

A Caesar Salad Chandelier is the Centerpiece of This New Exhibition

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Installation view of Chloe Wise: Thank You For The Nice Fire, Almine Rech, 2021 (all images courtesy Almine Rech; photo by Dan Bradica)

At her new gallery show, *Thank You For The Nice Fire*, Chloe Wise employs food to great, grotesque effect: The show's centerpiece is a Caesar Salad Chandelier studded with croutons, its urethane romaine lettuce leaves fanning out like rococo paillettes, its milky "dressing" dripping into a puddle on the gallery floor below. Atop glass block plinths, there are thick mounds of waxy butter, punctuated by ears of corn; in one painting, a bodiless hand appears to want to plunge its fingers into a pile of garlic. This isn't the first time Wise has used food in her work; a 2017 *New York Magazine* article called her the "carb artist" of her generation, detailing how, "inspired by a Fendi Baguette, she created a line of bread-based luxury 'handbags,' among them Bagel No. 5, a urethane bagel oozing with fake cream cheese and attached to a real Chanel chain." But it's definitely the first time we've reacted so emotionally to it. We felt a similar reaction when taking in Ellen Pong's meat-covered Antipastissue box earlier this week. What is happening?

In some ways, such a reaction might be attributed to the deadening sameness of the past year. These foods represent what Wise calls a kind of "glorified nothingness," but unwrapped from their packaging they evoke a more visceral reaction, recalling the popular refrain of the past year "just to feel something." Wise herself asks: "How do we conceptualize experience when many of us are spending inordinate amounts of time indoors, with limitations imposed on our habitual ways of accessing the world? Time ticks on, as evidenced by the changing of the seasons and the rotting of produce, the dispassionate proof in the parabolic pudding."

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The rest of the exhibition features paintings of friends, which Wise created remotely using archived images or self-portraits sent to her by her subjects. In many of these, the subjects appear to have fake smiles or gritted teeth, another vestige of this past year. “The main thought I had, in creating this body of work, was the cognitive dissonance that is required for survival during times of crisis. To be constantly crying would be of no use. To feel outrage and sadness is human, but it is equally within our human nature to trudge along, fake a smile, do one’s best to get by.” On view at Almine Rech through April 17.