

***Microwave on High for One Minute: Axel Livingston at The Barbershop***

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March 6, 2025

I love how art has the potential to prompt or sustain an infinite array of contemplations while also participating in a deep-rooted lineage of material and aesthetic discourse. Axel Livingston's exhibition at The Barbershop satisfies an impulse to acknowledge the ongoing objectification and consumption of bodies through "ingredients" like gelatin, packaged egg, chicken feet, processed cheese and meat. Sculptural forms shrink-wrapped in plastic and cast in iron work with found objects and cryptic diagrams to solicit a feeling that may inspire veganism or a concern for civil rights. There is a thinned-out line between the concepts of "human" and "animal" here.



*Slim Jim* (detail)

Ingredients: gelatin, packaged egg, processed cheese, processed meat, plastic, staples, wood

## Microwave on High for One Minute

Starting with the corpse-like figures on pedestals placed center as if they were operating tables or butcher blocks... decomposition is the common denominator. But unlike Damien Hirst who employs *formaldehyde* in his monumental immortalization of animals, or Marc Quinn who cast a self-portrait in his own *frozen* blood, Livingston welcomes decay. Over the course of the exhibition, the surface of these forms have become decorated with spots of black, white, green and red as rot consumes the animal-derived substances. The fact that this is not a science experiment raises the question of why the artist chooses to explore the decomposition using the human and chicken forms specifically. Being the second most consumed food in the world next to pork, poultry has been the topic of heated debates surrounding ethics in the industrialization of food. Empathy gets in the way of straight up carnage as some people recognize that their legs, thighs, and breasts are accompanied by an actual soul. A kind of anthropomorphism, I guess...A human bust with eggs for eyes is another species-blending tactic; “you are what you eat.”



*Microwave on High for One Minute* at The Barbershop



*Cruca Chicken*

Ingredients: gelatin, packaged egg, chicken feet, plastic, staples, wood





*Slim Jim* (left - week 1, right - week 3)

Ingredients: gelatin, packaged egg, processed cheese, processed meat, newspaper

The hierarchy of lifeforms as established by *modern* societies is contingent upon where in the world you are, but pretty much all of them place humans at the top. Our assumed authority to decide what stays and what goes has rendered a world parallel to the *natural* reality of complex interdependency. The horrific disregard for subjecthood as a universal phenomenon leads to widespread exploitation, expulsion and erasure; the metaphorical mousetraps successfully highlight the theme of supremacy and mass extermination that has come to define colonial thought. Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* attempts to lay out a visual of the categorization that has led to our perpetual isolation. What he calls the "Gordian Knot" is a conceptual structure where species, genders, religions, cultures etc, are collectively subjected to a man-made classification system that determines their level of worth and autonomy in the world. This segregation obviously affects our relationship to each other but also our relationship to food, leading to the rise in diseases coming from industrial livestock production and agriculture. This show just so happens to be on view during a rise in H5N1 Bird Flu, which for the first time has tested positive in rats.



Microwave on High for One Minute



*Microwave on High for One Minute*  
Ingredients: Barbershop ceiling tile, fiberglass, sublimation print, plastic



*How to Microwave*  
Ingredients: sublimation print, plastic



*Untitled*  
Ingredients: found objects

Microwave on High for One Minute



*Untitled*

Ingredients: cast iron

Microwaves, microfibers, microplastics, microdosing. The macro is dissolving and I think we are going insane. Sadism as entertainment is rampant; true crime is the top genre, you know? But even before factory-farms, there was still war, slavery, and cannibalism, so I honestly wonder if “civility” as a concept is even possible. Artists like Francis Bacon had no reservations when expressing the visions of a tortured soul, or at least the shadowed corners of the subconscious mind.



Microwave on High for One Minute



*Rat Race Finish Line*

Ingredients: microwave, organic burn out bronze

Some of them explored the Deleuzian “becoming animal” type of fantasies, with characteristics being highly interchangeable amongst animate and inanimate life forms; sort of like Jung, but a little more mechanical. Anyways, you can definitely find some of that in this Axel Livingston show, as he references a malleability that is both freeing and terrifying.

*Microwave on High for One Minute* opened on February 7, 2025 and will be on view until March 14, 2025.

The Barbershop, 3432 Caniff St., Hamtramck, MI, 48212

<https://www.thebarbershop.ink/>