...ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A WORLD: WHIMSICAL, HUMOROUS, SYNTHETIC, GIRLY, INTIMATE, ALIEN, GLITTERING, SEXY, SOFT, INNOCENT, EXPLICIT, HUMMING AND OBSCURE....

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ABSTRACT

...........once upon a time there was a world: whimsical, humorous, synthetic, girly, intimate, alien, glittering, sexy, soft, innocent, explicit, humming and obscure..........

Miniature styrofoam bathtubs with yellow paper propellers move around nervously, exchanging vital substances with a drippy sack. Soft, skin-like forms, placed on antiseptic tables breath rhythmically. Nearby stones become lumps of gold, numbered meticulously, and plastacine eggs dress up in pink lace, silver gems, white feathers, and glistening pearls for a moment of decadent, dark, and luscious play. In my work, fictional narratives, dream worlds with anchors in the real, occupy a space between familiarity and fantasy. The environments are systems - overlapping worlds, groups and subgroups that are juxtaposed and united through scale, color palette, sound, form, space, and material. With the continuous pushing and pulling among the elements of this vocabulary, I am creating hierarchies of events and narratives, which compete and communicate. The groupings of objects and their placement within a particular space become a journey of discovery. I develop pathways for the viewer to travel, I link micro with macro worlds, encourage notions of irritation, and implied movement of the objects and ask the viewer to relate oneself to the objects and the situations they present.

Materials, found objects and colorful, kitschy, decorative supplies overflow the categorized shelves and bins in my studio. In fabricating these fairy-like worlds, I knit, cut, glue, sew, find, draw, fold, select, solder, saw, paint, decorate, carve, combine and mold. The making itself is playful and spontaneous. Intuition and design alternately dictate my working process, promoting the unexpected.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LITTLE OBJECTS, 2001/02/03

Image 1.1. Little Objects on Shelf, 2001/02/03. Mixed media, dimensions variable
A delicate, dotted lace lawn caringly shelters spongy foam eggs: a silver cloud gets feet to walk with, tiny plaster heaps become candy-like objects, squeezed and decorated with threaded jewelry and a hairy, soft capsule releases a mass of earthly plastacine, studded with glistening pearls.

A tall shelf in my studio is crammed with these imaginative, and playful little objects. The fragile but vivid miniatures inhabit this ground, becoming a micro cosmos, an intimate world on its own. I fabricate my own dream world, adding one object after the other to my private collection.

This body of work came into being through my fascination for seductive, candy-like colors, my interest in daily, cultural, mass-produced objects, as well as crafty and decorative materials and my intuitive desire to create beautiful, sensuous, and imaginative objects.

In the beginning my only conscious motivation was to allow myself to play with the materials and objects that I have unconsciously yet specifically picked. Until the last couple of years I had never really trusted my intuition (specifically in sculpture) and I had never really allowed myself to play, to let go and to “make” before even having a specific plan. To form three-dimensional work always meant for me to develop a concept, a profound idea and then to make a plan how to translate my “brain-work” – which was very often a real struggle – into form. I felt that good artwork had to have a specific and clear meaning and I needed to be conscious about its content. The resulting works of art were sometimes fairly direct and therefore, in my today’s opinion limited in its potential as artwork. Besides the process was unpleasant and forceful and I realize today how much I denied my real personality.

With the support and confidence of my professors in Graduate School I carefully and precariously took a new approach. As I had doodled in drawing and painting before, I now made an effort to do the same with sculpture. I surrounded myself with stimulating materials
and items and started to play, to combine, to alter, to form them, and to react to what I had chosen to work with. It was a joyful and maybe even meditative working process. I let my imaginations flow, knitted my own free narratives, gave way in my affection for beauty and material obsession, and allowed unconscious decision-making.

This process was a time full of doubts, insecurity, pain, satisfaction, joy, refusal and decisions. In a difficult attempt to trust myself, my intuition, I needed to learn to respect and to value this new kind of work and the different working method. Since this playful work felt so "unserious" and light in meaning, was wide open, ambiguous, pretty, and exhibited a quality of craft, the handmade and kitsch, I felt extremely self-conscious about it, and questioned it constantly. The fact that these small objects were a result of spontaneity, free association, without planning and conscious reflecting, made it difficult for me to accept. Yet it seemed to be a very natural way of working for me and I came to realize, that this was my most honest act. Knowledge of myself took place through a product, through making.

This collection of small, delicate objects has its own specific language. Colors like pink, light yellow, turquoise, light blue, beige and materials like pearls, lace, plastacine, foam, plaster, wire, fabric, yarn, sponges, paper, astro-turf refer to a child's world. The handmade, acts, such as knitting, cutting, gluing, sewing, drawing, folding, painting, decorating contribute to the idea of play as well. Colors, materials and making-technique are seductive, glittering, sweet, innocent, and fairy-like. Yet there is another side to them that is not clearly child-like. The miniatures are very sophisticated, complex, and carefully placed. They sometimes have a voluptuous and bodily undertone and are more mysterious than transparent. Materials from daily life are transformed into surreal, poetic creatures with narrative suggestions.
Some are truly innocent, which implies my real love for such girly, kitchy materials, colors and forms, and some are more ironic. Some are static objects with a defined footprint. Such as Little Object #42: it has a stated form and simply exist on its own, patiently and calmly sitting on the shelf. But there are also objects that exceed their footprints. They consist of different parts, which communicate with each other. Two knitted objects with spheres and wire connections, are charged with a sense of potential energy, implied activity. They almost appear as if they are animated, frozen in the middle of an intercourse (Little Object #31).

Image 1.5. Little Object #42, 2002. Mixed media (plaster, sand, wood, paint), 5 1/2” x 6” x 4”

Image 1.6. Little Object #31, 2002. Mixed media (knitted yarn, wire, plastacine, styrofoam, beads), 6 1/2” x 18” x 10”

*Little Objects, 2001/02/03, contains many juxtapositions: there is the handmade and the manufactured, the invented and the real, the natural as well as the artificial, the synthetic. There is a conflict, a tension, but also a balance, a connection between these elements. These objects are strangely between two worlds, between the child’s and the adult’s, between reality and fantasy. One could maybe describe the work as a “serious play”, a “play by an adult”? The miniatures in the shelf may appear somehow familiar yet unknown and surprising at the same time.*

Today I realize how these small, whimsical objects are the roots for all the work that came after it. They were the beginning of a very different and fresh body of work for me. I made a departure from there, following my natural process that led me to my work today. Liberated from my conscious mind, from rigid concepts, layers of meaning evolve. I feel that I have found a way to create objects that have the capacity to crack open a well of associations that surprise and go beyond expectations. In promoting the unexpected through my new
working practice, I am now attempting to bring some magic and myseriousness into my
work. Besides, these fantasy miniatures taught me to be able to trust myself, let me find a
new vocabulary in art, gave me ideas for bigger work and awakened my deep love for
beauty, materials, textures, and formal concerns, as well as for the subjective, emotional
and irrational.
1.2 MY ART PRACTICE – A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

A word from Robert Frost about how works of art develop.

"A poem,” (Robert) Frost wrote to a friend in 1915, “positively must not begin thought first. It finds the thought and the thought finds the word. A poem, that is, whether it begins with the vaguest notion, a feeling, a mental image, a phrase, or a combination of these, usually discovers what it is thinking about only as it is being written.”

-Henry Lyman, in the introduction to An Anthology of Poetry from New England, 1996, Univ. of Massachusetts Press, Amherst

This writing was given to me to take with me, during the first weeks of graduate school. And only later did I truly understand what it meant. It illustrates what I was already, precariously trying but did not believe in, yet.

The making became a journey and an exploration for me. Step by step the work evolves, develops while making. I start with a material, a feeling, a color, or a vague image. Obscure, intangible thoughts and sensations colletct within my head and my body. There are no words for what I am going to do. Things come together – it feels like building, one stone goes on top of the other. Yet, sometimes I need to take one element out...maybe from the middle or further from the right? A conscious reflection takes place during the process. It is a playful process that goes through different stages of evaluation and development, before finding their finished form. It is a forth and back between letting go, allow parts just to lay where they fall, but then again to control, to refine, to push further, to put into order. Improvisation and structure are combined in my new working practice, provoking the unforeseen, the unexpected.
CHAPTER 2

THE FUSION OF BLISSFULNESS, SWEETNESS, AND DINKINESS WITH A SLIGHTLY OBSCURE, QUAIN'T UNDERTONE – OR MY APPRECIATION FOR OPENNESS, AMBIGUITY, COMPLEXITY

Image 2.1. Uvised, May 2002. Mixed media (painted wood, pigmented latex, breathing mechanism inside the tables, sound, lace, beads, plastacine, foam, styrofoam, medical tubing, wire, fabric, styrofoam pellets, paper, pum poms), dimensions variable (installed: 42" x 300" x 360")
When you enter the room there is a strange humming sound in the air. It is a quiet and deep-toned voice, repeatedly howling and mewing. Something is alive, something is happening and meant to be discovered.

There are three eggshell painted tables in this space. They are perfectly made, with smooth surfaces and sharp edges. Their design suggests “bucket tables”: tough, durable, utilitarian, yet they have an artificial, scientific and antiseptic surface. These tables provide a situation for examination. A pure and synthetic environment is produced through these tables and the white, clean, open space. It is a space to examine and experience the narrative of the objects that inhabit those tables and parts of this room.

Pink rubber organisms are placed carefully on each table. These forms have a voluminous shape with a depression in the center and allude to the feminine. Their diameter runs 20 inches, which gives them a physical and lively appearance. The skin-like character of the pink latex and the organic shape suggests something biological and human. They open up associations with human organs, skin, magnified cells, medical and life-supporting equipment, baby and flesh. The forms are strangely familiar yet open-ended in their associative qualities. That these rubber shapes are very subtly breathing – gently inflating and deflating in different rhythms – adds to the organic and medical reading. These alien forms are heaving, sometimes stocking, sometimes faster and more nervous. It may remind of a baby’s chest hastily rising and falling. The movement also provokes associations with a scientific lab or hospital environment. Life-supporting systems are operating, although the source of the breathing mechanism is not visible.
These pink organisms have navel-strings growing out of their bodies. One is a long thin tube that widens at the end, winding down from the tabletop and finding its attaching spot on the side of the table. Here the wide ending part of the navel-string, decorated with pink beads that are grown into its surface, has sucked onto the table. The connection is made between organic form, the navel-string and the antiseptic surface, the table. The navel-string of another pink creature is short and thin, attached to the tabletop. The form it comes from is wearing a small pink lace skirt, indicating the “gentle” sex. The third organism has a tattered navel-string, a long thin part hangs down the table. On the floor, just beneath this seemingly dripping navel-string, there are some pink plastacine drops, carrying pink poms.

A ramp that sits half under one of the tables leads the eye down to the floor. This ramp belongs to the family of tables. It has a similar minimal and geometrical form and is painted with the same warm, beige color. The downwards ramp points towards the space in between the table formation where this invented, surreal world on the tables continues.

A collapsed pink rubber form sits on the floor. Lengths of tubing and cables give the situation a medical reading. Small styrofoam forms, shaped like little boats or bath tubs with tiny yellow paper propellers, carrying blush balls in their cavities, nervously move around. Some are coming down the ramp, apparently connecting to the table and its creature sitting on top.
of it: one of the tables has a drippy sack hanging under it, stuffed with tiny white styrofoam pellets and with a yellow bead attached to the tip of it. The small vehicles erect their propellers towards the tip of the bag—maybe exchanging some sort of resource? It seems that here the exchange happens—the little boats get fed by receiving these blush balls. The sack under one table is a main link between the “table world” and the system on the floor. It seems like the sack is feeding this little world. Some of the styrofoam boats are on their way down to the collapsed creature. Many are gathering around the breathless object, creating a dramatic scene.

On sight is also a net-like form, made out of yellow, soft foam. This motherly, caring skeleton bends over the scene, collecting blush balls that some of the styrofoam vehicles have carried over. Far out of the sight is one vehicle. It traveled all the way to the end of the room, stopped by the wall. Maybe it got lost?

The repeating content of my work is the fusion of a “Gentle World” with some indications of gloom, repulsiveness, oddness or eroticism. Like dreams, fiction or fairy-tales, there can be two sides of the story—innocent, playful, glittering yet obscure, opaque, frightening, and sometimes erotic. Using colors, materials and forms that speak about softness, comfort, kitsch, naiveté, happiness, femininity, I am creating these innocent, childlike worlds that are disturbed by ambiguous, somewhat dark gestures.

This tension occurs for example in the use of the materials—their surface and their associative qualities. Slick, synthetic and mass-produced materials are juxtaposed with soft, warmth-giving and hand-made elements. In Untitled, May 2002, casted rubber forms, organic yet fabricated, are decorated with glistening pearls, and are wearing pink lace skirts. The antiseptic surface of the tables stands in contrast to the soft, fleshy, rubber forms; the accessories they wear: like beads and the lace skirt, as well as the sweet color pink of the latex, stand in contrast with the organic character of these creatures as well.

Through the use of such materials, the objects become strange hybrids—partially biological, organic, and also artificial and invented, with human features, indicating the female sex. I provided them with these artificial and kitschy parts in order to give them a more personified appearance. Here, I am interested in creating an atmosphere of ambiguity, between the repulsive body and scientific qualities (also generated through the breathing and its sound), and the artificial and “sweet” pink and all those accessories, suggesting vulnerability, gentleness, sensitivity, innocence, and likeness.
Very often in my work, found objects—well known and from every day's life as well as representational forms are linked with an invented, unknown, fantasy phenomenon—a dialog between fiction and reality. In Untitled, May 2002, butcher tables become platforms for alien creatures and medical tubing and cables transform into life-supporting systems for a collapsed rubber bulk, with living features. Foam netting turns into an entity that supervises, controls, and collects. In a different piece, Untitled, February 2002, organic, egg-shaped, plastiline creatures romp on a cozy baby blanket, which provides the stage for a bizarre narrative. However, most forms that I create are ambiguous in themselves. In my final piece, It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast, May 2003, a life-size playhouse becomes a padded room or a dreamy landscape of clouds (see Image 3.2, p. 15). In What a blissful time we had..., November 2002, a stuffed fabric form is a piece of furniture and, at the same time, an animated mushroom that releases pom poms through a casted aluminum pipe.

Image 2.5. Untitled, Feb. 2002. Mixed media (plastiline on styrofoam, beads, wire, lace, feathers, jet, medical tubing, fleece). 12" x 74" x 41"

Image 2.6. What a blissful time we had..., Nov. 2002. Mixed media (fabric, lace, casted aluminum, styrofoam, latex, wood, painted stones, chenille arms, foam, plastiline, wood glue, glitter, confetti), dimensions variable (installed: 84" x 900" x 360")

Image 2.7. What a blissful time we had..., Nov. 2002 (detail). Mixed media (fabric, stuffing, casted aluminum, pom poms). 35" x 39" x 36"
I am also working with the matter of stereotypes and their dual effects. In my opinion kitsch, artificiality, candy-colors and prettiness produce a very powerful stereotypical picture of "innocence". Such stereotypes like the color pink, delicate materials like satin, batting, lace or pearls, the fake character of some of these materials and forms and the highly overdone decorations seduce and, at the same time, disturb. In my opinion, such an exaggeration of things becomes almost aggressive. It communicates extreme artificiality, and the separation of sexes. Stereotypes trap and enclose, yet produce strong instinctive emotions. Awaken personal memories and experiences. This excessive "innocence" has an intimate, lovable side to it as well as a provocative, and painful one.

The scale shift in my work might also become an element of irritation for the viewer. The objects and environments that I create are systems – overlapping worlds, groups and subgroups that are juxtaposed and united through scale, color palette, sound, form, space, and material. With the continuous pushing and pulling among the elements of this vocabulary, I am creating hierarchies of events and narratives, which compete and communicate. I am interested in this friction and irritation, involving the viewer with his/her whole body and size. The miniature world exists next to the large, challenging the viewer with his own perception and role within the piece. The gigantic threatens in a way that the viewer feels absorbed and lost. The "small world" on the other hand, engages in denying entry. In It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavor of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toff, and hot battered toast, May 2003, the tiny fence around the house’s balcony, pales a space, a world that is forever held without. The creatures, living behind this miniature fence become indefinable in their size and birth. The viewer is not able to enter or relate. His/her size is called into question (see Image 3.3, p. 16). In Untitled, May 2002, the tables are our size, the rubber creatures could be enlarged organs, partly from our world, partly alien. The floor situation juxtaposes in size and origin. The tiny styrofoam bathtubs with their yellow paper propellers and the bluish balls in their cavities and the drippy sack stuffed with miniature bullets are fantasy objects that exist in a different world, a different level of reality and size. The link between the two worlds embodies the ramp that leads down from the tables to the floor. The materiality and form that repeats itself on both, tables and floor (the pink latex and the form of the breathing organs), as well as the tubing and cables that literally connect the two levels, are also linking the miniature with the larger (see Image 2.1, p. 7).
Through the diversity and unusual juxtaposition of materials, surface qualities, colors, and open-ended forms, my work subsists on tensions, distractions, mysteriousness and ambiguity. Irritation and cuteness stand next to a slightly erotic/voluptuous element, or are combined with something bodily/organic, scientific, alien, or distracting. This linking produces a spark and confusion that addresses the viewer, as well as the maker, deeper in the unconscious.
CHAPTER 3

MY INTEREST FOR DREAM WORLDS, FICTION, THE MAGICAL, THE SUBJECTIVE/EMOTIONAL/IRRATIONAL

Image 3.1. It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast, May 2003. Mixed Media (wallpaper, wood, paint, marker, stuffing, batting, paper, cable, spray-foam, plastacine, pom poms, cardboard, foam, coffee filter, carpet, fabric, styrofoam, found objects, glitter, conduit, sculp), dimensions variable (installed: 192" x 300" x 360")
I am fascinated by dream worlds, fiction and also by the materiality that comes with it—
the materials that I personally associate with such fantasy worlds. There is something
charming and magical about childlike, innocent fantasy. For me, it is a world extraordinary
in terms of letting us forget how logical, dry, orderly and black and white life sometimes
can get. Fictional narratives, children’s play and dreams have the capacity to confront us
intensively with subjective, emotional and irrational events. Fantasy worlds can be luscious,
sentimental, colorful, dense, surprising, thrilling, overtly happy as well as fearful, sad and
gloomy. Such magical environments are very powerful to me because with them, one can
create an outburst of emotion—emotions that one cannot necessarily explain or name.
Fantasy objects with anchors to the real have the capacity to crack open a well of associations
and allow the viewer to feel, to dream, to fantasize, be irrational, subjective and intuitive.
Specific or vague personal memories are awakened; the viewer is asked to weave his/her
own fictional narratives and sensations, to believe and to wonder.

3.1 IT HAD, IN FACT, A SORT OF MIXED FLAVOUR OF
CHERRY-TART, CUSTARD, PINE-APPLE, ROAST TURKEY, TOFFY,
AND HOT BUTTERED TOAST, MAY 2003

A partially open playhouse allows a glance inside through
the roof and the opening at the front. The interior appears
like a padded room, exposed skin of insulation or a cloud-
like landscape—soft, blurry, glowing turquoise. Flesh
colored cable made its way into the house. Paper water
drips trickle down and collect on the floor. One abundant
stool lingers in the corner.
The exterior wall of the house extends into the space,
forming an elevated platform with unknown creatures:
half heaps, covered with chocolate, half sexual, half swam
or mushrooms with tentacles. The other outer side of the
house becomes a flood of pink, patterned wallpaper,
discharging itself over the floor and up the gallery wall.
Object and space become one, one becomes the other.

Image 3.2, It had, in fact, a sort of
mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard,
pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and
hot buttered toast, May 2003 (detail)
While the interior of the house is participatory, the exterior house-form is an object among others. The house relates to a glitter-cloud mounted on the wall opposite from its open roof. A nearby cardboard fence – its avertng side pasted with white, flowery wallpaper – creates an intimate space. A plastic-looking nest or a freshly overturned pudding with blooming, shiny spheres sits halfway on the pink color field of wallpaper and releases liquid over the floor. A three-dimensional “sack-entity” sits close to a wall and has an astounding similarity with the black contour drawing behind it, and small cake-like mountains pose friskily throughout the space. Two-dimensional lines on the wall become integrated images in this whole scene. They flow over materials or objects or mirror themselves in an embodied three-dimensional form. An environment is created in which the viewer becomes an active enroar, as well as an invader and explorer. Through a very subtle chime-sound, becalming, protective yet sometimes with an arising uncomfortableness, this setting becomes even more a world on its own, a fictional narrative that is meant to be discovered.

In my work I am recollecting dreams and I am creating dreams. Partly, I am taking images from my own memories and experiences, yet never translating them directly; partly, I freely invent and come up with forms that arise very often through the material and its constitution. With play and spontaneity I give form to my personal and worldly view, creating a fictional world that is, in the end, subjective yet evocative. The work functions as a place to maintain and confirm my subjectivity, combined with the strong desire to share my world.
I have an intuitive aspiration towards creating something compact, enclosed, autonomous, secure and protected from the outside. It is about making a place for itself in this world, next to our physical world. There-by, shelters, nests, tents, houses or eggs are unconsciously repeated images in my work. Very often the art piece becomes a system – an independent organism – that, in its fictional narrative is still logical. In It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast, May 2003, a house, a nest-like form, a protective fence, a stream of paint, a maternal flower and other creatures create a landscape, a space on its own. The viewer wanders around, entering and exiting, dipping into a dream world with insinuations of children’s play and twisted circumstances. Here interior and exterior, the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional fuse and switch. One thing becomes the other; one thought draws the next. The world is tightly linked and juxtaposed and, in the end, further pulled together through the sound that very subtly absorbs the whole space.

There is a specific materiality and color palette that I am very responsive to and that I intuitively associate with such dream worlds. Soft, delicate, glittering, pretty and kitschy materials talk about innocence, illusion and specifically about a “girls world” with a shade of artificiality. Fluffy like clouds and glistening like jewelry and silk. Such materials let us dip into a “sweet”, overtly gentle world. On the other hand, crafty and decorative materials like plastacine, ornaments, pearls, lace, or feathers and pipe cleaners communicate play, creation and fantasy, the individual and hand-made. To see the hand moving through the clay, the act of kneading and forming or the carefully combing and gluing of bits and pieces of paper, foam, and found parts, brings a certain atmosphere of spontaneity and playfulness with it. A color pallet of pastel tones underlines the spirit of fantasy and childhood. In It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast, May 2003, glitter, styrofoam, batting and fleece, wood and paint, wallpaper, cardboard, coffee filters, fabric, carpet, plastacine, spray-fom, flesh-colored cable and paper are the material world of my narrative. Crafty and delicate, yet composed and formed elaborately. The materials are recognizable, worldly, with its imperfections. The trace of the human
hand is evident. With substance and particular surfaces, I am creating a tension between the material world and the imaginative, perfect fantasy world. The round, nest-like form can be seen as a foam sculpture, covered with shiny, durable, epoxy paint or as a nest, an overturned pudding, a fountain, or spaceship. Material and image are in conflict, yet its combination produces a charged atmosphere of dreams and fiction linked to reality.

With my work, I am allowing myself to dream, to go back to childhood and to surround myself with kitsch and artificiality. This longing for unrealistic, naive, magical and glittering dreams – to be the princess and to sleep in pink satin – may be even stronger today. I love the feminine and girly and, at the same time, I am repulsed by it. I want to celebrate “blissful times”, allow myself to be groundless, illusive, romantic, and dreamy. In my childhood I had much space and time for my imagined worlds, yet kitsch, mass-produced, and stereotypical girly things where never supported by my parents and didn’t exist in my own children’s room. Still, as an adult I am seduced by such decorative and delicate materials, forms, colors and the protective, comfortable, feminine, affectionate, and gentle atmosphere that comes with it. To weave oneself an imagined world, to totally dip into it with all the senses and to lose to some extend the contact to reality that becomes my home, my nest.

Image 3.7 It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherries-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast. May 2003 (detail)