

HELL'S KITCHEN

A proposal for a 2-person traveling exhibit
featuring the work of Nava Atlas and L.A. Watson

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Hell's Kitchen is a proposal for a traveling art exhibit that examines issues in contemporary food systems — animal abuse, environmental destruction, climate change, worker exploitation, and slavery. The installation-based works by artists Nava Atlas and L.A. Watson lure the eye with pieces that provoke curiosity; some might almost seem playful on the surface. Yet on closer examination, they challenge viewers to consider what often goes unacknowledged about the food we eat and the consequences it has. The multi-layered, research-based works presented in *Hell's Kitchen* acknowledge the complexities of our contemporary food system by addressing issues of interlocking oppressions based on class and species while touching on issues of gender as well.

There's a hunger, so to speak, to forge a stronger connection with how one's food is sourced and to become more familiar with sustainable practices. But sustainability becomes a meaningless buzzword if the average consumer has no idea how to apply this to personal food choices. Many disturbing aspects of common foods are simply not part of cultural consciousness.

For Atlas and Watson, the motivation behind creating the works in this series is foremost to raise awareness. But their intention isn't simply to leave viewers feeling depressed and helpless. This exhibit will provide an opportunity to present alternatives to environmentally harmful and ethically questionable foods. These will be highlighted in the exhibit itself, and amplified at openings and other public programs.

This exhibit has a potential of producing a rich variety of public programming, whether aimed at communities or students. Audiences will become familiar with how impactful "voting with the fork" can be. Food policies can be an important part of such discussions. The ethics of human exploitation (such as in agriculture and the fishing industries) are pertinent, as is climate change. Public programming can include talks by the artists and panels with experts. Films like "The Dark Side of Chocolate," "Cowspiracy," and "Vegucated" can be powerful tools in engaging audiences. Demonstrations (and tastings) of food swaps that are organic, fair trade, and plant-based, as the case might be, can provide enjoyment as well as enlightenment. Nava Atlas's connections with natural foods companies can be a great source for food samples for such public programs.

In addition to finished work already on hand, both artists plan on creating new and expanded work during the time it takes to schedule this exhibit. Our work until now has focused more on animal issues, but we're both currently exploring issues relating to food and its environmental and climate impacts. For example, a major 2006 report by the U.N. posited that animal agriculture causes more greenhouse gases than all forms of transportation combined, and since then, numbers of experts have agreed that the impacts are underestimated. Environmental issues and climate change will have a greater role in this future exhibit as the artists develop new works in progress. Following is a sampling of finished and in-progress works by Atlas and Watson.

NAVA ATLAS: HELL'S KITCHEN TABLE

Hell's Kitchen Table presents six place settings on a table, featuring striking tableaux that resemble placemats. On closer view, stories of what's behind these familiar foods begin to emerge.



Still in progress, Hell's Kitchen Table will have 6 place settings. The table can be constructed at each site with two lightweight doors



Shrimp Scampi (portion of Hell's Kitchen Table) 20" w by 16" h, digital prints and found objects



Bitter Harvest (portion of Hell's Kitchen Table) 20" w by 16" h, digital prints and found objects



Greetings from the Pasture (portion of Hell's Kitchen Table) 20" w by 16" h, digital prints and found objects



Is There Slavery in Your Chocolate? (portion of Hell's Kitchen Table) 20" w by 16" h, digital prints and found objects



Greetings from the Pasture (detail)

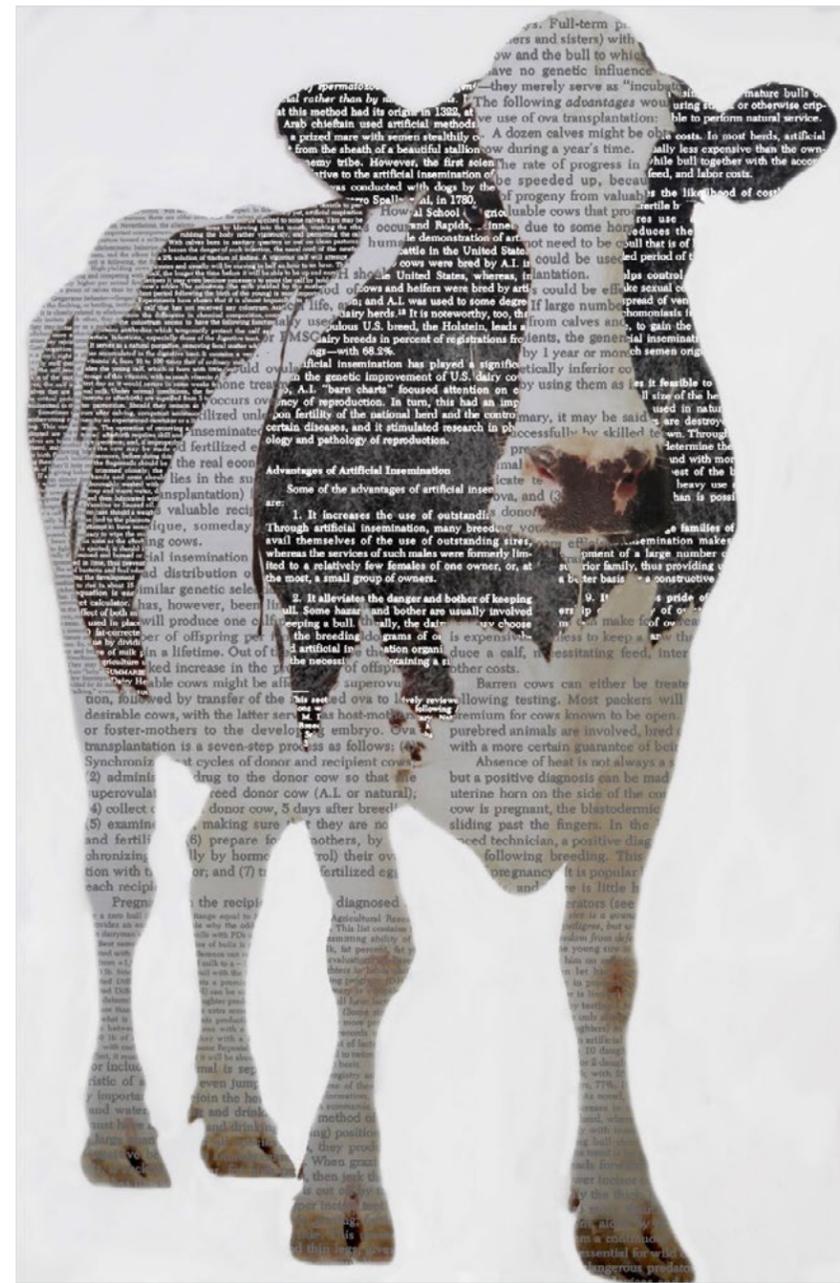
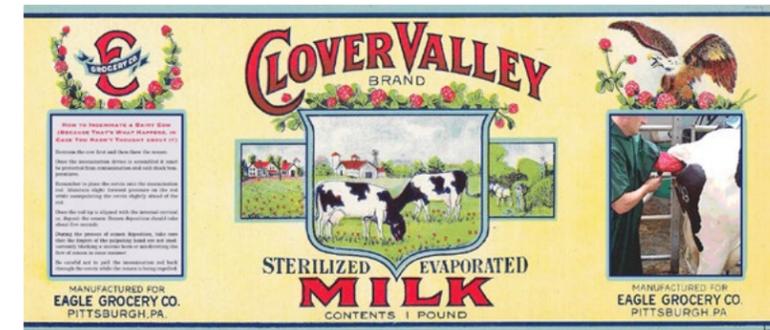
NAVA ATLAS: CLOVER VALLEY

Clover Valley mashes up a midcentury dairy product label with contemporary instructions on how to inseminate dairy cows. To get milk and dairy products to market, cows must be kept in an endless cycle of pregnancy and lactation for all of their productive years. Artificially insemination by force with the help of a restraining device and human intervention.

The violence of this act is in direct opposition to the image of the docile black and white cow peacefully ruminating in a picturesque meadow. This image, conjured up by the dairy industry for many decades, is nothing short of an advertising icon. There are many other things about dairy that industry would prefer for consumers to look away from, including what happens to calves, the environmental impact, and more. These will be touched upon in another series of works for this exhibition.



Clover Valley: Detail (see next page)



Clover Valley: Digital Prints on Fabric; top portion: 30" w by 13" h; bottom portion, 42" w by 62" h

L.A. WATSON: A BIRD AT MY TABLE

In the 10-part series *A Bird at My Table*, L.A. Watson sheds light on the horrific practices that turkeys (as well as chickens) are subjected to from birth until death on their way to the dinner and holiday table. Consumed more than any other domesticated animal, yet denied protection by any federal laws, these birds suffer both mental and physical abuse from over-breeding and confinement.

Watson complicates the rigid boundaries between the human and nonhuman animal by positioning her own body in such a way as to resemble the cooked corpse of a chicken or turkey. Her intention is to foster a sense of connection between the human body (which is typically viewed as someone) and that of the nonhuman animal's body (which is typically viewed as something). How does something that is appetizing become someone who is not? The ways in which women and animals are compared to one another and objectified in a consumer culture that reduces them both to their bodily parts—"breasts," "thighs," and "legs"—was also on her mind when creating this series.



A Bird at My Table, full series, 10 c-prints each 45" w by 30" h



A Bird at My Table 3, c-print, 45" w by 30" h



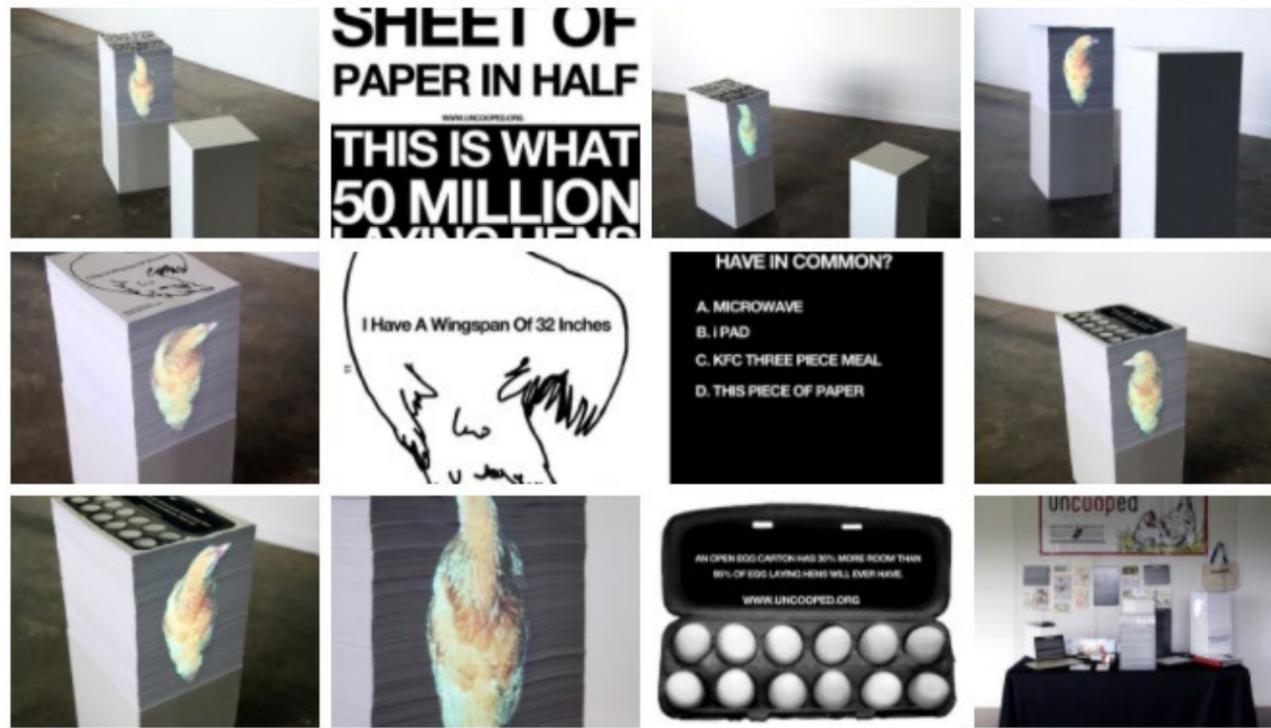
A Bird at My Table 7, c-print, 45" w by 30" h

L.A. WATSON: UNCOOPED

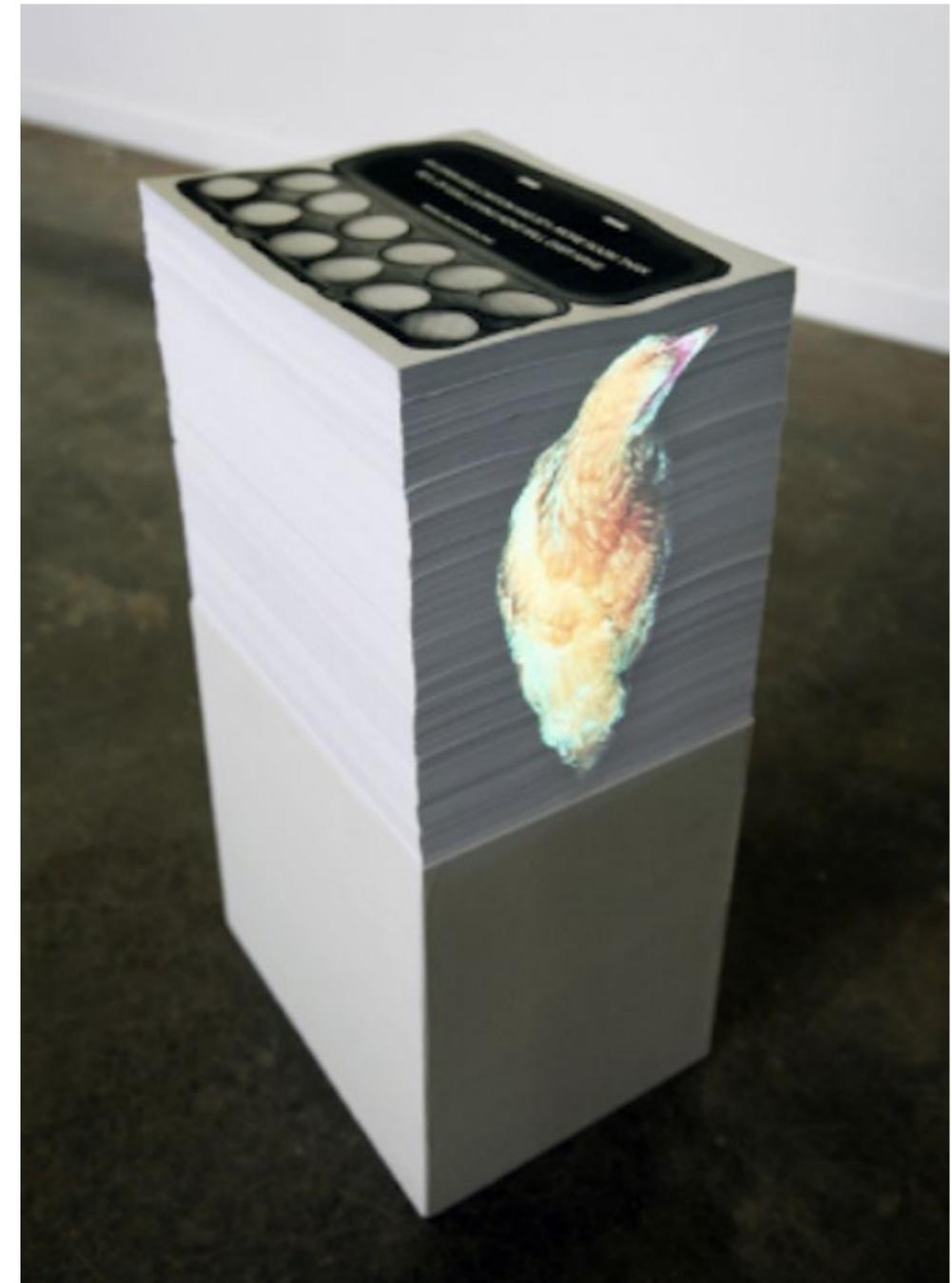
95% of egg-laying hens live in a space smaller than a standard size sheet of paper, while approximately 50 million hens live in a space half this size. In the *Uncooped* installation, standard size sheets of paper are stacked 11” tall and the moving image of a hen is projected onto the paper stack so that her movements are contained within the boundaries of this space.

Viewers are encouraged to take home a sheet of paper from the stack, which feature various designs that call attention to the appalling lack of space allotted to egg-laying hens in battery cages. Viewers are also encouraged to learn more about the lives of egg-laying hens by visiting: www.uncooped.org. As the sheets of paper are consumed by the public, the projected space the hen resides in slowly erodes — will she ever be Uncooped? To see the video of this installation, follow [this link](#).

The *Uncooped* installation was designed for The Animal Museum’s indoor and outdoor traveling pop-up exhibits and to promote the *Uncooped* exhibition at the museum.



Various views and installations from Uncooped



*Uncooped video installation, stacked paper and video projection, 8.5” by 11”
pedestal size approx 8.5” by 11.5” by 11.5” d, paper stack variable
Mini-projector on pedestal*

FOLD THIS SHEET OF PAPER IN HALF

WWW.UNCOOPED.ORG

THIS IS WHAT
50 MILLION
LAYING HENS
CALL HOME

Detail from Uncooped

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Nava Atlas and L.A. Watson were recently among fourteen women artists who participated in the exhibit “The Sexual Politics of Meat” at the Animal Museum in Los Angeles. Co-curated by L.A. Watson (along with Kathryn Eddy and Janell O’Rourke), this exhibit was inspired by eco-feminist Carol J. Adams’ hugely influential book of the same title, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary in print in 2017. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams analyzes the object-status of nonhuman animals and its relation to the objectification of women throughout visual and literary culture. This exhibit is traveling to Museo de la Cancilleria in Mexico City in January, 2018, where it will be incorporated in to a larger, international exhibition.

NAVA ATLAS

Nava Atlas’s work has followed parallel paths in the fine arts and publishing fields. Incorporating elements of her own writing as well as appropriated text with found images and materials, her work explores a variety of social issues including women’s roles, culturally sanctioned bias, animal advocacy, and the personal becoming political.

Found material incorporated into her work includes pinup photos, vintage advertising, pulp novels, romance comics, animal slaughter guides, legal texts, and more. Using computer processes to manipulate historic material into her art neatly reflects the premise of looking at present-day issues through the lens of the past.

Her work has been part of over 60 exhibitions nationally in museums, galleries, and alternative art spaces. Her artwork is part of a number of public collections, and her limited edition books are part of dozens of collections at home and abroad. In her other life, Atlas is also the author of a number of bestselling vegetarian and vegan cookbooks, and founded one of the longest-running food sites on the web, VegKitchen.com

Atlas lives and works in the Hudson Valley region of New York State. Link to [her complete CV](#).

L.A. WATSON

L.A. Watson is an interdisciplinary artist working in the field of critical animal studies. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and has a BA in Gender and Women’s Studies from the University of Kentucky.

Her work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including the Mary H. Dana Women Artist Series at Rutgers University and is in the permanent collection of The Animal Museum. She

co-curated the exhibits “Uncooped” and “The Sexual Politics of Meat” for The Animal Museum in Los Angeles and is a founding member of the artist coalition ArtAnimalAffect.

Watson’s work explores our ethical relationship to non-human animals, while employing critical tools and strategies of feminism. Through a process of appropriation and manipulation disparate “norms” in visual culture are re-contextualized in order to interrogate the established hierarchy of “the human” and challenge privileged assumptions regarding the status of non-human animals.

Watson is an adjunct professor in Digital Media in the School of Art at the University of Kentucky and makes work on her family farm in Frankfort, KY. Link to [her complete CV](#).