

# **Bitter Bites: Tracing the Fruit Market In the Global South**

**Oct. 27 – Dec. 10**

**Daniel Santiago Salguero  
Claudia Claremi  
Raja'a Khalid**

curated by  
**Juanita Solano  
Blanca Serrano**

*Bitter Bites: Tracing the Fruit Market in the Global South* examines the history, geography, and economy of the fruit market in the contemporary global scene, and reflects on how this phenomenon has shaped cultural identities. Fruits, both nature's bounty and a man-cultivated good, are the epitome of today's neocolonial dependencies, especially in relation to excessive consumerism. The insistence for cheap produce year-round has reinforced and exacerbated the divide between "first world" and "third world" and how consumers rarely understand that our cheap bodega fruits are the result of these colonial-based economies. Often regarded as an exotic commodity, fruits have been considered a symbol of the 'Other,' a metaphorical representation of the people who harvest the fields, a reading crafted by those who demand the land's products. This exhibition addresses a series of global networks and everyday experience concerns that approach the topic from different perspectives, mediums, and visual languages through the work of three artists: Daniel Santiago Salguero, Claudia Claremi and Raja'a Khalid.

Historically, fruits have been, on the one hand, cherished for their material value as a trading good and, on the other, desired for their multifaceted symbolic significance. An early example of this can be found in the 1539 mesmerizing mosaic-painting executed with colorful feathers by the indigenous artisans working under the supervision of Franciscan missionary Peter of Ghent in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (current Mexico). A gift for Pope Paul III, this rare artifact was partly meant to demonstrate the humanity of the "Indians" and, consequently, their correct disposition to be indoctrinated into Catholicism. Among the local items depicted in this religious scene are three pineapples. These pineapples visually synthesized what the Americas generally represented for the European viewer at the time: an exotic and fertile land to be culturally controlled and economically exploited. Despite the vast distance between the feather mosaic-painting and the artworks in this exhibition, similar neo-colonialist dynamics can still be identified by looking at the fruit market today, and contemporary artists are still including fruit references in their work that point to these same problematic synergies.

The fruit market is often under recognized today, yet it is also highly visible. In New York City, for instance, one can find fruit carts on almost every street corner regardless of the differing character, ethnicity, and socioeconomic makeup of each borough. However, how these crops manage to reach our tables is little known to most consumers. According to a recent New York Times article, 20 million bananas are distributed

around New York City each week, coming mostly from Ecuador. Not only is the global environmental footprint of such consumerist phenomenon dramatic, but it also transforms the local landscapes, social structures, and even traditions, of the fruit supplier communities abroad. Moreover, these inequitable power relations also trigger sexist, racist, and classist (mis)representations of those living in the world's warmest regions — think of Carmen Miranda's popular ad for Chiquita Banana. *Bitter Bites: Tracing the Fruit Market in the Global South* reveals the economic, political, and cultural implications of the fruit trade today. The show has a transnational scope that mirrors that of the global fruit market, including artists from Bogotá, Madrid, and Dubai, whose works navigate myriad contexts ranging from Southeast Asia to the Americas. The pieces in this exhibition present and interrogate the problems of the fruit market in both the domestic space and the public sphere, surveying the evolving shape of this reality, beginning in the colonial times until today.

*Fruits Tunnel* is a site-specific installation created by Colombian artist Daniel Santiago Salguero. After moving from Bogotá to New York City in 2014, Salguero started to notice the varied countries of origin of the fruits that he brought home after grocery shopping in his new hometown. As opposed to the locally grown crops that he used to buy year-round back home, in his new city most of the products were harvested elsewhere. In this way, what used to be a quotidian practice became a mapping project, a desire to trace the long path that the fruits had to take before reaching his apartment. Somehow, similarly to how the provenance of a painting can often be tracked by checking the labels on the back of a canvas, one can find out the country of origin of, say, a clementine by examining the small sticker on its peel: Panama, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru... *Fruits Tunnel* is an installation comprised by the accordion-shaped assembling of different bright color papers with an abstract cut-out space in the middle. Here, Salguero metaphorically compares the journey that millions of migrants undergo in order to enter the United States with the most common routes of fruit transport: from South to North, and from East to West. While the migrants' experience is usually performed clandestinely, the fruits itinerary is explicitly shown here in the bright color paper.

In *The Memory of Fruits*, Cuban-Spanish artist Claudia Claremi creates an unorthodox archive of 'forgotten' fruits from Puerto Rico. She gathers the testimonies of several "San Juaneros" in order to recuperate the memory of local fruits that are no longer cultivated in the country in favor of those that are preferred by the import and export market. Executed from

outdated media (a silent, black-and-white 16mm film, a handmade publication, and a vintage overhead projector), this anti-archive is composed of fruits that have virtually vanished in Puerto Rico. Claremi suggestively alludes to the island's "forgotten" fruits without actually ever including them visually: she asks her interviewees to pose for the camera as if holding their recalled fruit in their hands. Thus, by avoiding the literal materialization of the fruits, this work avoids the fruits' complete disappearance, and it protects them from potential commercial overthrow. In this work, not only does the artist call attention to contemporary ways of economic, territorial, and cultural colonialism but she also restores part of the collective identity of Puerto Ricans, as these fruits are, literally, part of their memories.

In *Mango Story*, a new work by Raja'a Khalid, the Emirati artist reflects on the history of mangoes as an emblem of 'soft power,' and on their use as a diplomatic gift in the international relations between Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. After completing extensive research on the history of the fruit itself—originating in India, then traveling to the Far East and the Mediterranean, and afterwards to South America, and finally to the United States—Khalid traces, not only the commercial uses of the mango, but also the political practices in which the fruit played a significant role. Drawing a parallel between diplomatic and corporate gifts, the artist has created a series of mango-shaped paperweights that unveil the unexpected connections between diplomatic and corporate transactions. As stated by the artist, "in the history of gastrodplomacy the mango positively reserves its own chapter, appearing again and again like a pulpy, juicy leitmotif." Indeed, Khalid's work reveals how apparently innocent 'thank you' gestures among nations are actually filled with political intent.

*Bitter Bites: Tracing the Fruit Market in the Global South* illuminates how international exchanges involving fruit today, either in the form of diplomatic gifts or as products of the year-round demand for tropical fruits in cold climates, reproduce worldviews arising at the origins of Western modernity that continue to jeopardize the ways of life of the so-called 'Other'.

*Artist books by Claudia Claremi and Daniel Santiago Salguero are available for sale (\$20 each) at Cuchifritos Gallery. The books speak directly to the artworks in the exhibition, and they have been specifically created for this occasion.*

# Bios

**Claudia Claremi's** oeuvre reflects on the relations between the collective and the individual. Her work studies the experiential component of the material world. Some of Claremi's projects are based on the exchange of gifts in order to examine both the limits and the possibilities of such encounters. Claudia's work can be divided into two sets: those pieces that intervene with reality, and which embrace the effects of such action; and those that narrate events through myriad ways of presenting and editing visual and literary sources through text, images, and sound. A graduate of Camberwell College of Art (London), and a former Instituto Superior de Arte (Havana), Claudia Claremi is currently researching documentary film at the San Antonio de los Baños International Film and Television School (Cuba). Claremi has participated in a number of art residencies, including Beta-Local (Puerto Rico) and Campus (Barcelona). Her work has been exhibited internationally in Spain, Cuba, UK, Colombia, and Germany. She is a member of the art collective Elgatoconmoscas.

**Raja'a Khalid** is an artist from Dubai. She received her MFA in Fine Art from Cornell University in 2013. Her practice is concerned with the Arabian Gulf region and its contemporary narratives of class, luxury, and consumer culture. Her current work aims to subtly critique the Gulf's own streaming constructions of masculinity, athleticism, adornment, desire, conspicuous production and crypto – secularity.

**Daniel Santiago Salguero** is a Colombian artist based in NYC. He received his B.F.A. in Audio-Visual Media and Photography in 2006 at the Politécnico Grancolombiano in Bogotá and completed an M.A. in Artes Vivas (Performance art) at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in 2014. His work has been selected for international exhibitions such as *Sights and Sounds* at The Jewish Museum in NYC and the 9th Mercosur Biennale in Brazil. More recently, Salguero has participated in projects such as "About the Error," a curatorial research endeavor on contemporary Colombian art and literature. The project was exhibited in several cities and turned into a delicate book that includes posters and texts especially commissioned for the project. He was also invited to partake in a two-year open dialogue with Dutch artist Anna Dasovik based on photography functions and the construction of historical memory. In 2016, Salguero was part of *Proximidades/Distancias, Prácticas escénicas contemporáneas en España y Latinoamérica* at NYU, where he showed the theater-performance piece entitled *Fuentes-Puentes*. As the father of two kids, he

assumes his dissident paternity as part of his artistic practice, documenting and archiving material left from his experience as a young dad.

**Blanca Serrano Ortiz de Solórzano** is Project Director at the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art. She is an art historian specializing in modern and contemporary art from Latin America and the Caribbean, and she holds a Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Her research focuses on discourses of intellectual and manual labor in contemporary Cuban art, and it has been generously supported by the Florence Waterbury Fellowship, the Florence and Samuel C. Karlan Memorial Scholarship, and the La Caixa Foundation. Blanca is co-curator of *Bitter Bites: Tracing the Fruit Market in the Global South* (Cuchifritos Gallery, NY, Fall 2017), *Lucy Kim: Rejuvenate and Repeat* (IFA Great Hall Exhibition Series, NY, Spring 2017), and *Martha Friedman: Some Hags* (IFA Great Hall Exhibition Series, NY, Fall 2016). She has also collaborated with the curatorial departments of the Brooklyn Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and El Museo del Barrio. Her academic writing has been featured in several art publications, including *From Craftivism to Craftwashing: The Politics of Craft in the Global Economy* (edited by Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, 2017), *Modernidad y Vanguardia: Rutas de Intercambio entre España y Latinoamérica, 1920-1970* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Fundación Cisneros, 2015), and *New Territories: Design, Craft, and Art from Latin America* (Museum of Art and Design, New York, 2014).

**Juanita Solano Roa** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. Her work focuses on the history of photography and modern and contemporary Latin American Art. In 2013, she received her master degree with distinction from the same institution. Prior to moving to NYC, she studied art with an emphasis in art history and theory at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. Parallel to her studies, she has worked in different editorial and curatorial projects both in Colombia and the U.S. and collaborated with institutions such as MoMA and El Museo del Barrio. She has been awarded several grants and fellowships, among them the Joan and Stanford Alexander Award from the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Roberta and Richard Huber Fellowship at the Institute of Fine Arts. Her more recent writing has been included in *Beyond the Face: New Perspectives on Portraiture* (National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C., 2018) and *Apuntes sobre la fotografía plástica en América Latina* (Fog, Madrid, 2018). She is currently based in New York City, where she collaborates with the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) while completing her doctoral dissertation dedicated to the work of Colombian photographers Melitón Rodríguez and Benjamín de la Calle.

# Checklist

Daniel Santiago Salguero

*Fruits Tunnel, 2017*

Paper installation, map on paper, photograph with natural pigments on rice paper

Variable dimensions

Claudia Claremi

*The Memory of Fruits, 2015-2016*

16mm film transferred to digital HD (30 min), projector, transparencies

Raja'a Khalid

*Mango Story, 2017*

Lucite and acrylic

Variable dimensions

# About

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space, a program of Artists Alliance Inc, provides exhibition opportunities to hundreds of emerging artists and independent curators. Founded in 2001, Cuchifritos is housed within the Essex Street Market on Manhattan's Lower East Side. This unique setting fosters a deep connection between art and the local community, encourages dialogue among artists and very diverse audiences, and enhances the Lower East Side's status as a place of historical importance, exploration, and exchange. Cuchifritos responds to changing needs within the art world, supports work that's reflective of our broader community, and finds ways to advance artists' and curators' practices. We're dedicated to ensuring the Lower East Side remains a powerful place for making and viewing art.

# Supporters

Artists Alliance Inc. is 501c3 not for profit organization located on the Lower East Side of New York City within the Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center. Cuchifritos Gallery and the LES Studio Program are supported in part by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Cuchifritos Gallery programming is made possible by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts. We thank the NYC Economic Development Corporation and individual donors for their continued support. Special thanks go to our team of dedicated volunteers and interns, without whom these programs would not be possible. For more information, please visit [artistsallianceinc.org](http://artistsallianceinc.org)