

2 – 17 September 2023



CARLA SMITH
SUGO

Look Again
Project Space
32 St Andrew Street
Aberdeen AB25 1JA

Open Sat & Sun,
11:00 - 16:00

↳ www.worm.gallery

this exhibition is presented
by **peacock & the worm**
21 Castle Street • Aberdeen
• AB11 5BQ • Scotland
in partnership with
LOOK AGAIN
Gray's School of Art • RGU

CARLA SMITH, SUGO

Smell bubbling, rising to the surface, red drops bursting. One of those aromas, tangy and complex, that instantly sweeps you somewhere else with a pang of love, a twinge of homesickness. Usually, to childhood. To comfort. To a time when you were cared for, by the simple measure of a ladleful of deep sweet red sugo.

Artist Carla Smith's multidisciplinary project *SUGO* explores the highly personal, intimate ways that relationships and acts of love and care are articulated and transmitted through food. The project considers how the significance of preparing and sharing meals changes as relations shift and grow over time, with a focus on memory and the preservation of something ineffable as the care embedded in a meal prepared by someone you love.

As the recipient of the Peacock Prize at the Gray's School of Art's Degree Show 2022, Carla was awarded a year-long Graduate Artist Residency at peacock & the worm. During this time, she has been able to hone her printmaking skills and explore new techniques, with the support of peacock printmaking technicians. Carla has developed *SUGO* while on residency, with the support of Look Again, (Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University). *SUGO* comprises of a pasta-making workshop and an exhibition of edible prints, artist books, ceramics, and a moving image work, both hosted at the Look Again Project Space on 32 St Andrew Street, Aberdeen.

The research and study behind Carla Smith's works are rooted in moments of being together, such as a shared meal, which generate material and ideas in a spontaneous, collaborative way. In this way, the work is not limited to the artist's individuality, even when it deals with personal, intimate matters, but stays open to a plurality of resonances. The artist has developed this way of working from previous works, such as her Degree Show work as well as more recent works realised as part of her Residency, such as *Comfort Foods*, a cookbook where she collected recipes anonymously that were avenues for sharing memories of comforting, nourishing food secrets.

The first element of *SUGO* consisted of a public pasta-making workshop, during which participants were invited to explore mark-making and creativity while making fresh pasta, which they then cooked and ate together. Inviting in playfulness and open conversations, the workshop invited considering what it may mean to look after someone by preparing a meal. Approached as a skill-sharing opportunity, the participants explored transmitting knowledge and techniques by working together, mimicking the way that recipes are often fed down by watching the hands of others work.

A Risograph and screenprint book realised by the artist with recipes for fresh pasta was shared with the participants. Considered as a working document, the participants were invited to add notes, comments, suggestions and their own stories. A new version of the book, expanded with recipes for sugo and contorni, as well as documentation of the workshop, realised by Phoebe McBride, will then form part of the final exhibition.

The recipes for fresh pasta that the artist shared in the workshop came to her from her mother, who in turn had learnt them from her grandmother: a handing-down of knowledge, skill and memory. With the final exhibition, sharing meals comes into focus as a concern for the difficult preservation of memory, the transmission of techniques and tools for care against the dispersal of time.

At the core of the project is the artist's relationship with her maternal grandparents, amongst other family members, explored in an artist film that the exhibition revolves around. Attentive to small details and moments of connection, the

film is aware of the fragile territory surrounding work made around family members, yet handles its material delicately, with awareness and gratitude. The film features a score realised by Saoirse Horne.

The works collected in the exhibition space form a delicate archive of the way these memories, and the people in them, have shaped the artist's life. Through the various elements within the exhibition, the artist aims to recreate the practices of care inscribed in family recipes and their transmission. Family recipes, passed over, from hand to hand, take on new life each time they are recreated; they can be seen as tools for a kind of knowledge that is changed and adapted, varying according to what is at hand, the ingredients available, the situation, who's around.

By introducing interactive elements in the exhibition, and by including a workshop element in the project, *SUGO* moves away from a solely documentary, memoirist impulse, instead opening up to a work that is communal, situated and relational. Beyond familial relationships, the work also elaborates a form of care that aligns closely with that of friendship. A unique kind of relationship, based on presence, attentiveness, selflessness, and enjoyment as an end in itself, friendship is reciprocal but the exchange is always balanced and equal: the continuous gift of presentness, of being there, of spending time together in a considered, yet light and playful way. In the fact that Carla's work reproduces acts of nurturing as transmitted by family but through an act of caring for friends, or people who come to take on that role, the work distances itself from gendered aspects of caring as nurturing and opens it up to an alternative way of being together. The workshop participants, as well as the audience, are an integral part of the project, which then comes to be about so much more than the artist and her personal story: just like a recipe, it moulds and adapts and speaks to whoever is in the room, whatever their story is. And their version of sugo.

Just like the sauce it refers to, *SUGO* brings concerns around family, memory, care and conviviality together, pushing them close to one another, simmering and reducing them down to a new essence. 'Sugo' is Italian for a kind of tomato sauce, boiled down for a long time, then filtered and bottled, to keep for months—a storing of time. But sugo is also a meal from another country: it holds a form of longing within it, the struggle of a word that doesn't quite fit, that takes you to a somewhere else. This becomes Carla's own way of preserving, not as a form of conservation, but closer to the way a recipe works: it passes knowledge on, by allowing something new to be made each time.

Sugo is one of those preparations that exists in variants, rather than in a single, stable form. There is no origin; rather, a proliferation. I let the oil infuse in garlic and dried chilli, then take the garlic away, before adding the tomatoes. Carla adds onions, chops them generously large, and carrots, following her family's recipe which always eluded her as a child, full of coveted ingredients she wasn't always privy to. She rakes through the jars of herbs and spices, seeking to follow the recipe as closely as she can, walking through its steps into memories of days spent cooking with her loved ones side by side. As the sugo bubbles away, memories are made anew, to nourish and nurture, tending to relationships old and new, time, and time again.

—Enxhi Mandija

SUGO is jointly supported by peacock & the worm and delivered as part of LACER project by Gray's School of Art, RGU on behalf of Culture Aberdeen.

ABOUT CARLA SMITH

Carla Smith is an artist based in Aberdeen, originally from Edinburgh. She graduated in Contemporary Arts Practice at Gray's School of Art in 2022, when she was awarded the Peacock Prize, which consisted of a year-long residency at the printmaking studio. During this time, Carla has explored and perfected a variety of printmaking techniques, under the guidance of our printmakers. She has worked on several prints, including *The Apple Tree*, an etching with screenprint and writing on calico, which was exhibited at the Moray Art Centre (Feb 2023). Other prints from this body of work, as well as other works realised during the residency, have been exhibited at Compass Gallery, Glasgow. She also realised a cookbook, *Comfort Foods*, a three-colour Risograph book with cyanotype cover containing recipes collected in secrecy, 'stories of guilty pleasures and meals that remind you of simpler times,' as the artist writes. *Sugo* is her first solo project and exhibition.

LIST OF WORKS

UPSTAIRS

1. Peperoni arrosto prints & Melanzane grigliate prints

laser cut boxes, screenprint, edible food colouring screenprints on wafer paper.

2. Sugo

*mixed-media book (Risograph, screenprinting, cyanotype, etching, laser cutting), edition of 25. £64
With photography by Phoebe McBride.*

Sugo is a recipe book gathering instructions for a few of the dishes and techniques recurring throughout the exhibition, as well as documentation of the pasta-making workshop that formed the first public iteration of the project. The recipes have been passed on to the artist from generations through her family, and are at once intimate and personal, yet gathered here to be shared, together with stories and memories. The book gathers all the printmaking techniques the artist has explored throughout her Graduate Artist Residency at peacock & the worm.

3. Workshop hands

Calico, natural dyes (beetroot, red cabbage, tomato, spinach, turmeric), monoprint.

The fabric here was first used as a tablecloth during a pasta-making workshop that was the first public element of the *Sugo* project, in June 2023. As the natural dyes spilled from the participants working hands, staining the fabric, Shared making acts as a record of the day, of the time spent preparing a meal and eating together, of hands moving, kneading, cupping around sticky flour and water. The hands, monoprinted from photographs of the participants' hands during the day (captured by Phoebe McBride), evoke the gestures and movements of making and sharing the acts of caring and nurturing one another.

4. Kitchen tiles

Ceramic tiles with screenprinting, cyanotype, and handwriting.

Carla grew up thinking her grandmother's kitchen was covered in ceramic tiles printed with a pattern of strawberries; a memory she held close until, during a phone call, she discovered what she thought were tiles had instead always been wallpaper. The tiles here start from this misremembering, bringing into the space an idea of memory that is fallible and fragile. The tiles are printed with faded images of her grandmother cooking, of the patterns and objects in her house, as well as moments of communal cooking and working during the pasta workshop.

5. Your mouli

Etching, unique.

6. Small pockets of life

Laser engrave on plywood, screenprint on paper.

7. Strawberry Tiles

Screenprinted screenprinting mesh, inked etching on copper plate.

This work focuses on one of the patterns that cover the house of Carla's grandmother, the strawberry wallpaper that was imprecisely remembered as tiles. The mesh fabric acts as a screen, half-hiding and half-revealing the etching plate behind it, echoing the ways that caring acts are often hidden in unseen, time-consuming labours, only surfacing in glimmers and glimpses.

8. Kitchen in blue, Kitchen in blue with peperoni

One-colour Risograph on newsprint, glazed ceramic.

9. When the sunlight streams into the kitchen

Glazed ceramic, handwriting.

Struggling to hold emotions and moments remembered, the spoons feature excerpts of text from the *Sugo* film, which are hard to see, and can only be spotted by coming close to them, in the right light. For some things – some relationships, some people – are hard to grasp fully until they are gone, and all you've got to hold onto – carefully, gently – are whispers, words murmured and half-remembered.

10. Little ceramic pieces + hands

Glazed ceramic.

Small ceramic pieces interspersed throughout the exhibition.

DOWNSTAIRS

1. Sugar melanzane

Crystallised-sugar coated grilled aubergines.

Relating to ideas of preservation and archiving, these sweet-tasting melanzane aim to recreate a dish that is significant of the artist's relationship with her grandmother. They express the desire and the impossibility to preserve the memory of a loved one, and their love and care for you, through a recipe they made.

2. Sunset Slugs

Four-colour Risograph on screenprinting mesh, embossing powder.

Playfully abstracted beyond recognition, the roasted peppers become enlarged and warped through the Risograph printer. Experimenting with the limits of the medium, the peperoni are held, trapped in bubbling fabric, ink bursting around the edges. The dish resists archiving. No matter how closely as a recipe may be followed, a dish will never taste the same if the person who first made it is not there anymore.

3. Strawberry Shrine

Embroidered fabric, found frame.

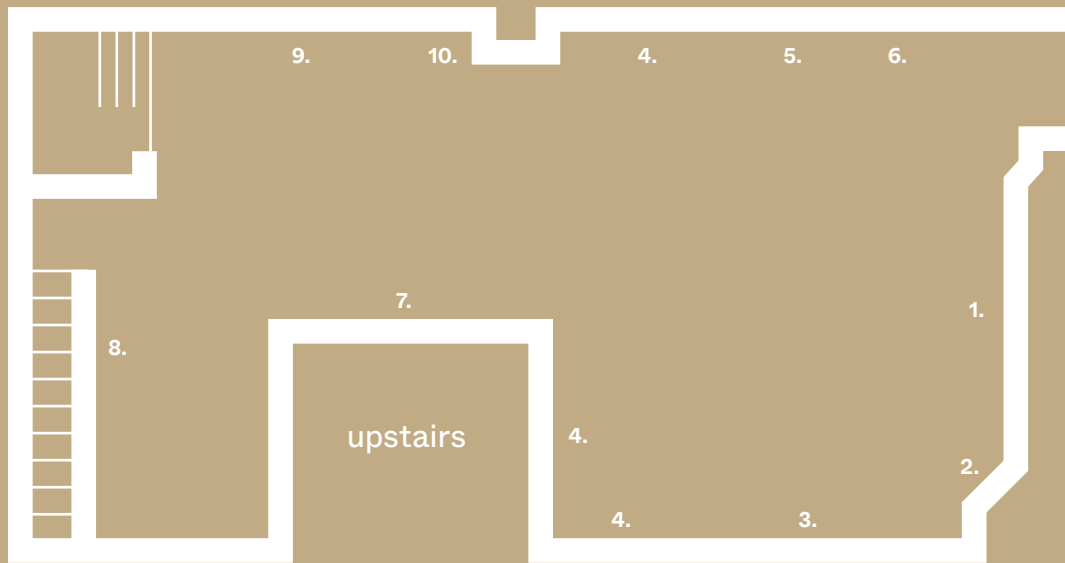
4. Sugo Cooking

Glazed ceramic pot, scent mix (tomato, basil, garlic).

5. Sugo

Artist film, 14' 56". Film score by Saoirse Horne.

The film gathers much of the concerns and context of the exhibition, scrambling to capture the care embedded in the act of showing another how to prepare a meal. Its soft, stuttering sequences, its immersive, swaddling score, aim to articulate the impossibility of capturing moments of a life, fully knowing a person, preserve forever the care and love inscribed in every one of their gestures.



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