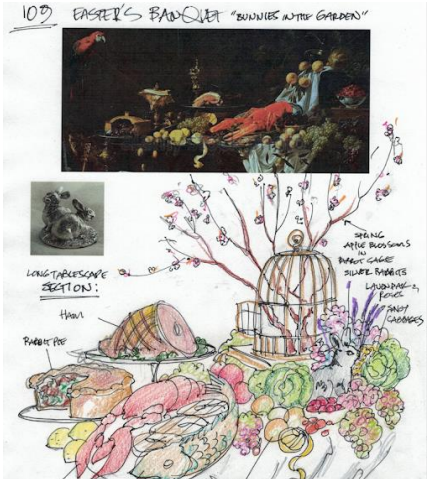

Figure 17 Janice Poon, Food styling sketch, 2015.

Admiral (2015), and *The Last Vermeer* (2019) were similarly designed, and films like George Clooney's 2014 *Monuments Men,* 2015's *Woman in Gold*, and 2019's *The Goldfinch* plotlines around looted Nazi art offer many expansive, art-rich museum scenes featuring Dutch Golden Age art. Lars von Tiers, Sophia Coppola, and Wes Anderson are other filmmakers whose work strongly draws reference from Dutch art. Most notable in television is Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal* (2013-2015), in which each episode contains at least one elaborately designed meal by food stylist Janice Poon, who took her aesthetic directly from Dutch masters. (Fig 17) This includes a *sanguinaccio*, a blood pudding dessert Poon / Hannibal serves in hollowed oranges.[36]

A US-based photographer whose practice has taken the *vanitas* concept and personalized it is New Englander JP Terlizzi. His *Good Dishes* series utilizes background textiles that echo the formal tableware but flattened, while focusing on a stylized ritual of formal tableware that obviously draws direct inspiration from Dutch Golden Age painting (Fig 18). Most Western viewers will recognize the domestic patterns he uses easily, as his images are rooted in the ideas of home, legacy, and family, and the tableware feature motifs that can be found in china cabinets across the US. In an interview, Terlizzi states that his favorite style of photography uses natural light, resembling the type of light found in the paintings of Johannes Vermeer, himself a capturer of domestic moments.[37]

Figure 18 JP Terlizzi, Gracie Lemonata, photograph, 2019.

[36] Luke Darby, "Meet the Brilliant Food Stylist Who Creates Hannibal's Beautifully Twisted, Artfully Macabre Meals."
[37] Sandrine Herman-Grisel, "Exclusive Interview with JP Terlizzi."

In a not dissimilar vein, Iowa photographer Suzanne Corum-Rich removes the lemon and other fruits from their domestic environment, setting the juicy cut fruit against an all-black backdrop (Fig 19). The images, designated as the *Food Study Series*, are part of a larger body of work, *Quarantine Studies*, created in 2020 during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a bare-bones version of the *vanitas* composition that is perhaps also a nod to the more austere Spanish *bodegón* tradition,[38] Corum-Rich discusses the ideas occupying her mind: isolation, appreciation, the upheaval of a system rooted in white supremacy and power dynamics. Proceeds from this series were donated to community bail funds for Black Lives Matter protestors in the Des Moines, Iowa area, a way for Corum-Rich to 'make lemonade out of lemons' during a difficult time.[39]

Figure 19 Suzanne Corum-Rich, Lemon 001, photograph, 2020.

Photographers haven't been the only contemporary medium attracted to Dutch Golden Age motifs. The same as many Dutch artists were perhaps drawn to show off their skills with trompe l'oleil peeled lemons, painters like Colorado artist Scott Fraser have been drawn to that spiral. Writing in June 2021, Fraser stated, "contemporary painters still use this luscious

Figure 20 Scott Fraser, Lemon Fall, oil on canvas, 2015.

[38] Corum-Rich did not mention *bodegón* paintings in her inspirations; the tradition was popularized in the second part of the 17th century, directly inspired by their Dutch predecessors. The *Paises bajos,* or Low Countries were Spanish territory starting in 1556, with the Dutch Republic gaining independence in 1581, while Flanders remained under Spanish rule until 1714.

[39] Interview with Suzanne Corum-Rich

visual conceit. I decided to exaggerate the effect by extending the lemon peel to extreme lengths, keeping the eye moving and creating a kind of surreal tension."[40] Fraser took his extended peel to its most surreal point in *Lemon Fall*, a series of eleven highly exaggerated peeled lemons set in a niche, the peels creating a reverse catenary arch further referencing historical painting composition (Fig 20). Of note, Fraser has stated he is influenced by both Dutch paintings and Spanish *bodegónes*, notably *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* (1602) by Juan Sánchez Cotán.

Figure 21 Jeffrey Hayes, Peeled Lemon in Shot Glass, oil on canvas, 2019.

Much like Fraser, Maine artist Jeffrey Hayes looks to 17th century still lifes for inspiration, though Hayes takes a purely classical, realist approach with nods to modernity in his content, like a peeled lemon in a mid-century shotglass, referencing two historical periods (Dutch 17th c. and American mid-century) while also situating the lemon in a common semi-domestic environment: the bar. (Fig 21). Yingzhao Liu, one of China's best known realist painters, works in a style more aptly termed *magical realism*, painting still lifes of vintage objects with flowers and fruits in a hyper-realistic manner. Yingzhao exaggerates colors and structure, rendering objects– like lemons– that appear so real they seem to float out of the canvas– trompe l'oleil at its finest, (Fig 22) an artistic display of prowess not unlike Willem Kalf.

Figure 22 Yingzhao Liu, Lemon, oil on linen, 2016. (Crop)

Following a logical progression, we come next to 3D works. Dirk Staschke is an Oregon ceramic artist best

[40] Scott Fraser, "On Lemons and Art History."

known for his exploration of the Dutch *vanitas* still life themes, often painted in glaze that blurs and blends lines until the image itself becomes ephemeral. In his sculptural work, Staschke literally turns these still lifes three dimensional. In a relatively small work featuring a single peeled lemon, a ceramic frame houses a realistic sculpture of a peeled lemon, only the twisted peel extends beyond the frame into the viewer's space, and the recessed backdrop brings the niche from painted archetype to literal dimensionality. (Fig 23) The most extraordinary part of Staschke's work, however, is the back. His 3D paintings all stand in the round on pedestals, and the visual glory of the fronts merge into the raw, visceral, behind-the-curtains look at the structure required to form the sculpture. It's both a humorous wink and nod to process by a process-focused artist, but also an intriguing commentary on the very heart of the *vanitas* genre. The bitter peel of the lemon reveals the juicy flesh of the interior, but it also quickly rots away. Staschke's interest in this duality is not purely driven by his deep interest in art history; his own personal experience with loss quietly permeates the work.

Figure 23 Dirk Staschke, 3D Print (Lemon), ceramic, 2016.

Figure 24 Hendrick ter Brugghen, Bacchante with an Ape, oil on canvas, 1627.

New York sculptor Kathleen Ryan was in graduate school in UCLA when her class visited the Getty Museum, where she encountered Dutch artist Hendrick ter Brugghen's 1627 painting, *Bacchante with an Ape*. (Fig 24) In an interview,

Ryan states she "doesn't even like fruit," but the drunken, buxom subject of Bacchante, breasts hanging out of her dress as she squeezes a raceme of grapes evoked a sense of pressure, tension, and sexuality, that Ryan wanted to emulate.[41] This would lead to her current body of work, oversized, rotting fruits sculpted from Styrofoam covered in plastic and semi-precious stone beads. (Fig 25) In the same interview, Ryan says she has mostly depicted moldy, decaying lemons:

> "the lemon has a few meanings, like you call a shitty used car a lemon–it's a metaphor for something that's broken and worthless. there are just a lot of cultural associations, like "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." I think the lemons work so well, they sort of pop and they're so– [...] they're so decadent and common everyday objects at the same time."[42]

Figure 25 Kathleen Ryan, Bad Lemon (Tart), various semi-precious gemstones, glass, steel pins on coated polystyrene, 2020.

The result are sculptures that even in their portrayal of rot and ruin are both tactile and seductive, sensual, intensely satisfying, and very much a modern-day twist of Dutch 17th century lemons, though these lemons don't seem particularly fertile.

Much like Kathleen Ryan, Barcelona ceramicist Sophie Aguilera's work explores the classical still life format in trompe l'oleil sculptures of florals, fruits, and fabrics reflected on modern surfaces such as custom cobalt mirrors, but adds similar elements of mold, dirt, and other

Figure 26 Sophie Aguilera, Memento Mori, stoneware, 2018.

[41] Kathleen Ryan, *Kathleen Ryan: Bad Fruit,* p 15.
[42] ibid, 15-19.

"realities" to take them out of the uncanny perfection of traditional still lifes and into the harshness of reality. Her contemporary scenarios, inspired by tradition, deal with themes of home, loss, and the feminine experience. In *Memento Mori*, (Fig 26) perfect yet moldy lemons rest on a pristine white doily, set atop a cobalt blue mirror– beautiful, sensual, yet disturbing. While Aguilera's work is on a much smaller and less sparkly scale than Kathleen Ryan's, both echo very similar sentiments.

Figure 27 He Xiangyu, Promotional image for Yellow Book, 2019.

Conceptual artist He Xiangyu deserves special consideration in this category; not only has He been inspired by the art history of Eastern and Western traditions, but they undertook to research the significance of lemons and the color yellow across cultures. He's *Lemon Project* (2016-, Fig 28) included works in fiberglass, bronze, ink, canvas, and film. This led to *Yellow Book* (Fig 27), a cultural history of the color yellow; *Yellow Book* is a compilation of essays by scientific, anthropological, sociological, psychological, medical, and historical experts detailing the history of yellow, including the history of the lemon, from medieval Persia to the colonial Dutch forward to contemporary China. As artistic undertakings, *Lemon Project* and *Yellow Book* are an immersion worth the effort.


Figure 28 He Xiangyu, Lemon Pickers, bronze and stainless steel, 2017.

University of Montana alumna Andrea Jenko explored the lemon in relation to the concepts of youth, aging, and "the fear of looking back at life with regret" in her large panel painting *Oh Shit!*. (Fig 29) Part of Jenko's BFA thesis show, this

Figure 29 Andrea Jenko, Oh Shit!, acrylic on panel, 2018.

painting follows her love of art history. Echoing common themes of the *vanitas* genre, lemons represent both the bitter and the sweet, the duality of torment and joy brought about by nostalgia and reflection.[43]

Bridging the divide between the categories of art history and pop culture reference is work that fits into both and neither: work such as poet Mark Doty's essay, "Still Life with Oysters and Lemons:"

> Lemons: all freedom, all ego, all vanity, fragrant with scent we can't help but imagine when we look at them, the little pucker in the mouth. And redolent, too, of strut and style. Yet somehow they remain intimate, every single one of them: only lemons, only that lovely, perishable, ordinary thing, held to scrutiny's light, fixed in a moment of fierce attention. As if here our desire to be unique, unmistakable, and our desire to be of a piece were reconciled. Isn't that it, to be yourself and somehow to belong? For a moment, held in balance.[44]

Here, Doty perfectly captures the *vanitas* with no *overt* reference (though the connection is easily made); he immortalizes the sensual but unstable nature of both the fruit and life itself.

No discussion of lemons in art would be complete without Joseph Beuys' *Capri Batterie* (*Lemon Light*, Fig 30), a composition containing a yellow lightbulb with plug socket powered by a lemon. "Change battery every thousand hours." Created while the artist was recovering from a lung ailment on the isle of Capri in an edition of 200, the work is a twist on the still life as well as a metaphor for nature's

Figure 30 Joseph Beuys, Capri Batterie (Lemon Light), 1985.

[43] Interview with Andrea Jenko.
[44] Mark Doty, "Still Life with Oysters and Lemons," p 9.

transformative power– the lemon reflecting the bright Mediterranean sun and tropical climate. It also addresses the commodification and consumption culture just burgeoning in the 80s, questioning the ecological balance of civilization and the cycle of life and death. Beuys died not long after, in 1986. One can't help but consider the lemon's medicinal history in Dutch paintings; whether this is a direct reference to those will remain unknown.

Yael Kanarek's *Lemon* is the final 'both history and pop culture' work; made of rubber text using the word *lemon* in 40 languages,[45] shaped into a barely recognizable depiction of a lemon tree in bloom, (Fig 31) this work captures the history of the lemon through human activity: conquest, trade and migration. The linguistic association bridges historical and cultural references across the globe, with a surface that references both topographical maps and domestic crafts like crochet. The piece also references the first line in William Carlos Williams' poem "Perfection". Kanarek replaces Williams' apple with lemon: "Oh lovely [apple] lemon! Beautiful and completely rotten".[46] Considering the Dutch Republic's large role in both colonization and the dispersion of the lemon globally, as well as the visual history of the lemon, Kanarek's work may not be visually similar to Dutch *vanitas,* but it is clearly thematically linked.

Figure 31 Yael Kanarek, Lemon, rubber, 2008.

The phrase "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade," was originally coined by Christian anarchist, writer, and philosopher Elbert Hubbard in a 1915 obituary for dwarf actor Marshall P Wilder to encourage optimism in face of adversity.[47] This phrase alludes to the

[45] Dutch, Maltese, Afrikaans, Catalan, Galician, Papiamentu, Swahili, Thai, Southern Chinese, Tongan, Irish, Albanian, Slovene, Wolof, Basque, Portuguese, Italian, Bulgarian, Russian, Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, Romanian, Papago, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Old French and Old Italian, Farsi, Urdu, Hebrew, Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Assamese, Chinese, Uyghur, Korean, and English
[46] Lambert M Surhone, Miriam T Timpledon, and Susan F Marseken, *Yael Kanarek*.
[47] Elbert Hubbard, "Selected Writings of Elbert Hubbard."

promise of greatness coming from something bitter, the semantic opposite of the *vanitas* lemon. Ironically– in multiple facets– it is frequently used by Christian churches. The many subsequent derivatives: “add salt and tequila,” “Get mad! Make life take the lemons back!”, “keep them, because Hey! Free lemons!” etc... have made great fodder for art. Many puns, alliterations, twists (hey!) on themes of sourness, bitterness, and even more references to the lemon’s juicy sensuality. One perfectly punny example is the duo Art n’ More’s 2016 neon composition, *John Lemon* (Fig 32).

Figure 32 Art n' More, John Lemon, neon, 2016.

Carlos Nicanor’s (Canary Islands) *Lemon Way*, part of the project *Detrás del muro 2: En el medio de la nada* (*Behind the Wall 2: In the Middle of Nowhere*, Fig 33), a creation for the twelfth Bienal de la Habana (24 May- 21 June 2015) was a reference to *The Wizard of Oz’s* ‘Yellow Brick Road’ “in which we aspire and hope, equally, to find prosperity, development, well-being; however, "everything is a trap, an optical illusion that is located under our feet."[48] Nicanor considers himself a Brossanian sculptor, a reference to Catalán author and artist Joan Brossa, in dialogue with the culture and environment in which his work is installed. In the case of *Lemon Way*, his pointed references to sour lemons, pokes at the US’s long, punishing embargo on Cuba, the road ending at the ocean’s shore in a direct line to Miami, many Cubans’


Figure 33 Carlos Nicanor, Lemon Way, wood and paint, 2015.

[48] Daniel G Alfonso. “En busca del Mago de Oz… o de la ilusión perdida,” trans. author.

idealized “Emerald City.”[49] Of note, the original Yellow Brick Road in L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) had no relation to lemons whatsoever, but an actual yellow brick road.

Lemons reached their pop culture pinnacle in 2016, when Beyoncé (Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter) released her sixth studio album, *Lemonade*, accompanying a 65-minute film of the same title. (Fig 34) *Lemonade* received universal acclaim, nominated for nine Grammys, eleven VMAs, four Emmys, and winning a Peabody Award in Entertainment. As a multimedia visual artwork, *Lemonade* deals with infidelity and trauma in Black relationships through Beyoncé’s processing of husband Jay-Z’s infidelity. According to Melina Matsoukas, *Lemonade’s* director, "she wanted to show the historical impact of slavery on black love, and what it has done to the black family, and black men and women—how we're almost socialized not to be together."[50] Towards the end of *Lemonade*, Beyoncé reveals the meaning behind the

Figure 34 Beyoncé, video still from Lemonade, 2016.

[49] Raul Gorroño, “Lo Más Importante Es La Idea,” trans. author.
[50] Alexis Okeowo, “The Provocateur Behind Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Issa Rae.”

album title, showing Jay-Z's grandmother Hattie White saying "I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade," and describing her own grandmother, Agnez Deréon, as an "alchemist" who "spun gold out of this hard life" with the instructions to overcome these challenges passed down through generations like a lemonade recipe.[51] Deréon's recipe for lemonade was included with the album. In an interview with Elle, Beyoncé said: "I hope I can create art that helps people heal. Art that makes people feel proud of their struggle. Everyone experiences pain, but sometimes you need to be uncomfortable to transform."[52]

On a deeper note are references to the Yoruban water goddess Oshun. Yoruba is a native West African religion brought to the Americas through the Transatlantic slave trade. In Yoruban iconography, Oshun, goddess of life and fertility, water and rivers, is represented by the color yellow, and one of her most frequent offerings is lemons. In the video *Lemonade*, Beyoncé famously wears a flowing yellow dress, (Fig 35) gold jewelry, emerging from underwater through two golden doors as water rushes past her. She then smashes store and car windows and cameras as a visual representation of the wrath at her husband's betrayal. At the creation of the world, Oshun, the only female Orisha, left after being wronged by the male Orishas, and had to be wooed back. Her blessings, and her wrath, come in the form of water; rains and monsoons, floods

Figure 35 Beyoncé as Oshun in Lemonade, video still, 2016

[51] Rebecca Hawkes, Ed Power, Neil McCormick, Simon Heffer, Mick Brown, Ali Shutler, and Bryony Gordon, "Beyoncé's New Album."
[52] Tamar Gottesman, "EXCLUSIVE: Beyoncé wants to change the conversation."

and droughts.[53] Like the lemon, she contains both sweet and sour, beauty and vengeance, as does Beyoncé in *Lemonade*.

Lemonade became an immediate pop culture sensation that dominated every facet of visual and audio media. The music industry saw a revival of the concept album along with the many musicians who credit Beyoncé's inspiration in their own work. In visual media, *Lemonade* has had a mark on costumes, fashion, comics, hairstyles, sketch comedy, and beyond. Parodies and references can still be found on a regular basis even now, nearly seven years later (Fig 36). Georgia Murray, writing for Refinery29, credits the album for "kickstarting an obsession with yellow that we're still seeing the effects of today." Yellow dresses, shoes, cardigans, tees and tanks, even fashion accessories; Murray believes the transformation of lemon yellow from a color that flatters almost no one to nearly ubiquitous is all thanks to Beyoncé (Fig 34). A Twitter spokesperson also commented on Beyoncé's contribution to a renewed popularity for the lemon: the lemon emoji. "Before *Lemonade*, the lemon emoji had no meaning. Since the launch of Lemonade, the emoji has taken on a meaning of its own."[54] 🍋

Figure 36 Titus Burgess as Titus Andronicus "Lemonade-ing," aka riffing Beyoncé in Netflix's The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, video still, 2017.

Beyond the surface-level pop culture impact of *Lemonade* is a broader awakening to America's unresolved issues of racism, police brutality, and the lives of Black women since the era of slavery. SNL did an amazing sketch called "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black," lampooning how uncomfortable white fans were with

[53] He Xiangyu, p 136.
[54] Ashley Hoffman, "See the Far-Reaching Impact of Beyoncé's Lemonade."

Beyoncé's unashamed Blackness. *Lemonade* educates and empowers and has opened a conversation in communities and in academia; her impact on culture is now being taught in universities California Polytechnic State, Arizona State, Rutgers, and the University of Texas, in classes called 'Beyoncé, Gender and Race.'[55] *Glamour* held a forum of Black women critics in honor of *Lemonade's* fifth anniversary, in which panelist Clarissa Brooks stated "Lemonade is different in that it's canonical and reimagines how we understand Black women's rage and grief and sadness. This album was made for us."[56] Brande Victorian comments, "what *Lemonade* conveys is that every single day, Black women are taking a whole bunch of lemons—our sour, individual experiences mixed with a lot of joy that we create ourselves—and making beautiful memories out of them."[57]

A final note on *Lemonade,* an album and film that have fully considered history of the African diaspora and impact of the Atlantic slave trade; it is not a stretch to connect the lemons that showcased the wealth and success of the Dutch Republic in 17th century art and stocked their ship's holds to ward off scurvy with an entirely different cargo. The Dutch transatlantic slave trade lasted from the late 16th century until 1872, running between Africa's Gold Coast and both Dutch and Spanish colonies in the New World; slavery was one of the Dutch West India Company's primary sources of profit along with the sugar from the plantations the slaves were shipped in to work at. An estimated 12 million people entered the slave trade during this period. Beyoncé's *Lemonade* is threaded together by bright, lemon yellows and water imagery that speaks to distances, dispersions, unknowns, disorientations, trauma, Yoruban culture, and life during and post-slavery. The lemon is, in this case, an unspoken invocation of horrors past.

[55] Candace McDuffie, "5 Years of Beyonce's 'Lemonade."
[56] ibid
[57] ibid

Another artist who recently gave lemons the musical and visual treatment is teenage indie-pop newcomer Brye, whose self-produced, hit "LEMONS," dropped just after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its message caught on with a frustrated audience in quarantine. A catchy, cute song about ditching a toxic relationship, the single released with an appropriately goth-pop lyric video on YouTube. As Brye's lyrics roll across the screen:

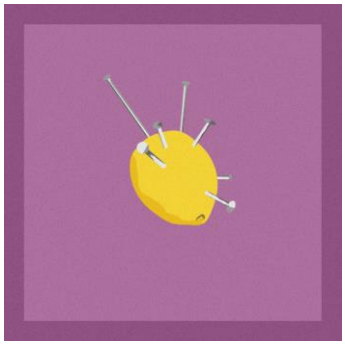

Figure 37 Brye, LEMONS, cover art, 2020.

> When life gives you lemons
> You don't make lemonade
> You use them to make girls cry
> You take those lemons
> No sugar at all
> And you squirt it right into our eyes
> When life gives you lemons
> You don't make lemonade
> You use them to make girls cry
> You take those lemons
> No sugar at all
> And you squirt it right into our eyes[58]

they are accompanied by visuals of lemons: a house with a yellow door standing in a field, and yellow lockers flash across the screen. As the video progresses, nails drive into an individual lemon, a black ooze bubbles up in a bowl of lemons (Fig 38) and through the locker doors, a window shatters, and the house begins to burn down. The artist could not be reached for an interview, but the idea of vanitas inspiration isn't out of the realm of possibility; however, the pop-culture reference to "life hands you lemons" couldn't be more obvious.

Figure 38 Brye, LEMONS, video still, 2020.

[58] Brye, "LEMONS."

Figure 39 Pat Hobaugh, When Life Gives You Lemons, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2020.

Pat Hobaugh makes still lifes, directly inspired by 17th century Dutch painters, but as he calls them, they are *Not Your Granny's Still Lifes*.[59] Working in oil and acrylic on canvas, Hobaugh's still lifes use the traditional elements: china bowls, glasses, peeled lemons, but unlike classic still lifes, his paintings also include characters like Gumby, Kermit the Frog, the Pillsbury Dough Boy, and Pac Man. In *When Life Gives You Lemons* (Fig 39), Kermit is perched on a pile of lemons in a blue and white bowl, holding up a martini shaker. A bottle of limoncello sits open in the background. In *Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy* (Fig 40), an entire cast of Muppets engage in shenanigans in a scene that mixes elements of Dutch *pronkstilleven* with modern components: a lemon being pressed in an espresso maker, a salt shaker placed to the far right almost out of the frame. Maybe by "easy peasy," Hobaugh is insinuating someone has a little extra "zest" in their morning cuppa?

Figure 40 Pat Hobaugh, Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy, oil and acrylic on panel, 2020.

Washington glass artist Megan Stelljes, whose work initiated this body of research, first turned to lemon imagery because of their rounded shape: "it's what glass wants to do." She cited the desire to not make glass things that look tortured; glass likes to make bulbous shapes. Further, after the 2016 election, "things were weird, and I was depressed."[60] Stelljes previously made very overt,

[59] Pat Hobaugh, "Not your granny's still lifes."
[60] Interview with Megan Stelljes.

Figure 41 Megan Stelljes, Tired of Lemonade, glass, 2017.

sexual work, and for her upcoming show wanted to make objects that people were more familiar and comfortable with, something personal to help ease communication and prevent her audience from shutting down. For Stelljes, lemons corresponded to a lot of themes in pop culture that echoed her sentiments: sourness, bitterness, making lemons into lemonade, a bit of sadness, kind of a bummer. Her first piece was a *vanitas* style stack of "moldy" glass lemons on a plate, *Tired of Lemonade* (Fig 41), representing that piling on positive messages "on top of shit," an exhaustion of keeping a "sunshiney attitude" in sour times. (Echos of Kathleen Ryan and Sophie Aguilera) The whole show was full of work that showcased a dissonance between happy, familiar, and sad. Stelljes said that for her "lemons are a double-edged sword; yellow is a positive color, happy sunshine, but with that little bit of dissonance" from the sourness. The parallels with Dutch still lifes are multiple in Stelljes' work; from the prominent, everyday object of familiarity and consumption to the innate sexuality of the lemon in both shape, texture, and gustatory innuendo, and ultimately the societal-cultural commentary.

Figure 42 Megan Stelljes, Lady Lemons, neon, 2020.

Other pieces included *Squeeze My Lemon* in neon and hot glass, a nod to Led Zeppelin, and *Lady Lemons* (Fig 42), a neon piece that hits plainly at the subversive sexuality of lemons. The 'lady lemons' are placed to look like breasts

hanging next to each other, the pedicels of the juicy fruit clearly posed as nipples. Stelljes' next project? Halved glass lemons and oranges sliced to look like "buttholes and vaginas."

Figure 43 Dan Cardinal McCartney, Misgendering Mouthfuls, still and detail shot of performance piece, 2017.

Continuing in the vein of bitter socio-political commentary is two-spirit Métis-Canadian artist Dan Cardinal McCartney, who chose lemons as the vehicle for his performance piece in protest of Arts Commons, a venue accused of censoring a fellow trans artist's work in 2018. Surrounded by rows of cut lemons, onto which were scrawled hateful comments he has received since beginning his transition in 2015. "You're going to hell." "You'll never be my son." "You would have made a beautiful woman, it's such a waste." McCartney spoke each phrase aloud before biting into the lemons as the audience watched, cringed, and cried. "Biting into the lemons reminds me of before I started taking testosterone, before my voice dropped, because it was very painful to talk. [Literally and figuratively.] It got so painful I just kind of had to block everybody out."[61] (Fig 43) For McCartney, lemons served a medicinal purpose, almost serving as antidotes to the poisonous words they showcased. Though not the same sort of 'lovesickness' the Dutch used lemons to 'cure,' the themes align all the same: the cure is perhaps worse than the malady, which is one of ignorance and misunderstanding and not truly of the physical body.

[61] Sarah Rieger and Terri Trembath, "Biting Through Hateful Words."

For *The Sexual Bronze Show*, Los Angeles artist Bettina Hubby cast various grocery store items arranged as couples. Her mostly humorous work deals with the politics of the female body, sexual desire, and intimacy. Again, we see the use of the 'nipple' insinuation in Hubby's lemons, in one instance being pinched by the clothespin. She imagines her sculptures and photographs as "gleam[ing] with a confident appreciative post-coital sigh."[62] (Fig 44) Hubby's lemons would certainly function as a type of cure for one of Jan Steen's lovesick maidens, though in a way that would have shocked 17th century Dutch viewers.

Figure 44 Bettina Hubby, Lemon and Clothespin, Bronze with patina, 2015.

Rounding out the pop culture, humor, and what ended up also including a great deal of sexuality, category is eclectic Swedish artist Olaf Breuning. Breuning's playful, anthropomorphized fruits and vegetables harbor a subtle cultural satire, using everyday objects that he finds visually fascinating to investigate kitsch, appropriation, and cliché, all with a sense of irreverence and nonsense. He created one creature-character, *Lemon Pig*, in 2004 out of Styrofoam shaped into a lemon body, mushroom legs, ears, and tail, and cherry, raspberry, and strawberry smiley face. In 2005 Breuning installed a full 'flock' of lemon pigs at Metro Pictures, New York, lining up to dive off a ladder onto the

Figure 45 Olaf Breuning, A group of unstable Lemon Pigs, styrofoam, 2005.

[62] Klowden Mann, "Bettina Hubby."

concrete floor. (Fig 45) Says curator Marc-Olivier Wahler of Bruening's work:

> The subject matter is of little importance, and ultimately, what is on view matters just a little. It is always the same story: all images are of equal value, all scenarios are possible. Breuning's motto encapsulates it: 'Whatever.' His works are extraordinary catalysts for interpretation, powerful scenario-machines, intriguing and visually fascinating tableaux, but at the end of the tunnel, the message is clear and unequivocal: 'Whatever.'[63]

The work was accompanied by a hand drawn, illustrated manual explaining "in case a part falls off -> simply glue it back on! I am sorry about that -> in future I will only work with steal!" Whether this last word is another bit of satire or a case of translation error, we will never know.

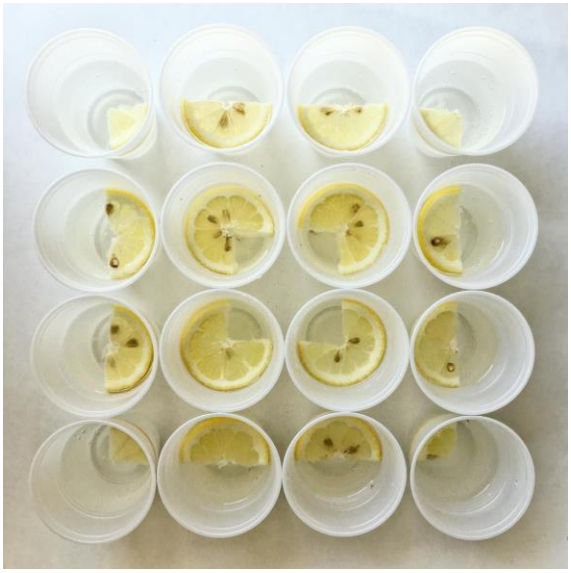

Figure 46 Adam Hillman, Wedged In, photograph, 2021.

Finally, there are the lemons that are lemons, an everyday object of visual fascination. Multimedia artist Adam Hillman of New Jersey creates intricately detailed patterns from objects like fruit, vegetables, and chocolates, to create geometric compositions that appeal to many, based on his massive Instagram following, which is where Hillman became interested in the idea of 'knolling,' a popular type of photography where objects are organized at right angles, a direct opposite of the disorder and excess of Dutch *pronkstilleven*. (Fig 46) Heavily influenced by abstract artists like Mondrian and LeWitt, Hillman is concerned with elevating the quotidian: "Through references to art history and use of everyday objects, I attempt to transcend their banal uses and open up new possibilities for how they may be viewed, reinvigorating the way people experience their everyday environments."[64]

[63] Marc-Olivier Wahler, "Olaf Breuning."
[64] Rahul Kumar, "Adam Hillman."

Figure 47 Amanda Salov, Red Cedar Boat Project, porcelain, wax, wood, 2014.

For Seattle artist Amanda Salov, it started with a poem by Emily Dickinson:

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

Concerned with the disappearance of the American Honeybee, Salov set out to make work that signified the impending environmental collapse that would follow its loss. Fragile porcelain lemons, absent of life and color are hoarded in a lifeboat, alongside yellow wax lemons Salov cast during the four-day interactive installation, presented at the National Council for the Ceramic Arts Annual Conference in March 2014. (Fig 47) The absurd image of a rescue vehicle, foundering due to the attempt to preserve life on a lifeless planet, represents a perhaps irrational sense of hope. Says Salov of her passion behind the project, simply: "Without bees, no fruit, no lemons. No life."[65]

Figure 48 Ben Wright, Migrations, mixed media, 2021.

Canadian multimedia artist Ben Wright is similarly concerned with the relationship of humans and the environment. His work *Migrations*, recently shown at the Bellevue Art Museum in Seattle, uses plastic lemons, flowers, various found plastic objects– a

[65] Interview with Amanda Salov

Figure 49 Amoako Boafo, The Lemon Bathing Suit, painting and collage, 2019.

Hello Kitty Pez dispenser and an Easter egg held by a doll's hand among them, with collaged paper butterflies and flowers, backed by a squiggly 'map' in pale pink neon to comment on our destructive and unsustainable relationship with the natural world. (Fig 48) Flora and fauna versus plastic and industrialization: a collage of competition, globalization and the empires of industry.

Ghanaian artist Amoako Boafo recently emerged onto the international art scene with a splash. Ditching his brushes to paint with his fingertips, his figures are rendered with bold, gestural textures that give his subjects feelings of being in motion. Boafo often depicts his figures wearing bright, decorative patters reminiscent of Dutch wax prints. These are collaged from European wallpapers and wrapping paper, as seen in *The Lemon Bathing Suit* (Fig 49), similar to this one currently offered by Rossi 1931 (Fig 50).[66] These patterns adorn his subjects, constructing and celebrating Black identity. They are contemporary protagonists, confident in their selves and leisure, no longer the objects of

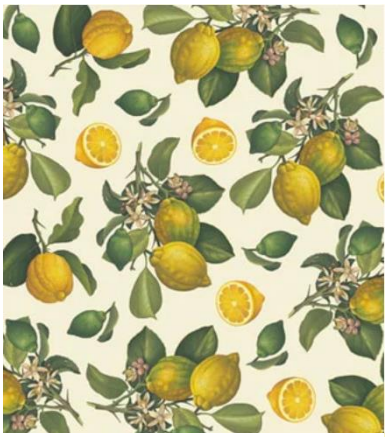

Figure 50 Rossi 1931, Lemon decorative paper, 2021.

[66] Dean Kissik, "Figurative Painter Amoako Boafo."

Matisse or seen in a devastatingly negative manner. Here, Black is Beautiful, adorned and embellished by previously colonial lemons. Nothing sour at all.

It was while working on the first part of this research, developing an understanding of why the Dutch people of the 1600s would have such an interest in a lemon, that I noticed how frequently I was seeing lemons in contemporary artwork. First, I assumed it was confirmation bias, but once I began to really research, it became clear that there really was something about lemons. For the Dutch, they were primarily a positive representation of national pride, a symbol not only of wealth and empire but of Dutch life in all its facets. The contemporary lemon was it's own mystery; often what is represented is the same lemon, taken directly from the art historical reference after a resurgence of interest in Dutch Golden Age art, but when viewed by a modern audience the meaning must be unpeeled more like an onion.

This lemon has been twisted, squeezed, and molded into contemporary art, both intentionally and unintentionally. As a world-wide commodity with a multitude of uses, an omnipresent, quotidian object, lemons have deep cultural resonance globally. Due to the inherent nature of language as a living organism, the meaning has grown much broader, but even then, or because of this, the reflection of Dutch Golden Age lemons can continue to be seen. *Vanitas* lemons that once were thought to represent the layers of life: tempus fugit- time flies and ours is short, the beauty of the peel and the sourness of the flesh and pith, the vanity of wealth, superficial and fragile beauty. This emblematic reading is often present in contemporary lemons, even in the more recent references such as “when life hands you lemons.” Though for the Dutch lemons primarily represented the wealth of their empire, their sour, bitter, acidic nature, medicinal uses, gastronomical value, pleasure/pain, and association with sexuality were also established in the 17th century. An object of globalization and trade, consumerism, imperialism

and colonization, contemporary lemons have deep ties to their Dutch predecessors, whether this is a conscious decision by the artist or subconscious. In all the above examples, clear symbolic and historical overlap connects the two eras of lemons. Much like the ways in which trade routes spread citrus fruits across the world, the meaning of lemons has similarly spanned time and culture, from 17th century Netherlands to 20th and 21st century global contemporary art.

Beyoncé's Lemonade Recipe: Take one pint of water," she begins in a sultry voice during one of the spoken word interludes. "Add a half-pound of sugar, the juice of 8 lemons, and the zest of half of a lemon. Pour the water from one jug into the other several times, strain through a clean napkin.

Additional Images

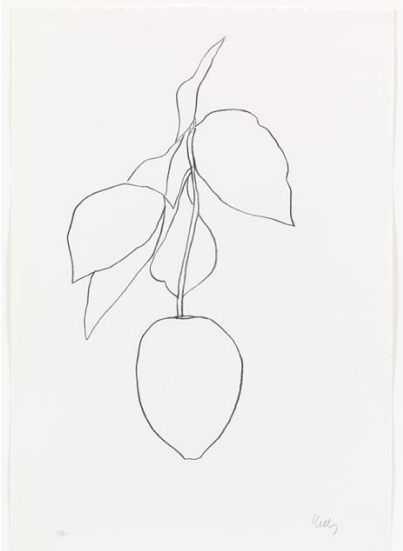

Figure 51 Ellsworth Kelly, Lemon (Citron) from Suite of Plant Lithographs, 1964–65, published 1966

Figure 52 Formbys Lemon Furniture Treatment, 1970s

Figure 53 Doug Casebeer, Lemon Centerpiece, woodfired ceramic, 2021, after Italian majolica wares

Figure 54 Eliot Walker, This Lemon?, glass, 2019 (still life)

Figure 55 2Bmcr, How to not be Bitter, risograph, 2021

Figure 56 He Xiangyu, Lemon Pickers, fiberglass and resin, 2018

Figure 57 Katharine Amies, Lemon, watercolor, 2020

Figure 58 Yann Pendariès, Le Repecheur de pepins, ink and watercolor, 2019

Figure 59 Megan Stelljes, Squeeze My Lemon, neon and glass, 2018

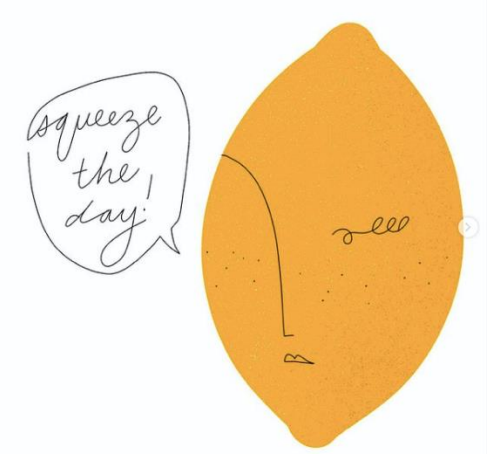

Figure 60 Madison Sinsel, Squeeze the Day, digital drawing, 2021

Figure 61 David Shringley, You Must Eat the Lemon, acrylic, 2021

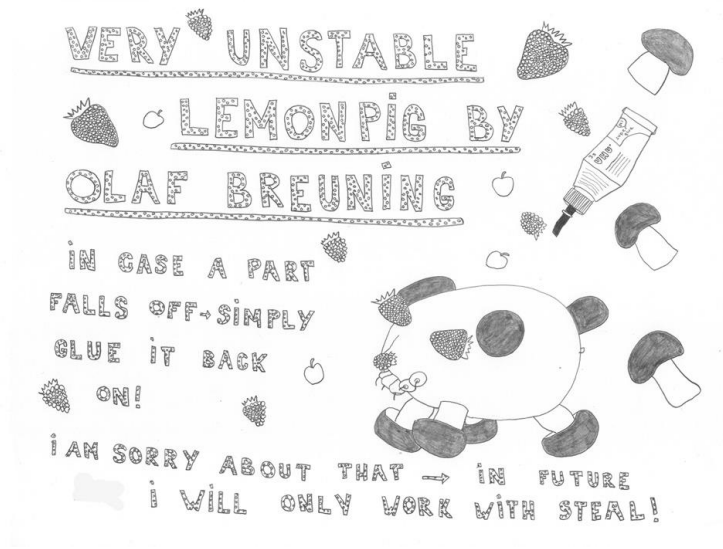

Figure 62 Olaf Breuning, Manual for Lemon Pig, ink on paper, 2005

buzzfeedgeeky:

> tastefullyoffensive:
>
> > by Jim Benton
> >
> > It took two of us multiple minutes to figure out this joke.

Figure 63 Jim Benton, How to Summon a Lemon, digital drawing, comic, 2018

Figure 64 Jan Kirsch, Lemon with Leaf, Bonded marble, acrylic paint, c 2017

Figure 66 Tim Andraka, SOUR, ink and paper, 2021

Figure 65 Autumn Higgins, Lemon mug, porcelain and underglaze, 2015

Figure 67 Holly Coulis, Still Life Above, oil and canvas, 2020

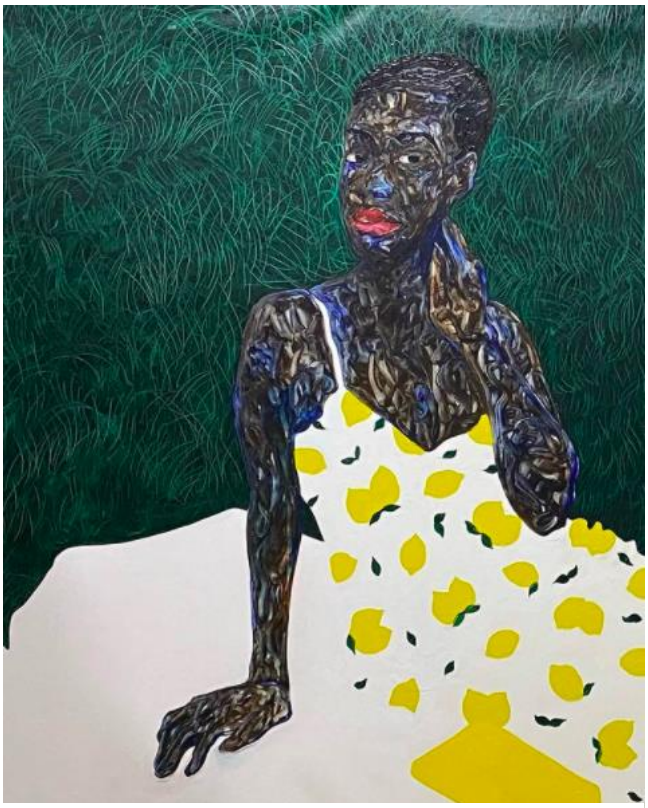

Figure 68 Amoako Boafo, White Blanket, oil on canvas, 2021

Figure 69 Parvis Tanavoli, Iran, Poet Squeesing Lemon, silkscreen, 1974

Figure 70 Lorna Selim, Iraq, The Lemon Sellers, chalk pastels, 1956

Figure 71 Stephanie Sarley, Lemon Squirt, video still, 2016

Figure 72 Stephanie Sarley, Lemon Squirt 2021, video still, 2021

Figure 74 Lemon Joy, circa 1970

Figure 73 Phexxi advertisement by Evofem, 2021

Figure 75 Will Santino, No. More. Lemons. Please. cartoon, 2021.

Figure 76 Jessie Smith, The Fruit of Spring Labors, acrylic, 2020.

Figure 77 Eleanor Ingrid Rose, Clementine, wood and paint, 2021.

Figure 78 Andrea Éva Györi, Traumatised Lemons, ceramic, 2018

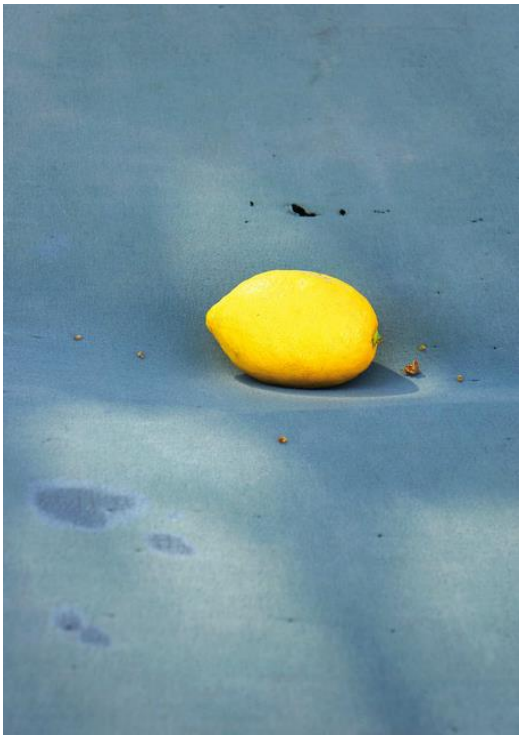

Figure 80 Jessica Backhaus, A Lemon, photograph, 2018.

Figure 79 Caroline LaCava, Lemon Straws, borosilicate glass, 2021

Figure 81 Cover, New York Times Magazine, November 28 2021

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